

PLAYFEATURES

Research on the Twin Cities Regional Parks & Trails



June 2020

Visits to the Regional Park System in 2019

The Metropolitan Council produces estimates of visits to the Twin Cities Regional Parks System annually, collaborating with 10 partner agencies. These agencies include cities, counties, and special parks districts, which work with the Council to protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation for public enjoyment. The Council provides long-range system planning, investment, and regional coordination.

The Regional Parks System is composed of regional parks and trails that are nationally renowned for their beauty, size, and variety of features. With 44 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 49 regional trails, and eight special recreation features, the Regional Parks System provides a wealth of opportunities for recreation, exercise, and fun. It also preserves significant green space and wildlife habitat.

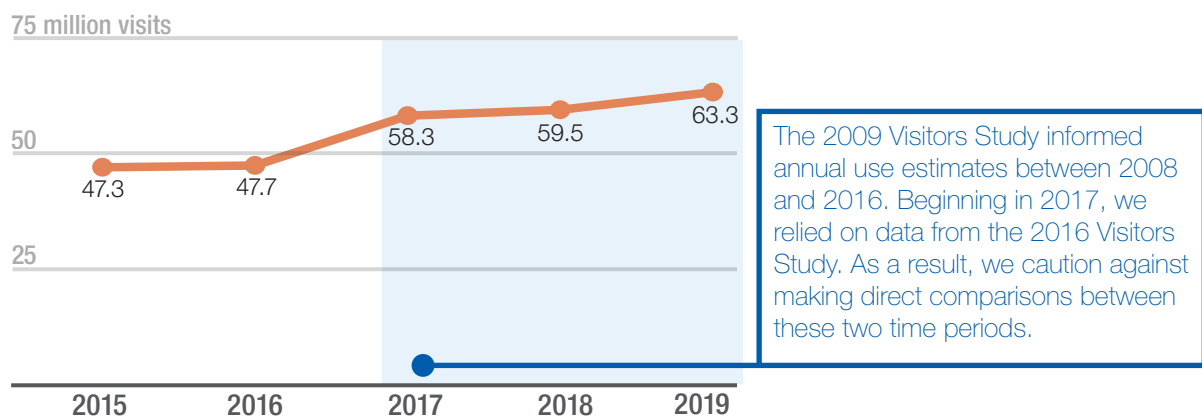
This report highlights the estimated number of visits to the Regional Parks System for 2019. Park agencies collect visitation data from each park and trail during the summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day). The Council uses the result to produce an annual estimate.¹ Due to Covid-19, the Regional Park System will not have a 2020 use estimate; the Regional Park System funding formulas will rely on 2019 estimate for the next two years.

Key Findings

- An estimated 63.3 million visits were made to the Regional Parks System in 2019. This represents a 6.3% increase over 2018 and the most estimated visitation on record.
- The top-visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes with over 8 million visits, followed by Como Regional Park with about 3.8 million visits.
- Summer 2019 visitors to the Regional Park System included an estimated 12,000 scooter-riders and 387,000 cyclists. The regional system includes almost 400 miles of trails, with annual trail use reaching over 15 million visits.
- Campers made over 360,000 visits to campgrounds during 2019 in Carver, Anoka, Dakota and Scott Counties as well as within Three Rivers Park District. Campgrounds throughout most of the regional park system are open and accepting reservations in 2020.

People made an estimated 63.26 million visits to the Regional Parks System in 2019 (Figure 1), the most estimated visitation on record and a 6.3% increase over 2018 visits.

