

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS & TRAILS COMMISSION

# POLICY & PLANNING REPORT FOR 2024



Northern Lights over Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp



Luverne Loop & Blue Mounds Trail



# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

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Friends,

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission often uses the word “nimble” to describe our approach to working with our designated facilities and adjusting our policies and procedures to best address their needs. We know that listening and understanding how we can improve will lead to great outcomes for the park/trail facilities and ultimately the public using those facilities.

In 2024, we adjusted the timing of our Environmental and Archeological Review Grant to make it open and available for applicants all year round, not just during a predetermined time frame. The result of this change is more interest in, and applications for, the grant. These reviews are costly but necessary, and by offering the grants on a year-round basis, they are available when the facilities need them. The benefit of this grant is a foundation for success when applications are made for funding a future project.

We also acknowledge that we can, and should, do more to enhance inclusivity in designated parks and trails across our system. We will be implementing an Inclusive Access Grant in 2025 that is designed to help make facilities more inclusive, going above and beyond the minimum requirements of the ADA. This grant will also be available on an as-needed basis, year-round. Along with this new grant initiative, we are developing an Inclusivity Value Statement and an Accessibility Strategy Statement. In 2025, a large focus of our work will be defining the importance of ensuring our parks and trails offer the best experience for all users.

Building on the collaborative research project conducted with our partners at MN DNR and Metropolitan Council, we have contracted with Placer.ai to continue our research into visitation and user demographics across the Greater Minnesota System. The metrics offered by Placer.ai are robust and will help our park and trail agencies in their efforts to appeal to more users and gain insight into patterns of use.

With the continued growth of the Greater Minnesota System, now at a total of 80 facilities, we strive to offer solid support, thoughtful grant opportunities, and creative ideas for bringing new users the joy of nature and outdoor recreation.

We offer our sincere thanks and appreciation to our colleagues and partners, and especially the residents of Minnesota who voted affirmatively to establish a sales tax to create the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008!



**Rick Anderson – Chair**



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## DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

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Executive Committee Vice Chair

**Tim Engrav** | *Britt*

**Beth Pierce** | *Hibbing*

**DISTRICT 2**

**Rob Mason** | *East Gull Lake*

**Reid Huttunen** | *East Grand Forks*

**DISTRICT 3**

Executive Committee At-Large

**Peg Furshong** | *Sacred Heart*

**Brad Bonk** | *Alexandria*

**DISTRICT 4**

Executive Committee Secretary/Treasurer

**Barry Wendorf** | *Cambridge*

**Jonathan Wolf** | *St. Cloud*

**DISTRICT 5**

Executive Committee Chair

**Rick Anderson** | *Balaton*

**Tom Schmitz** | *New Ulm*

**DISTRICT 6**

**Tom Stoa** | *Winona*

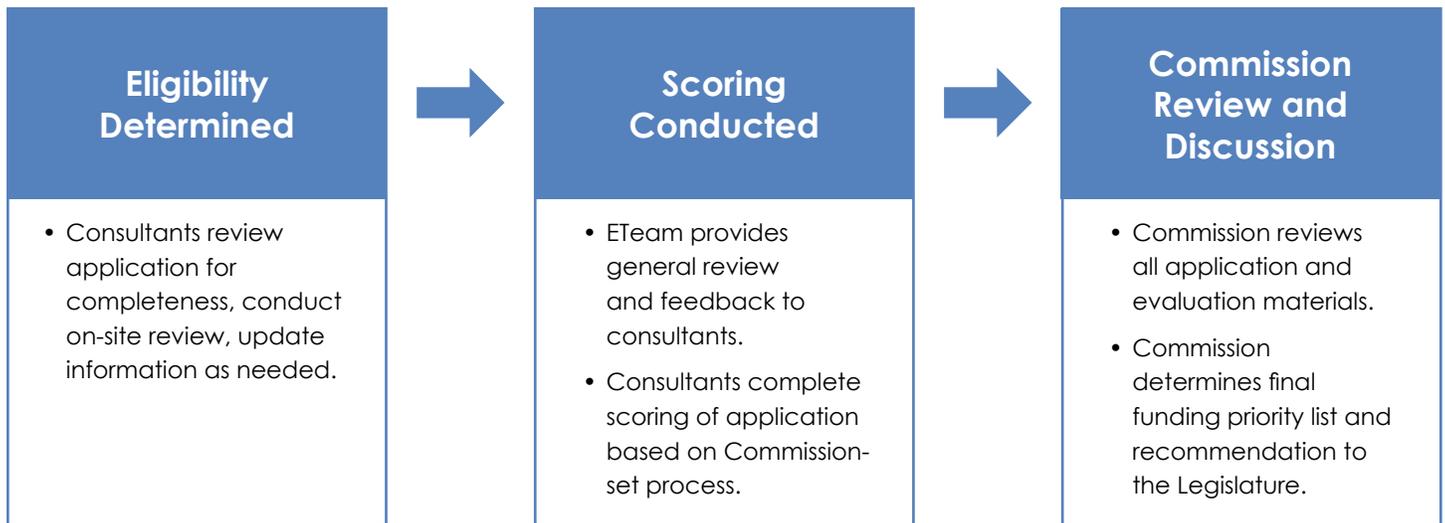
**Karlin Ziegler** | *Hayfield*

**AT-LARGE**

**Jen Foley** | *St. Cloud*

Executive Director: **Renee Mattson, Duluth**  
 System Plan Coordinator: **Joe Czapiewski, Bemidji**  
 Administrative Assistant: **Tess Dandrea, Hermantown**  
 Special Projects Coordinator: **Karen Umphress, Jordan**

# FUNDING RECOMMENDATION SELECTION PROCESS



## SCORING CRITERIA

Park Criteria	Trail Criteria	Connecting People to the Outdoors Criteria
Completes a regionally substantial component in the applicants Master Plan.	Completes a regionally substantial component in the applicants Master Plan.	Supports the programming and marketing components in the applicants Master Plan.
Fills a gap and provides an outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance for that district.	Fills a gap and provides connectivity to users. Could also provide connectivity to a larger trail system to create a recreation benefit of regional significance.	Fills a gap and provides a proven outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance for that district.
Is significantly linked to one or more of the four pillars in the 25-Year Legacy Plan.	Is significantly linked to one or more of the four pillars in the 25-Year Legacy Plan.	Is significantly linked to the Connecting People to the Outdoors pillar objectives as well as additional pillars in the 25-Year Legacy Plan.
Project is a critical acquisition or critical rehabilitation and repair of a park facility or feature.	Project is a critical acquisition or critical rehabilitation and repair of a trail, trailhead facility or trail feature.	Provides significant and locally sustainable recruitment, retention or reactivation of outdoor recreation participation.
Provides access to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.	Provides access to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.	Provides access for underserved populations to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.
Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.	Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.	Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.
Includes a fully detailed budget, implementation, and sustainability plan.	Includes a fully detailed budget, implementation, and sustainability plan.	Includes a fully detailed budget, implementation, and sustainability plan.

