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# *The Feasibility of Designating Regional Parks as State Parks*

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Pursuant to 1987 Laws, Chapter 404,

Section 26, Subd 6

# **The Feasibility of Designating Regional Parks as State Parks**

## **I Introduction**

### **Background**

During the 1987 legislative session, the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED) was directed by Minnesota Law 1987, Chapter 404, Section 26, Subdivision 6, as follows:

“The Commissioner, in consultation with the Chair of the LCMR, or the Chair’s designee, shall prepare a report for the Chairs of the environment and appropriations committees in the House and the Chairs of the Environment and Finance Committees in the Senate by January 1, 1989, examining the feasibility of designating county parks in the seven-county metropolitan area as state parks. The report shall include analysis of the operation (O) and maintenance (M) costs and the extent of the public’s use of the parks, and a comparison of the efficiency and cost effectiveness of county management versus state management of the parks.”

While the legislation refers to county parks within the metropolitan area, subsequent conversations indicate the real interest was metropolitan regional parks.

### **Description of the Regional Park System**

The Metropolitan Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, plans for the system of regional parks, park reserves and trails. The Minnesota Legislature provides the funding for acquiring and developing the parks in the regional system. With these funds, the Council makes grants to nine implementing agencies, listed below. The agencies acquire and develop the land, and operate and maintain the parks.

#### **Anoka County Parks and Recreation**

**City of Bloomington  
Department of Community Services  
Parks and Recreation Division**

#### **Carver County Parks**

#### **Dakota County Parks Department**

#### **Hennepin Parks**

In cooperation with Scott County, Hennepin Parks also operates regional parks in Scott County, through the Scott-Hennepin Park Advisory Board.

#### **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board**

#### **Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department**

**City of St. Paul  
Division of Parks and Recreation**

#### **Washington County Parks Division**

There are 43 regional park units in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Of these, 29 are designated as regional parks, 10 as park reserves, and four as regional trail corridors. On the next page is a map showing the location of the regional park units in the metropolitan area.

The primary function of the regional parks is to provide resources that support outdoor recreation. Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Central Mississippi River Front and Como Park are all regional parks.

Park reserves are established to preserve representative areas of each of the original major landscape types in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. In addition, they are to provide diverse resources for outdoor recreation activities compatible with the reserve's high-quality natural surroundings. Examples of park reserves are Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes, Baker and Lake Elmo.