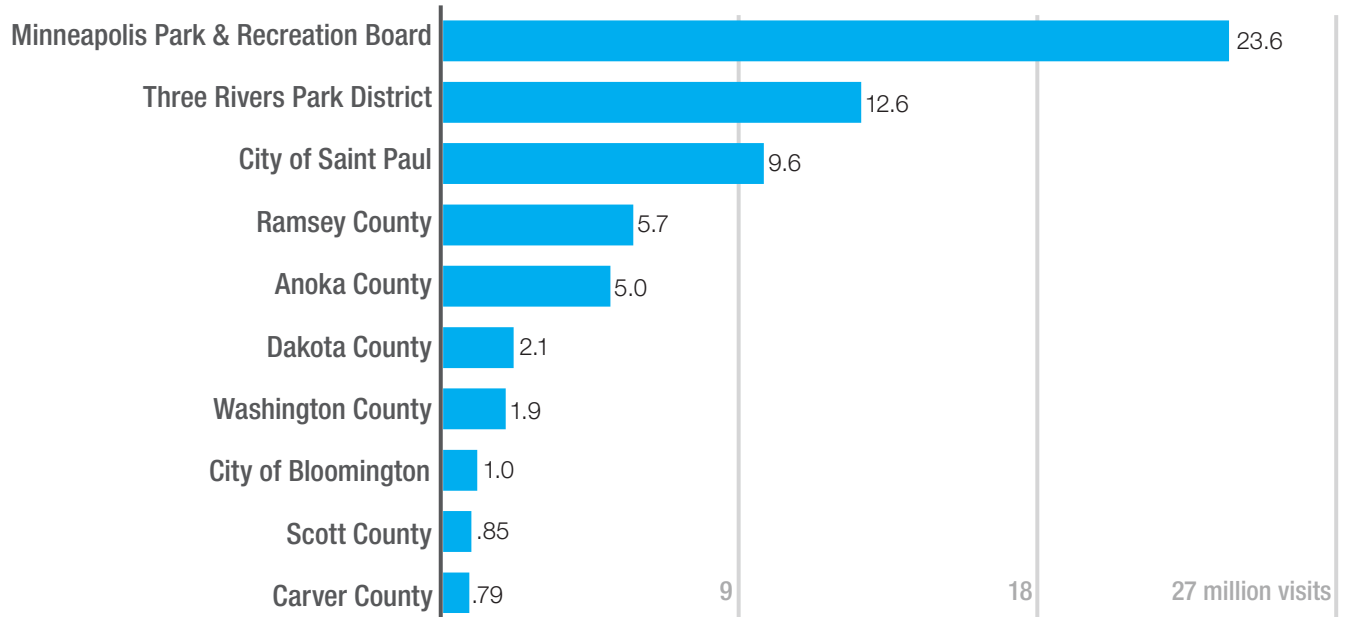
FIGURE 1. VISITS TO THE REGIONAL PARK SYSTEM



Source: Metropolitan Council's Park Use Estimates.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board had the highest visitation among the ten agencies in 2019 with approximately 23.6 million visitors, followed by Three Rivers Parks District (12.6 million) and the City of Saint Paul (9.6 million) as shown in Figure 2.