# INCREASED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WITH MORE GRANT CATEGORIES

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## Emerging Opportunities Grants

The establishment of a new Emerging Opportunities Fund in 2024 is intended to drive grant requests to Connect People with the Outdoors and enhance access in existing facilities.

## Supplemental Grants 2024

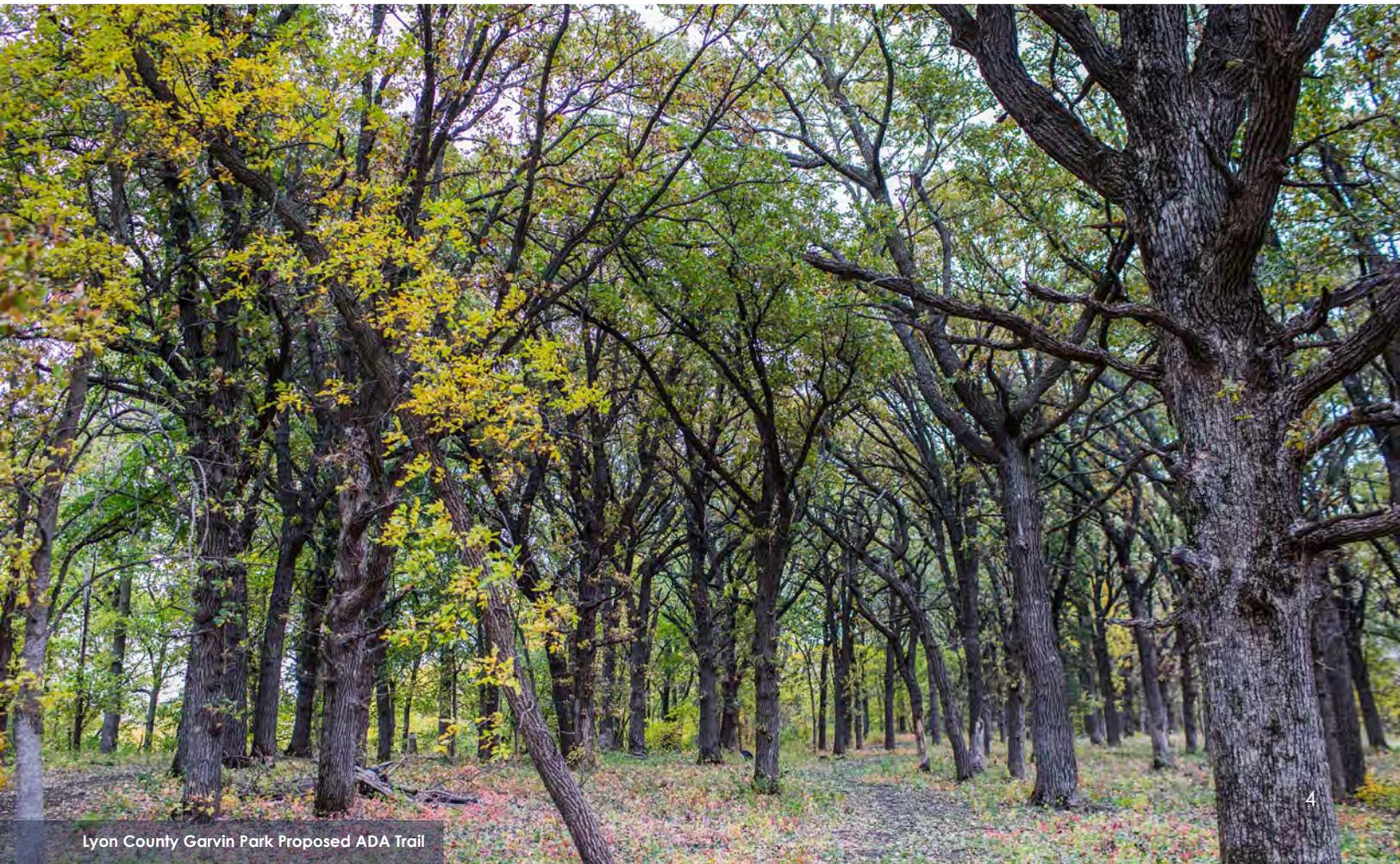
Increased construction costs caused some projects to run significantly over budget. The Commission recognized the importance of making it possible to complete work and get projects done. A competitive supplemental grant round was established with surplus Legacy funds awarded in the 2024 legislative session. As a result, rather than waiting until the next biennial budget, two significant projects are on track for completion and a Connecting People with the Outdoors grant for trail signage and amenities will welcome trail users.

## Inclusive Access Grants

Supporting better access to parks, whether for physical limitations, neurodivergence, or lack of familiarity and tradition of park/trail use has spurred work to create a new Inclusive Access Grant. This grant encourages applicants to exceed the minimum ADA requirements and think about ways to overcome obstacles to enjoying parks and trails. This grant pool will be funded annually and may be applied for as needed during the calendar year. It is not tied to a defined application timeframe.