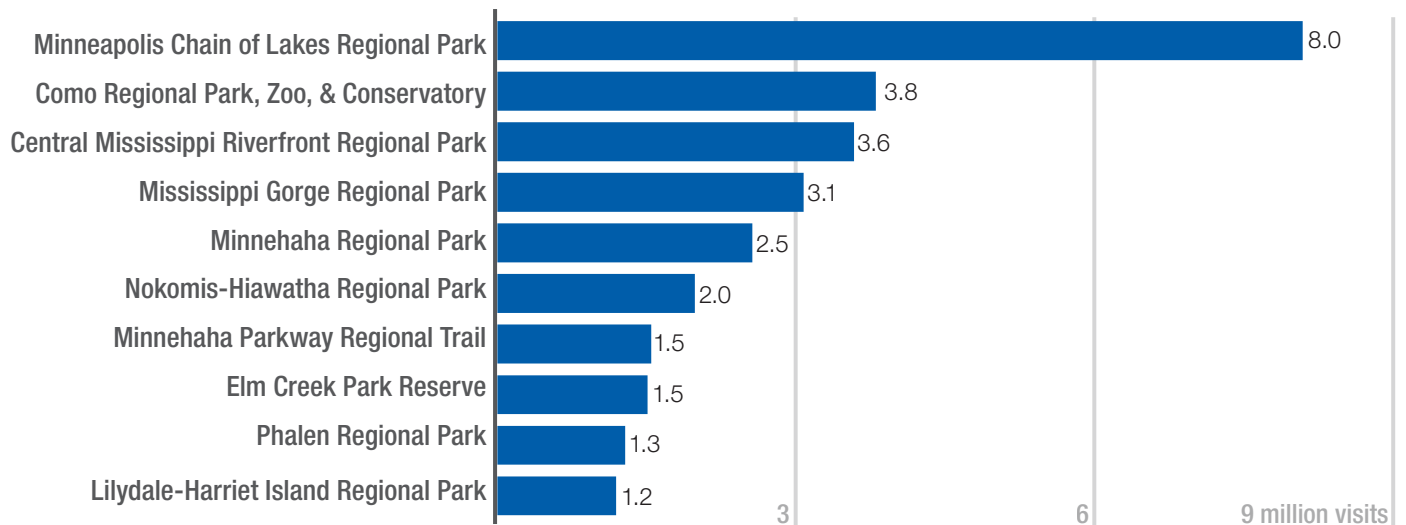
FIGURE 2. 2019 VISITS BY PARK AGENCY



Source: Metropolitan Council's Park Use Estimates.

The most-visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes with roughly 8 million visits, followed by Como Regional Park, Zoo & Conservatory with about 3.8 million visits and Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park at 3.6 million visits (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. MOST VISITED REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS IN 2019



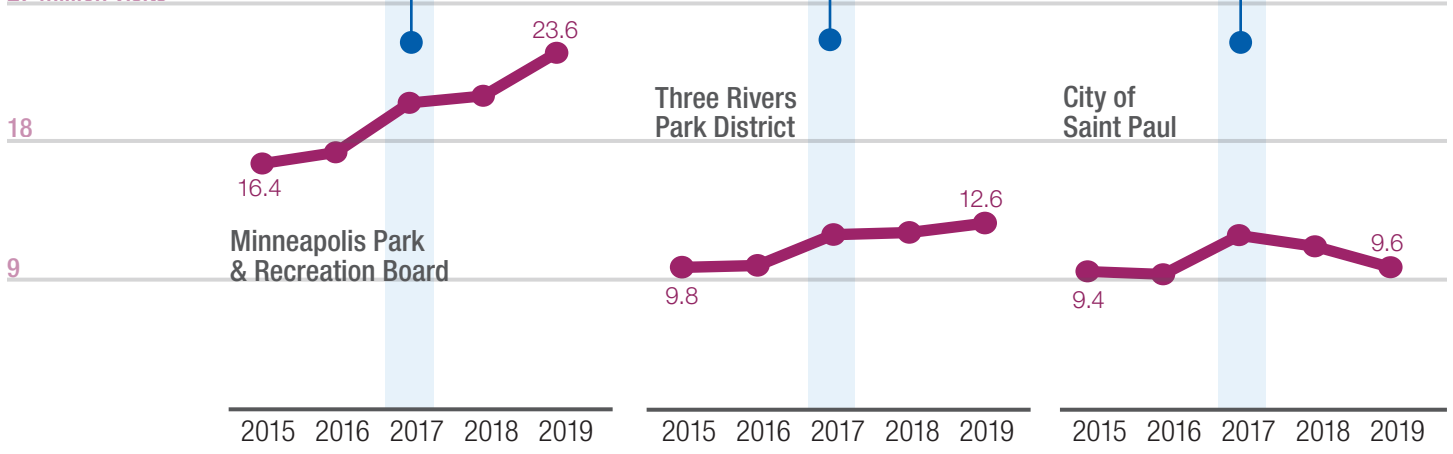
Source: Metropolitan Council's Park Use Estimates.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board showed the largest gain in visitation with 2,810,000 more visits in 2019 compared with 2018 (Figure 4). Other parts of the system with large gains between 2018 and 2019 include Ramsey County (911,000 more visits), the Three Rivers Park District (592,000 more), and Anoka County (377,000 more). Ramsey County had the largest percentage increase in visitation at 19%, followed by Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (13.5%), and Washington County (11.5%). Nearly all agencies reported their highest visitation to date in 2019.