## Environmental and Archeological Review Grants

This grant fund is available throughout the calendar year and may be applied for as needed. The costs associated with environmental and archeological services are accelerating and for some facilities it can be an obstacle to making a project happen. There is a cap of \$50,000 and a required match of 20%



# FY26 LEGACY FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

START DATE JULY 1, 2025 | END JUNE 30, 2028

PROJECT	AWARD	DIST.
<b>Cloquet Pine Valley Recreation Area</b> Rehabilitation of the 20 meter and 40 meter ski jumps, replacement of existing and additional cross country ski trail lighting, parking lot paving to enhance ADA access and perimeter security lighting in the parking lot.	\$1,307,783	1
<b>Proctor Hermantown Munger Trail Spur</b> Construction of an additional 4.86 miles of trail connecting to a wellness center, the Hermantown School Campus and the existing, previously constructed trail system.	\$950,000	1
<b>Mesabi Trail</b> Rehabilitation and reconstruction of 2.5 miles of trail from Buhl to Kinney, one of the first paved sections of the trail, which is now 26 years old in some segments.	\$400,000	1
<b>Gull Lake Trail</b> Construction of a .78 mile trail connection from Lake Shore to Nisswa, which will complete the 21-mile trail around Gull Lake. The project includes a floating aluminum frame boardwalk with wood decking over wetlands and an observation deck. The design will minimize environmental impact and offer wildlife and nature viewing opportunities.	\$2,528,591	2
<b>Frazee Wannigan Park</b> Development of a Phase I plan to establish trailhead facilities, ADA accessible trails, create campsites, a picnic shelter, playground, restrooms and a bathhouse.	\$917,177	3
<b>Willmar Robbins Island Park</b> Phase 1 construction of a two-sided amphitheater to accommodate large performances on one side and smaller performances on the other side. The building will share a green room, performers restroom and storage area. The facilities will be fully accessible for both performers and attendees.	\$1,304,568	3
<b>Sherburne County Two Inlets at Bde Hehaka - Omashkooz Zaaga'igaans Regional Park</b> Acquisition of a 6.42-acre inholding within the park boundary. The site includes a home, outbuildings, and shoreline on Elk Lake.	\$526,880	4
<b>Chisago County Swedish Immigrant Trail</b> Acquisition and construction of 2.5 miles of Segment D of the trail.	\$2,414,549	4
<b>Morrison County Soo Line Trail</b> Replacement of a failing bridge at South Two Rivers and rehabilitation of 2.2 miles of trail.	\$986,957	4
<b>Great Northern Trail</b> Construction of trailhead signs at key trail intersections and trailside amenities along the trail including a restroom, water filling station, shade structure, picnic tables, benches and trash receptacles. The amenities will enhance the user experience along the trail and are a cooperative project with the partner agencies.	\$683,240	4
<b>Wright County Stanley Eddy Park Reserve</b> Trailhead improvements, including separate gravel parking areas, one for day use and one for horse trailers. The project also adds potable water, security lighting, a vault toilet and wayfinding.	\$292,850	4
<b>Lyon County Garvin Park</b> Construction of a new picnic shelter, improved bathroom facility accessibility and upgrading electrical service in two campgrounds.	\$517,167	5
<b>Rochester Quarry Hill Park &amp; Nature Center</b> A variety of projects to restore and preserve the historic and natural resources in the park, as well as enhancements to security and safety in the park.	\$477,276	6
<b>Olmsted County Chester Woods Park</b> Replacement of old playground equipment to update and provide mobility accessible options for the playground.	\$185,000	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$13,492,038</b>	

# EMERGING OPPORTUNITY GRANTS FOR FY25

The Minnesota Legislature authorized the release of surplus Legacy funds to be used in fiscal year 2025, rather than holding over the funds to the next biennial budget cycle. As a result of this action, Greater Minnesota had an additional \$2,055,085 in funds. This amount, with funds held over from the previous grant cycle and some recaptured funds, resulted in an additional \$2,478,256 available for immediate use.

Commissioners voted to authorize \$100,000 to be set aside in a grant fund to assist with archeological and environmental project reviews.

The remaining funds were earmarked for use in an Emerging Opportunity Grant round designed to assist projects experiencing cost overruns, enhanced accessibility, and connecting people with the outdoors projects.

## FY25 EMERGING OPPORTUNITY GRANT AWARDS - START DATE: IMMEDIATELY

PROJECT	AWARD	DIST.
<b>Duluth Spirit Mountain Recreation Area</b> Funding to cover construction materials increases, severe rain event damage recovery, and an endangered species declaration that created new design and construction requirements that resulted in higher costs.	<b>\$531,590</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Gull Lake Trail</b> Trail enhancements including informational kiosks and signage, mile markers, and pet waste stations to create a consistent user experience across the trail.	<b>\$24,232</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Cannon Valley Trail</b> A previous award for Cannon River slope failure repairs at trail miles 14 and 16 was thought to be sufficient to conduct the necessary remediation. The preferred solution was not viable due to having to perform the work in a DNR Scientific and Natural Area. As a result, the slope failure had to be addressed through the use of 500 linear feet of sheet pile wall at the most severe location, and riprap armoring for the remainder of the failing slopes.	<b>\$1,358,211</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,914,033</b>	



Cannon Valley Trail Bridge Before Replacement



Cannon Valley Trail Bridge After Replacement

# WHAT CLEAN WATER, LAND AND LEGACY FUNDING CREATES IN GREATER MINNESOTA

In 2008, Minnesota's voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. This bold choice ensures that for the next 25 years, we make a conscious decision to: protect water and restore wetlands, prairies and forests; protect fish, game, and wildlife habitats; preserve arts and cultural heritage; and support and enhance parks and trails. In the four funding categories – Outdoor Heritage, Clean Water, Arts & Cultural Heritage, and Parks and Trails, the Parks and Trails Fund receives 14.25%, and of that, Greater Minnesota receives 20%, while the Minnesota DNR and Metropolitan Council Regional Parks receive 40% each.

These dollars make a huge, positive impact on facilities throughout the 80 counties in Greater Minnesota. New facilities and trails have been built, older parks and trails have been rehabilitated and renewed, programs to connect and welcome people to the outdoors have been created, and Minnesotans and visitors have reaped the benefits of these improvements.



Rochester Gamehaven Park



Le Sueur County Lake Washington Park



Sandstone Robinson Quarry Park



Olmsted County Zollman Zoo



Red Wing He Mni Can – Barn Bluff Park



Sandstone Robinson Quarry Park



Lake County Mountain Bike Trails



Goodhue County Bylesby Park

# MINNESOTA PARKS ARTIST IN RESIDENCE (MNPAiR)



The MNPAiR project is a unique collaboration with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, Minnesota DNR, and Metropolitan Council Regional Parks, with Forecast Public Art managing the process. Titled "Creating Belonging in Minnesota Parks," MNPAiR will explore community and belonging in parks in each of the three systems.

The project concept is to place an artist or artists at each of three parks in each system. Greater Minnesota took an expanded approach by asking artists to work at multiple parks within three of the six districts in Greater Minnesota, thereby making an impact in more communities.

The artists will research and engage with a park and its stakeholders and use that research to inform their approach to new work(s) which will be ready for the public in the spring and summer of 2025. Unlike traditional residency opportunities, this program focuses on how artists can serve as partners and ambassadors for their respective parks as they work with visitors to create art.

For more detailed information about the program visit the GMRPTC website: [gmrptcommission.org](http://gmrptcommission.org)



## ARTIST AND PARKS PAIRING

### DISTRICT 3 | GRANITE FALLS MEMORIAL PARK + DOUGLAS COUNTY LAKE BROPHY PARK



#### TAMARA ISFELD AND JOHN STERNER

Tamara and John are both teachers as well as recognized artists. Tamara works with mosaic and painting and John in sculpture and painting. They often team up on projects to creatively and collaboratively foster a greater sense of community.

### DISTRICT 4 | SHERBURNE COUNTY TWO INLETS AT BDE HEHAKA – OMASHKOOZ ZAAGA'IGAANS REGIONAL PARK + WRIGHT COUNTY ROBERT NEY PARK



#### LINDSAY BUCK

Lindsay is a landscape artist by trade but an artist by passion, specializing in landscape design and digital and social media.

### DISTRICT 6 | OLMSTED COUNTY OXBOW AND CHESTER WOODS PARKS AND ROCHESTER QUARRY HILL AND CASCADE LAKE PARKS



#### CASSANDRA BUCK

A muralist, Cassandra is a former teacher and full-time artist who enjoys collaboration in public art to spark inspiration and human connection.

# TRACK WHEELCHAIR GRANTS



Duluth Hartley Park Track Wheelchair

In 2022, the GMRPTC offered a special grant for track wheelchairs in an initiative to support inclusive enjoyment of our parks and trails for individuals with mobility limitations. Three facilities applied for and received the grants: Duluth Hartley Park, Lyon County Garvin Park, and Wright County Bertram Chain of Lakes Park. All three parks have now taken possession of their track wheelchairs, and they are available for public use.

The anecdotal stories about the impact the chairs have had for those who have taken advantage of the mobility devices have been amazing and heart-warming. From young users to the elderly, the chairs have made a positive impact during their park visits. We strive to be inclusive across the system, and the track wheelchair grants are a positive improvement.



Lyon County Garvin Park Track Wheelchair

# FREE EQUIPMENT USE DAYS

The GMRPTC offers a Connecting People with the Outdoors grant for the purchase of recreational equipment. As part of this grant, we require the grantee to offer free public use days to ensure that everyone, regardless of financial means, has the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. The grant, in addition to fostering enjoyment of the outdoors, encourages people to try a new activity before making an equipment investment. The grants expand inclusion and promote the physical, mental, and social benefits of outdoor activities.

The number of required free use days is dependent upon the type of equipment and whether it can be used year-round or seasonally, with a minimum of six days and at least three taking place on a Saturday or Sunday.

An annual report on the number of users for free use days is required by January 5 each year and must include the users' age or age ranges, and zip codes.



Le Sueur County Lake Washington Park



Duluth Traverse

# LOCATION BASED ANALYTICS

This year the Commission has taken steps to strengthen its park and trail user analytics capabilities by contracting with Placer.ai, a company that compiles aggregated and anonymized mobile device data into visitation numbers and a robust user demographic picture.

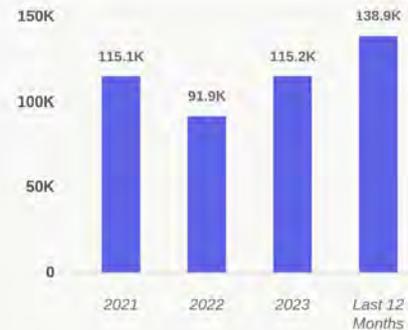
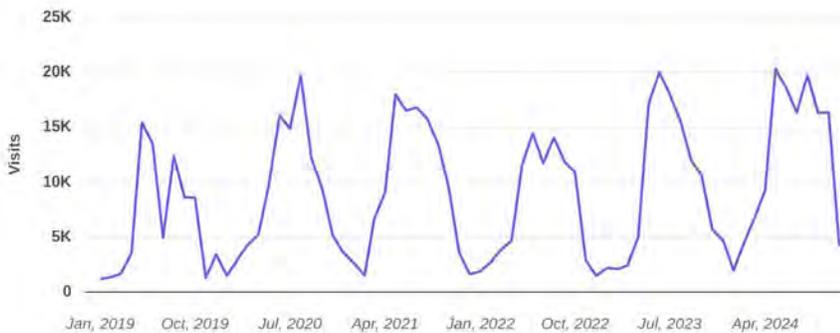
This platform is a powerful tool to assess patterns of park or trail use, where visitors generally come from, and identification of the most popular park or trail amenities. Analysis will help both the Commission and facility managers to make more informed decisions and investments.

This effort follows a two-year research project started in 2020 with the Parks and Trails Legacy Partners to count visitors to the three system's parks and trails. That project, using information from StreetLight Data, Inc., laid a foundation for understanding parks and trails visitation across each system and facility. Though the partnership project has concluded, the Commission felt it necessary to continue learning more about visitor demographics and collecting visitation numbers.

With Placer.ai data we can show the positive impact of expanding facilities to better meet the demand for programming at a popular nature center. Below is a graph showing park visitation before and after building a new, larger facility. This is just one example of the robust data available with the new tool.