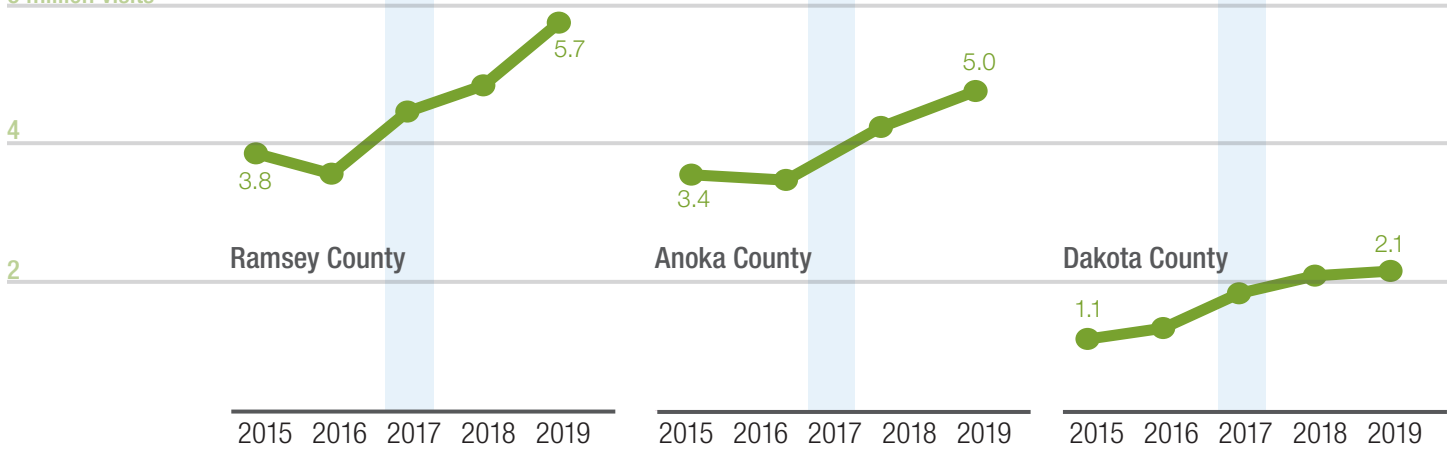
FIGURE 4. RECENT VISIT TRENDS BY PARK AGENCY (1/2)

The 2009 Visitors Study informed annual use estimates between 2008 and 2016. Beginning in 2017, we relied on data from the 2016 Visitors Study. As a result, we caution against making direct comparisons between these two time periods.