## Visits Trend

**Oxbow/Zollman Zoo**  
Yeager Trail, Post Town, MN



Monthly | Visits | Jan 1st, 2019 - Nov 30th, 2024  
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. ([www.placer.ai](http://www.placer.ai))



Oxbow Park Nature Center Entry

Oxbow Park Nature Center Exhibit Area

# VALUE STATEMENT FOR INCLUSION

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission believes that nature and outdoor recreation belong to everyone. We are committed to creating and maintaining parks and trails that are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their abilities. Our dedication to inclusion reflects our core values of equity and respect for every visitor.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION:

- 1. Universal Design:** We promote universal design principles in all projects to ensure parks and trails are navigable and enjoyable for people of all abilities. This includes well-maintained pathways, accessible restrooms, and appropriate signage.
- 2. Inclusive Experiences:** We encourage our facilities to provide diverse recreational opportunities that accommodate the needs of everyone, from adaptive sports to sensory-friendly activities, ensuring everyone can connect with nature in a meaningful way.
- 3. Community Engagement:** We encourage active conversations with the community, including individuals of all abilities and advocacy groups, to gather feedback to continuously improve the accessibility of facilities and programs.
- 4. Education and Training:** Our designated facilities educate their staff and volunteers about the importance of inclusion and provide them with the tools and training needed to support all visitors effectively.
- 5. Connection to Nature and the Outdoors:** We believe facilitating opportunities to connect people of all abilities with nature fosters an appreciation for the outdoors and the environment.
- 6. Continuous Improvement:** Inclusion is an ongoing process. We encourage facilities to regularly assess and upgrade their facilities and programs to meet evolving standards and the diverse needs of their community. We are committed to staying informed about best practices and innovative solutions to ensure everyone can participate.

Over the course of the past year, Commissioners and staff have had numerous conversations about enhancing access to parks and trails in the Greater Minnesota system. Staff attended an impactful national conference focused on ADA access, which underscored both the progress made and the knowledge still to be gained. To further this initiative, outreach was conducted to access specialists with the skills and knowledge necessary to elevate the system. As a result, capable consultants are now available, as needed, to help achieve the goal of inclusion across the system.



Red Wing He Mni Can – Barn Bluff Park

Stearns County Quarry Park



# DISTRICT 1

## Connect People and the Outdoors

### *Cloquet Pine Valley Recreation Area*

Pine Valley Recreation Area was created in 1961 and encompasses 243 acres of northern Minnesota forest, with old-growth trees that survived the devastating Cloquet fire of 1918. The facility is year-round, with biking, hiking, snowshoeing, and Nordic ski trails, as well as their signature feature, ski jumps. There are four ski jumps, ranging from 5 to 45 meters, attracting jumpers as young as three to as old as the adrenaline will take a jumper. The area has a rare geological feature called a Qli formation, an ice-contact deposit that includes an esker, a kame, and a meltwater fan deposit. The beautiful old-growth red and white pine that survived the fire make a beautiful canopy over areas of the park, along with a wide variety of other tree species. Future plans for the park include renovating the ski jumps, improving the parking lot, and adding new ski trail lighting to extend the availability of skier use.

## Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

### *Duluth Waabizheshikana/The Marten Trail*

This beautiful multi-use recreational trail is currently 3.3 miles long, with an additional seven miles planned, to be completed in part with a Greater Minnesota Legacy grant of nearly \$1.5 million. The trail runs along the St. Louis River estuary and will connect users with the river and parts of Duluth currently without accessible river access. The trail development is coming at a critical time, with a nearly \$400 million Federal and State cleanup of the St. Louis River nearing completion. Two trailheads will incorporate amenities such as parking, watercraft launches, bathrooms, wheelchair storage lockers, interpretive elements, and wayfinding. Special consideration was given to the interpretive elements by celebrating the estuary through art, cairns, and pause points where users can experience a unique perspective of the river and its history.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	Milaca Gateway to the North Park	N
2	Lake County Prospector Loop Trail	T
3	Lake County Regional Trail	T
4	Mille Lacs County Soo Line Trail - South	T
5	Grand Marais Sawtooth Bluffs	N
6	Chisholm Redhead Mountain Bike Park	S

DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Aitkin County Northwoods ATV Trail	T
2	Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp	S
3	Cloquet Pine Valley Recreation Area	S
4	Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System	S
5	Duluth Hartley Park	N
6	Duluth Spirit Mountain Recreation Area	S
7	Duluth Traverse	S
8	Duluth Waabizheshikana/The Marten Trail	T
9	Grand Marais Recreation Area	N
10	Hermantown/Proctor Munger Trial Spur	T
11	Lake County Mountain Bike Trails	T
12	Lake Vermilion Trail	T
13	Mesabi Trail	T
14	Mille Lacs County Plains to Port Trail	T
15	Sandstone Robinson Quarry Park	S

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

**DISTRICT 1** (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

**20** Projects Funded

**35** Applications

**\$17,081,140** Awarded

**\$3,780,008** Community Match



Lake County Mountain Bike Trails at Split Rock Wilds



Sandstone Robinson Quarry Park



Duluth Spirit Mountain



Cloquet Pine Valley Recreation Area



# DISTRICT 2

## Coordinate Among Partners

### *Red Lake River Corridor*

With six partner communities along the river corridor – Thief River Falls, St. Hilaire, Red Lake Falls, Crookston, Fisher, and East Grand Forks – the Red Lake River Corridor is unique among the Greater Minnesota designated facilities. Visitors experience a blend of land, water, and people as they travel the river corridor. The partner communities envisioned expanding access to the river, making connections between the water and camping, as well as adjacent parks and trails. In short, they aim to promote an active lifestyle and the amenities that support that end result.

## Connecting People with the Outdoors

### *Northland Regional Sports Park*

Northwest of Bemidji, the Northland Regional Sports Park supports a traditional community activity in a big way! Like many Northwoods communities, Beltrami County residents and visitors are very active in the shooting sports, whether it be hunting, target shooting, competition, or personal enrichment. Northland provides an attractive, regional-class facility where the shooting sports can be taught and practiced safely.

From the explosive growth in high school trap teams to successful new women’s classes to competitions that engage the whole family, people are no longer relegated to the backwoods or unsecured gravel pits to practice this traditional activity. Law enforcement, hunter safety, and permit to carry classes make extensive use of the training space. Classroom and gathering facilities, camping, and ATV trailhead facilities round out this high-class facility.

The unique management model for the park includes ownership and oversight by the County, with a non-profit partnership maintaining facilities and operating the extensive programming. Out of all Greater Minnesota facilities, this is one of the best examples of the strength of community partnerships to fulfill a critical community need.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	Fertile Sand Hill Recreation Area	N
2	Marshall County Marshall Kittson Trail	T

DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Beltrami County Northland Regional Sports Park	S
2	Cohasset Tioga Recreation Area	N
3	Crow Wing County Milford Mine Memorial Park	S
4	Hubbard County Deep Lake Park	N
5	Lake of the Woods County Northerly Park	N
6	Lake Shore Gull Lake Trail	T
7	Red Lake River Corridor	T
8	Roseau River Water Trail	SP
9	Warroad Point Park	S

**N = Natural Resource Based Park    S = Special Features    T = Trail    SP = Supportive Partnership**

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

**DISTRICT 2** (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

**16** Projects Funded

**22** Applications

**\$14,128,665** Awarded

**\$4,059,595** Community Match



Gull Lake Trail, Fairview Township Section Grand Opening



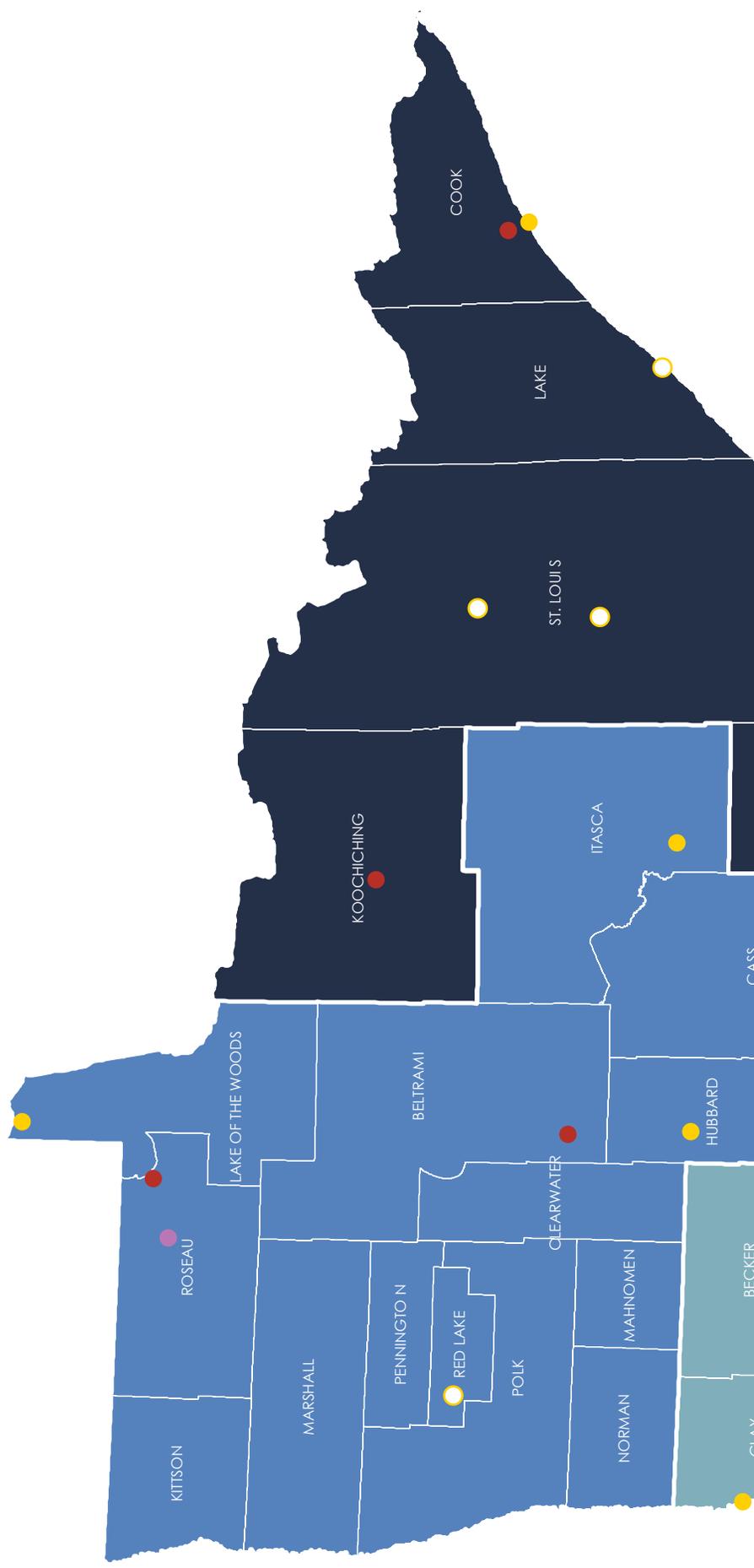
Beltrami County Northland Regional Sports Park



Red Lake River Corridor Crookston

# DESIGNATED REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT PARKS & TRAILS

(AS OF 12/31/24)







# DISTRICT 3

## Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

### *Frazeo Wannigan Park*

A recent addition to the Greater Minnesota System, Wannigan Park is a nature-based park of just over 157 acres that offers access to the Otter Tail River State Water Trail, the Heartland State Trail, and the North Country National Scenic Trail. Bold plans for the bare landscape include camping, picnic shelters, restroom/shower facilities, a playground, river overlooks, and a visitor center, among other planned improvements. A fun and well-visited feature installed in the summer of 2024 is the enormous troll sculpture by artist Thomas Dambo. The giant troll is tucked away in a far corner of the park, and to find it, visitors follow the troll trail. Counters on the trail have confirmed the popularity of the troll with visitors from across the United States and Canada.

## Connect People and the Outdoors

### *Douglas County Lake Brophy Park*

This picturesque park in the heart of the Alexandria chain of lakes offers a wealth of opportunities for connecting people with the outdoors. From a busy and well-loved playground area to mountain bike trails, water access, a sledding hill and a beautiful new visitor's center, Lake Brophy Park has something to experience for all ages. Recent development of this park has driven a significant economic impact to the area, while offering outdoor enjoyment and the calm of a natural landscape.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	Battle Lake to Ashby Trail	T
2	Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center	N

DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Detroit Lakes Detroit Mountain Recreation Area	S
2	Douglas County Lake Brophy Park	N
3	Douglas County Kensington Park	N
4	Fergus Falls Glacial Edge Trail	T
5	Frazeo Wannigan Park	N
6	Granite Falls Memorial Park	N
7	Lac qui Parle County Park	N
8	Moorhead MB Johnson Park	N
9	Moorhead River Corridor Trail	T
10	Otter Tail County Heart of the Lakes Trail	T
11	Otter Tail County Phelps Mill County Park	S
12	Swift County Appleton OHV Park	S
13	Willmar Robbins Island Park	N

**N = Natural Resource Based Park    S = Special Features    T = Trail    SP = Supportive Partnership**

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

**DISTRICT 3** (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

**21** Projects Funded

**37** Applications

**\$14,433,904** Awarded

**\$5,684,184** Community Match



Douglas County Kensington Park



Willmar Robbins Island Park



Frazer Wannigan Park



# DISTRICT 4

## Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

### *Sherburne County Two Inlets at Bde Hehaka - Omashkooz Zaaga'igaans Regional Park*

A recent acquisition of 430 acres on Big Elk Lake led to the creation of Two Inlets at Bde Hehaka – Omashkooz Zaaga'igaans Regional Park. The name is a recognition of the ancestral lands of Dakota Oyate and Anishinaabe, the original stewards of the lands and waters that we now refer to as Sherburne County. The site is of great historic and cultural significance and will be developed for recreational use in a very cautious and respectful manner, honoring the past while providing education about the history of the site. The initial development calls for interpretive elements, a foraging forest, restroom facilities, and natural surface trails. It will be exciting to watch this beautiful property transform over the coming years.