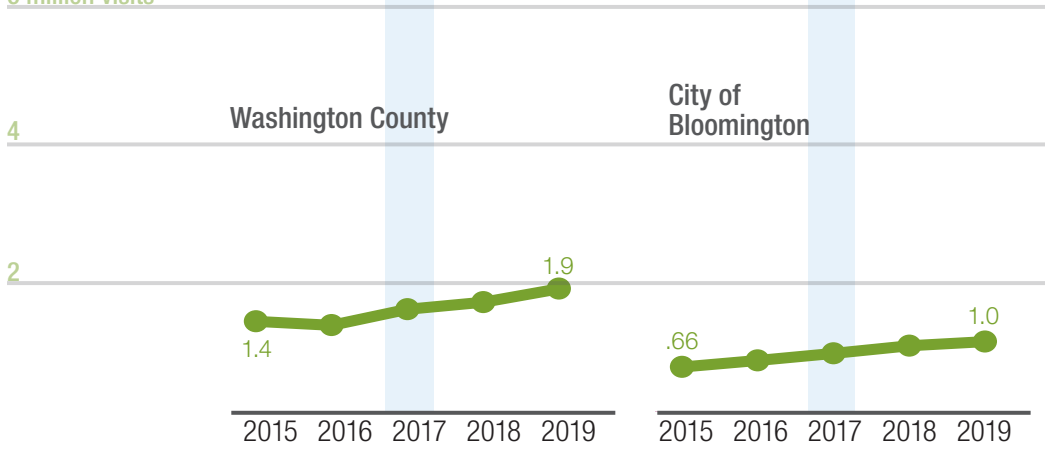
27 million visits



6 million visits



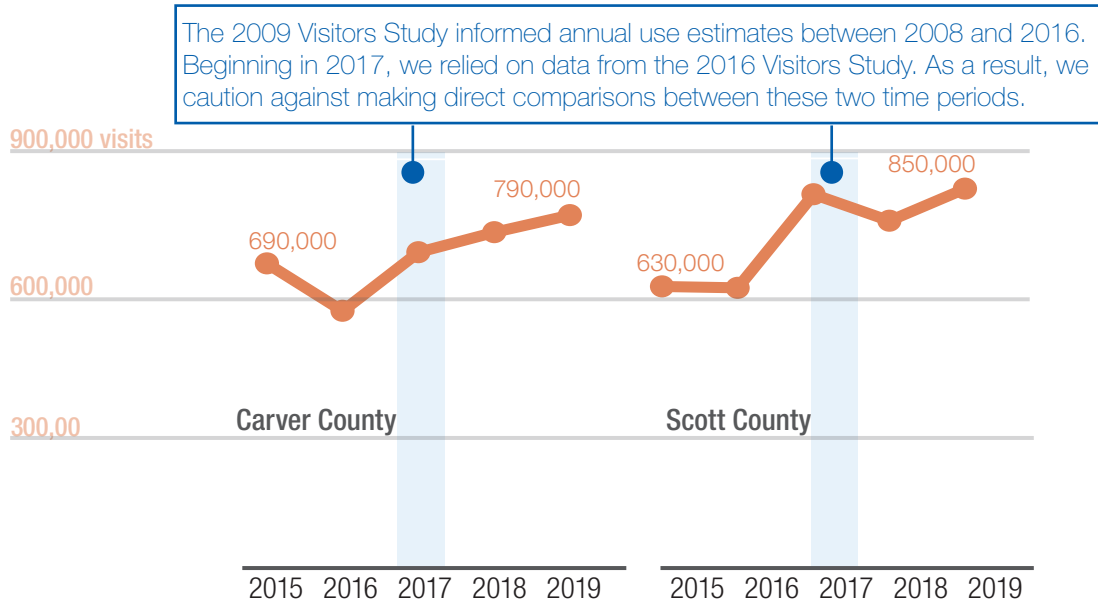
6 million visits



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Source: Metropolitan Council's Park Use Estimates.

FIGURE 4 (continued). RECENT VISIT TRENDS BY PARK AGENCY (2/2)



Source: Metropolitan Council's Park Use Estimates.

Endnote

¹For a description of how the estimate is produced and usage statistics for each park and trail see the [2019 Regional Park System Use Estimate: Methodology Report \[PDF\]](#). For detailed estimates by agency see [2019 Regional Park System Use Estimate: Appendix Tables \[PDF\]](#).