## Connect People and the Outdoors

### *Isanti County Springvale Park*

The location of Springvale Park in the growing population center of Isanti County is good news for connecting people with the outdoors at this park rich in outdoor recreation. The recent addition of an ADA accessible nature play area, and a three-mile expansion of the single-track mountain bike trail provides users with more opportunity for outdoor recreation and enjoyment. Equally important is the addition of a permanent vault toilet to replace the existing portable restroom.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	St. Cloud River Bluffs Park	N
DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Chisago County Sunrise Prairie Trail	T
2	Chisago County Swedish Immigrant Trail	T
3	Elk River Woodland Trails Park	N
4	Isanti County Irving & John Anderson Park	N
5	Isanti County Springvale Park	N
6	Morrison County Belle Prairie Park	N
7	Morrison County Soo Line Trail	T
8	Sherburne County Two Inlets at Bdé Heháka - Omashkooz Zaaga'igaans Regional Park	N
9	Sherburne County Great Northern Trail	T
10	St. Cloud Beaver Island Trail	T
11	Stearns County Kraemer Lake Park	N
12	Stearns County/Benton County Great River Park Complex	N
13	Stearns County Lake Wobegon Trail	T
14	Stearns County Rockville Park	N
15	Stearns County Quarry Park	N
16	Stearns County Warner Lake Park	N
17	Wright County Bertram Chain of Lakes Park	N
18	Wright County Collinwood Park	N
19	Wright County Crow River Trail	T
20	Wright County Great River Trail	T
21	Wright County Robert Ney Park	N
22	Wright County Stanley Eddy Park Reserve	N

**N = Natural Resource Based Park   S = Special Features   T = Trail   SP = Supportive Partnership**

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

## DISTRICT 4 (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

35 Projects Funded

47 Applications

\$23,702,427 Awarded

\$6,239,917 Community Match



Stearns County/Benton County Great River Park Complex



Chisago County Sunrise Prairie Grand Opening



Sherburne County Great Northern Trail



# DISTRICT 5

## Take Care of What We Have

### *Redwood County Plum Creek Park*

Plum Creek Park in Redwood County is just outside the town made famous by Laura Ingalls Wilder and Little House on the Prairie, Walnut Grove. The park is an expansive 215 acres, with beautiful Lake Laura as the main feature. Over time, this well-used and well-loved park has seen the need for updates to serve the public better and create improved access for all users. A recent Legacy grant will provide for ADA access to the beach with landscaping that will offer beautiful views of the lake starting at the parking lot, a great improvement from the current layout. Additionally, there will be a series of retaining walls creating space for people on the beach and reducing the annual maintenance due to rising and receding lake water levels. The grant will also add new bathrooms and changing rooms and a nature-scape playground near the beach.

## Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

### *Sibley County Henderson Scenic Byway Trail*

The city of Henderson and Sibley County are working together on the construction of the Hummingbird Trail that will be constructed concurrently with the reconstruction of CSAH 6, which is being rebuilt to 50-year flood mitigation standards. The new trail is not part of the flood mitigation project but will be built alongside the new road at the same time. When complete, the trail will be 7.3 miles long and will offer connections to county parks and the Ney Nature Center. Henderson plans to construct a trailhead facility and new park as part of the project, with separate funding. A new trail in the beautiful Minnesota River Valley will be tremendously popular and offer an amazing and safe trail riding experience.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	Lyon County Camden Regional Trail	T
2	Le Sueur County Ney Nature Center	N

DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Greater Mankato River Valley Trail System	T
2	Le Sueur County Lake Washington Park	N
3	Lincoln County Hole in the Mountain Park	N
4	Luverne Loop & Blue Mounds Trail	T
5	Lyon County Garvin Park	N
6	Lyon County Twin Lakes Park	N
7	McLeod County Dakota Rail Trail	T
8	Redwood County Plum Creek Park	N
9	Redwood Falls Ramsey Park	N
10	Sibley County Henderson Scenic Byway Trail	T

**N = Natural Resource Based Park    S = Special Features    T = Trail    SP = Supportive Partnership**

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

**DISTRICT 5** (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

**18** Projects Funded

**24** Applications

**\$10,795,423** Awarded

**\$6,178,421** Community Match



Le Sueur County Lake Washington Park



Lyon County Twin Lakes Park



Luverne Loop & Blue Mounds Trail



# DISTRICT 6

## Connect People and the Outdoors

### Rochester Cascade Lake Park

In the heart of urban Rochester is Cascade Lake Park, a 225-acre area created out of the reclamation of a sand mining area. Complete with a lake and beach, amphitheater, paved trail around the lake that connects to the Douglas State Trail, shelter and picnic area, Cascade Lake is an urban oasis. Part of the early development included beautiful gardens and a nature play area. A recent grant enabled the building of a 20,000 square foot universal play area that welcomes children of all abilities. The accessible route is made of poured-in-place rubber that allows for easy maneuvering to the various play elements. Several sensory elements will be located throughout the playground along sidewalks and the accessible route. Signage in the park is in English, Spanish, Somali, Unified English Braille, and American Sign Language.

## Take Care of What We Have

### Lake City Hok Si La Park

Located in Lake City along the Mississippi River at the midpoint of Lake Pepin, the largest lake on the Mississippi River, Hok Si La Park spans 252 acres and features more than a mile of shoreline on the western shore. Originally a Boy Scout Camp, the city purchased the park in 1973 and made a commitment to protect the undeveloped natural areas of the camp. The park is currently working to improve lake areas and green space, as well as making it more accessible and enhancing access for diverse communities.

DESIGNATION ELIGIBLE		CLASSIFICATION
1	Olmsted County Root River Park	N
2	Owatonna Regional Park	N
3	Houston County Trail	T
4	Oronoco Zumbro River Water Trail	T

DESIGNATED		CLASSIFICATION
1	Austin Jay C. Hormel Nature Center	N
2	Cannon Valley Trail	T
3	Goodhue County Byllesby Park	S
4	Lake City Hok Si La Park	N
5	Olmsted County Chester Woods Park	N
6	Olmsted County Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo	S
7	Red Wing He Mni Can - Barn Bluff Park	S
8	Rochester Cascade Lake Park	N
9	Rochester Gamehaven Park	N
10	Rochester Quarry Hill Park	N
11	Winona Bluffs Traverse	S

**N = Natural Resource Based Park    S = Special Features    T = Trail    SP = Supportive Partnership**

# TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED

**DISTRICT 6** (FY16-FY25)

This notes the total number of applications and the total amount of grants made to this district over time.

**27** Projects Funded

**34** Applications

**\$19,750,592** Awarded

**\$11,456,388** Community Match



Rochester Gamehaven Park



Olmsted County Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo



Rochester Quarry Hill Park

# 2024 MILESTONES

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## Enhancing Access in Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails

The Commission has developed a grant program that encourages parks and trails to apply for funding to enhance and increase access. To assist designated facilities in determining how they can exceed ADA standards, we are working with accessibility/inclusivity experts to provide a multitude of support opportunities:

- Virtual seminars on specific areas of improvement
- Plan review and comment
- Holistic park review with onsite tours
- Inclusion Value Statement that describes the Commission's commitment to inclusivity for all

## Minnesota Parks Artist in Residence (MNPAiR)

The Minnesota Parks Artist in Residence project is a collaborative initiative with the Metropolitan Council Regional Parks and Minnesota DNR, paid for with Cooperation Among Partners funds. This imaginative program will place an artist or artists at parks in each of the systems for one year to explore themes of belonging in the outdoors in creative and unexpected ways. The pilot program has been two years in the making as we thoughtfully worked together to meet all three systems' unique needs so that the public enjoying this inventive program, and the artists creating the art, will feel a sense of participation and accomplishment.

## First Supportive Partnership Designation

The Roseau River Water Trail is the first designation as a Supportive Partnership, a new designation category that was created with the 2021 Strategic Plan update. Supportive partnership designation is a classification that relates to regional quality city and county facilities that support large, diverse, high impact recreation resources that are owned or controlled by non-eligible entities or units of government.

## New Grant Opportunities to Better Serve the Greater Minnesota System

Commissioners continually seek ways to improve the granting process to best serve the 80 facilities currently in the system. Commissioners listen to suggestions and recognize change as it occurs, and when necessary, make adjustments to the grant process as needed. In 2024, three new grant opportunities were established:

- Emerging Opportunities Grants is a temporary program to assist with construction overruns caused by inflationary prices and other obstacles to completion of a project
- Universal Access Grants to enhance park and trail access in existing buildings and trails
- Environmental and Archeological Grants to assist with the high cost of environmental and archeological studies that are required before many projects can be started

## 2024 System Site Visits

The highlight of any day is the opportunity to visit one of the 80 designated parks and trails in the Greater Minnesota System. Staff visit every facility applying for a grant to gain better knowledge of the extent of the request. Staff also visit each park or trail submitting a Master Plan as part of the application for designation process. Often, the Commissioner or Commissioners in that district also visit the facility. The visits have benefits beyond acquiring a better understanding of the park or trail, they also build personal relationships and mutual trust and transparency in the process.

## Logo Signage and Legacy Amendment Information

We recognize that work must be done to brand each Greater Minnesota System facility as part of the regional system. In 2024, we began providing all designated facilities with signs featuring the GMRPTC logo and website so visitors can learn more about the many wonderful facilities throughout Greater Minnesota. We also developed signage that recognizes the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment and the important role the funds have played in the creation of facilities in Greater Minnesota. A QR code leads those with an interest in learning more to a dedicated page on the GMRPTC website.

## Learning From Place: Bdote

The GMRPTC is a champion of the inclusion of all people in outdoor recreation. Our strategy includes encouraging our regional partners to work with Tribal communities and Historic Preservation Offices during park development, including Native American people and stories in their park public engagement process, and advocating for the addition of tribal governments to the list of Legacy eligible entities. To ensure that we continue our own growth and understanding, several Commissioners and staff attended the Learning from Place: Bdote training offered by the Minnesota Humanities Center.

## IMBA Trail Labs

GMRPTC has developed a close relationship with IMBA, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, since the development of the Mountain Bike Trail Development Guide that launched last year. IMBA has developed and held the Trail Labs primarily in Bentonville, Arkansas, for the past several years, bringing participants from across the country and internationally to learn about trail development. Recognizing the value of hosting Trail Labs, GMRPTC pursued and landed the program for the next three years. The inaugural Trail Labs will be held in Winona in Spring 2025 and Duluth in Fall 2025. The promotion of the labs will bring national awareness to Minnesota's rich variety of mountain bike trails and increase economic impact.

### Summary

Parks and trails in the State, Metropolitan, and Greater Minnesota systems are incredible assets, offering places for tranquility and relaxation, as well as entertainment, adventure, and exploration.

The commitment to this enduring Legacy investment in Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails alone totals nearly \$100 million dollars with an additional community investment match of almost \$40 million.

We are fortunate to live in a state that highly values and invests in building and maintaining our beautiful park and trail systems for the enjoyment of all.

# A LOOK AHEAD TO 2025

## Increased Public Engagement Will Bring Heightened Awareness of the Greater Minnesota System of Parks and Trails





The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission is responsible for designating regionally significant parks and trails in the 80-counties outside the metropolitan area.

Parks and trails in Greater Minnesota are incredible assets and places to enjoy quiet solitude, or adventure and exploration. We are fortunate to live in a state that places a high value on building and maintaining our beautiful park and trail systems for the enjoyment of all.

[www.gmrptcommission.org](http://www.gmrptcommission.org)



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Olmsted County Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo Bison at Sunset



Winona Bluffs Traverse