PLAYFEATURES

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Appendix A: Detailed 2019 Visitation Estimate

	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits (1,000's)	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
ANOKA COUNTY					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	1,025.8	1,861.8	71.9	270.5	3,230.0
RT subtotals	634.6	1,162.5	-	0.6	1,797.8
Subtotal:	1,660.4	3,024.3	71.9	271.1	5,027.8
	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits (1,000's)	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
BLOOMINGTON					
Bush and Normandale Lakes RP	309.8	562.3	-	65.1	937.1
Nokomis-Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	32.8	60.1	-	-	92.9
Subtotal:	342.6	622.4	-	65.1	1,030.0
	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits (1,000's)	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
CARVER COUNTY					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	148.6	269.7	16.5	38.7	473.5
RT subtotals	111.3	203.9	-	2.5	317.8
Subtotal:	259.9	473.6	16.5	41.2	791.3
	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits (1,000's)	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
DAKOTA COUNTY					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	470.1	853.2	57.1	50.4	1,430.8
RT subtotals	243.7	446.5	-	1.7	691.8
Subtotal:	713.8	1,299.7	57.1	52.1	2,122.6
	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits (1,000's)	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
MPLS. PARK & RECREATION BOARD					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	6,631.9	12,038.2	-	813.7	19,483.6
RT subtotals	1,457.9	2,671.0	-	16.7	4,145.6
Subtotal:	8,089.8	14,709.2	-	830.4	23,629.2
RP = Regional Park; PR = Park Reserve; RT = Regional Trail; SRF = Special Recreation Feature					
¹ Seasonal visitation data gathered in 2016 from 5,459 regional park and trail visitors was used to calculate seasonal and person per vehicle multipliers.					
² Camping is in "visitor-days," where each visit is one person in the park for one day. A family of four staying one night would have 8 visitor-days. Special events include events over 300 and any unusual park-specific situations.					
	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
RAMSEY COUNTY:					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	1,301.9	2,363.4	-	227.7	3,892.9
RT subtotals	642.7	1,177.5	-	6.0	1,826.2
Subtotal:	1,944.6	3,540.9	-	233.7	5,719.1

Appendix A: Detailed 2019 Visitation Estimate

	Summer	Spring/Fall/Winter	Other ²		
Agency/Park	estimated visits	estimated visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Estimated Visits (1,000's)
CITY OF SAINT PAUL:					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	2,790.0	5,071.5	-	879.3	8,740.7
RT subtotals	290.2	531.7	-	82.5	904.2
Subtotal:	3,080.2	5,603.2	-	961.8	9,644.9
SCOTT COUNTY					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	240.4	436.4	16.5	9.0	702.3
RT subtotals	50.8	93.1	-	0.7	144.7
Subtotal:	291.2	529.5	16.5	9.7	847.0
THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	2,282.3	4,133.7	151.6	460.4	7,028.2
RT subtotals	1,949.5	3,571.3	-	19.3	5,540.2
Subtotal:	4,231.8	7,705.0	151.6	479.7	12,568.4
Notes:					
All visits are listed in units of 1,000 (for example, "50.5" is equivalent to 50,500 visits). Subtotals are rounded.					
RP = Regional Park; PR = Park Reserve; RT = Regional Trail; SRF = Special Recreation Feature					
¹ Seasonal visitation data gathered in 2016 from 5,459 regional park and trail visitors was used to update visitor multipliers for the 2017 and later use estimates.					
² Camping is in "visitor-days," where each visit is one person in the park for one day. A family of four staying one night would have 8 visitor-days. Special events include events over 300 and any unusual park-specific situations.					
WASHINGTON COUNTY					
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	630.8	1,120.6	49.4	43.4	1,844.2
RT subtotals	11.9	21.8	-	-	33.7
Subtotal:	642.7	1,142.4	49.4	43.4	1,877.9
REGIONAL TOTALS					
Agency/Park	visits (1,000's)	visits (1,000's)	Camping (1,000's)	Special Events (1,000's)	Total Visits (1,000's)
RP/PR/SRF subtotals	15,831.6	28,710.8	363.0	2,858.2	47,763.3
RT subtotals	5,426.4	9,941.1	-	130.0	15,494.9
REGIONAL TOTALS	21,258.0	38,651.9	363.0	2,988.2	63,258.2

ANNUAL REGIONAL PARKS SYSTEM USE ESTIMATE METHODOLOGY

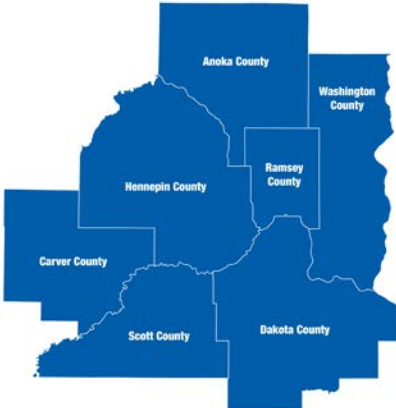


July 2020

The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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Introduction

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is home to a system of regional parks and trails that are nationally renowned for their beauty, size, and variety of features. With 55 regional parks and preserves, comprising over 54,000 acres, nearly 400 miles of regional trails, and eight special recreation features, the system provides a wealth of opportunities for recreation, exercise, and just plain fun. It also preserves significant green space and wildlife habitat.

The Regional Parks System is operated by 10 partner agencies, including cities, counties, and special park districts, which work with the Council to protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation for public enjoyment. The Council provides long-range system planning, investment, and coordination.

The Regional Parks System is comprised of four types of parks and trails: 1) Regional Parks, 2) Park Reserves, 3) Regional Trails, and 4) Special Recreation Features.

The Metropolitan Council produces visit estimates of the Regional Parks System annually and has done so since 1995. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2019 park use estimate will be used for the next two years, and no use estimate will be conducted in 2020.

How the Annual Use Estimate is Calculated

One person entering a park or trail represents one visit. If a person visits a park or trail once each week for a year, that is 52 visits.

Counting Park and Trail Visits

The annual use estimate is based on the average of four years of summer counts of bikers and cyclists, pedestrians, horse-riders, boats, vehicles, and charter buses that enter the park through recognized park entrances. People in vehicles and buses are not counted individually. To determine the number of people entering in vehicles or buses, a person-per-vehicle average is multiplied by the number of vehicles or buses in each sample count. The person-per-vehicle averages come from the [Metropolitan Council Regional Parks and Trails Survey 2016](#).

Counts are taken in two-hour samples between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Two-hour sample counts begin at 8 a.m., 10 a.m., 12 p.m., 2 p.m., 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. The entrances and times are randomly chosen with the samples split evenly between weekdays and weekends. Agencies are scheduled to complete 16 sample counts per park, park reserve, regional trail or special recreation feature unit.

Averaging Counts to Reduce Anomalies

The samples for the current year and the three previous years are combined to determine the annual use for each park and trail. For each year, 16 samples are drawn for each park and trail. The four-year approach results in enough weekend and weekday samples to meet the requirements of at least 25 data points.

The four-year approach reduces the effect of extreme weather or other anomalies on each park's estimated visitation. It reduces the effects of a temporary closure of a popular facility and road construction to the facility. The four-year average also somewhat underestimates increased visitation associated with a major new facility such as a swim pond or play structure. By the fourth year of the facility's existence, its visitation is fully represented in the data. The annual estimate makes no attempt to correct for overestimates for temporary closures or underestimates for facility additions. All agencies in the regional system are adding desirable facilities and experiencing temporary closures of facilities

that are being redeveloped. Therefore, it is believed that the four-year average has negligible effects when comparing visitation across agencies.

Season Calculations and Additional Data

Summer visitation is calculated by taking the total number of people entering the park during each sample and multiplying it by the number of entrances and time slots that sample represents. Winter, spring and fall seasonal visitation estimates are then calculated from the summer visitation using seasonal multiplier data derived from the *Metropolitan Council Regional Parks and Trails Survey 2016*.

Camping visits are also added to the annual estimate. A camping visit is defined as a camper in the park for any part of a day, so a family of four who camped one night would be counted as 8 total visits. Special events are also added to the annual use estimate when event attendance was greater than 300 people and the event did not take place during the sample counts. If sample counts occurred during a special event, counts are not included in the estimate. Camping and special event data are not averaged across four years since the implementing agencies have records reflecting those types of visits on an annual basis.



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