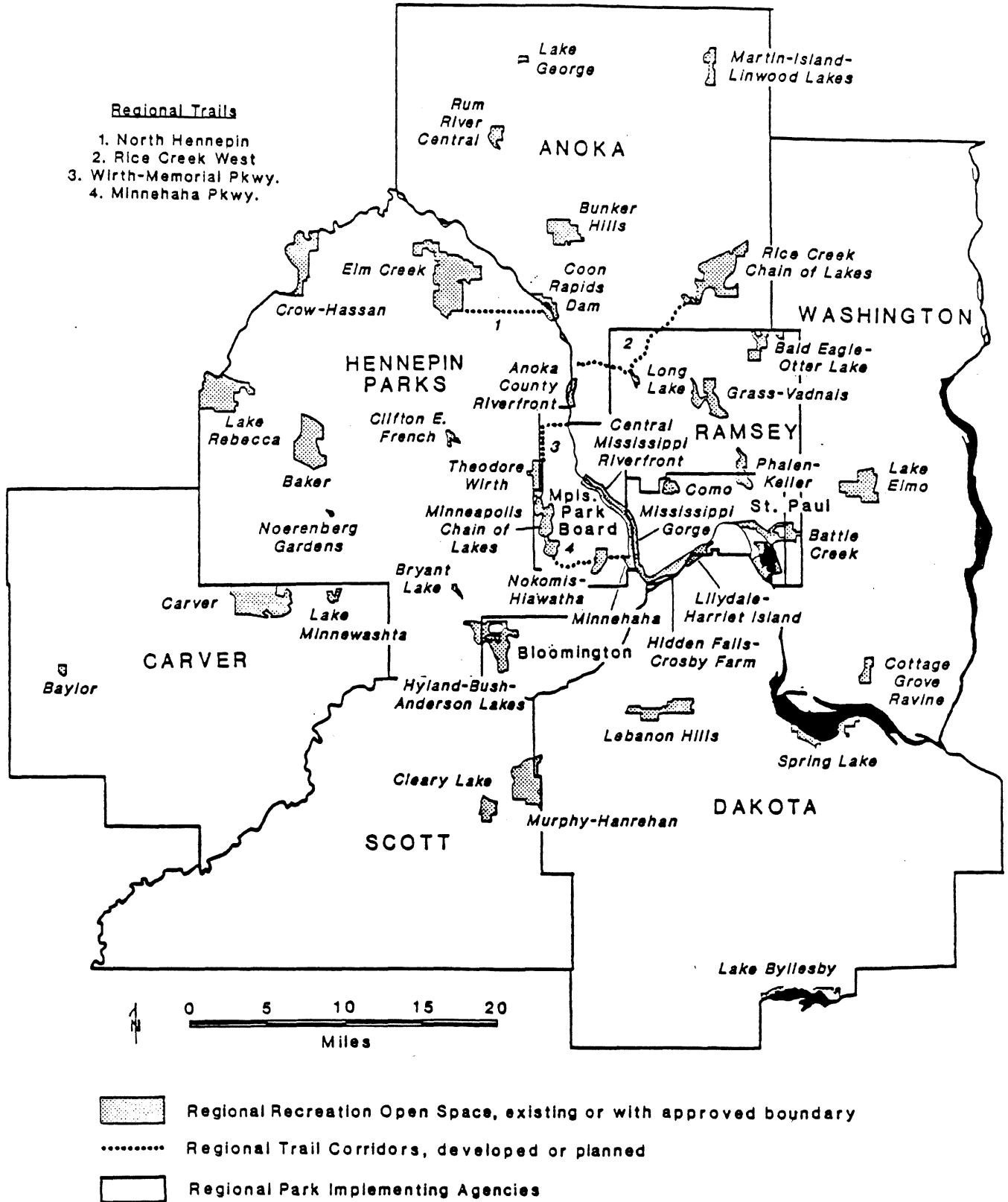
Regional trail corridors provide for recreational trail activities while connecting and providing access to regional park sites. The regional trail corridors include Minnehaha Parkway, Rice Creek West and North Hennepin regional trail.

### **Organization of the Study**

The first chapter of this study discusses the economic implications of designating the metropolitan regional parks as part of the state park system. First, we estimate the cost to the state to acquire the regional park land. Next, operation and maintenance expenditures, and costs associated with land acquisition and park development, are presented. Finally, the operating efficiencies of the state and regional park systems are discussed.

The second chapter focuses on the functions the state and regional park systems serve for the public. In order to determine whether the park systems serve similar public uses, we examined their respective mission statements and visitor characteristics such as visitor origin, overnight use and motivation for park visits.

TWIN CITIES METROPOLITAN AREA  
**EXISTING REGIONAL RECREATION OPEN SPACE SYSTEM**  
 September 1988



## II

### Economic Implications of Designating Metropolitan Regional Parks as State Parks

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the economic impact of designating the metropolitan regional parks as part of the state park system. Specifically, we estimate the cost of purchasing metropolitan park land, discuss operation and maintenance expenditures and costs associated with land acquisition and park development, and address the operating efficiency of the state and regional park systems.

#### Acquisition Costs

Although it is not certain that the state would have to purchase regional parks in order to take over their operation, it is certainly a possibility. Many of these parks, such as Minnehaha Falls, are highly-valued city or county landmarks. As a result, we first estimated the cost to the state to acquire the land.

In considering the cost of purchasing metropolitan park land, total cost and an average-per-acre acquisition cost were estimated. The estimated unadjusted total cost for the state to purchase the regional parks from the local units of government is \$1.9 billion, or an estimated average price of about \$43,000 per acre. However, since 1976 the state has contributed \$92 million to the purchase of some of this land. Because the state would certainly not have to purchase this land twice, we netted out state contributions to metro regional parks since 1976. The resulting estimated net total purchase price to acquire the regional parks is \$1.8 billion.

These figures are based on the following procedure: first, the metropolitan regional parks were categorized into three subregions based on population density, park visitation and visitor characteristics data. For example, Lake Calhoun was assigned to the urban subregion, Long Lake to the suburban subregion and Lake George to the rural subregion. Next, we estimated the fraction of the total acres of metropolitan park land that each of these regions constitute. Table 1 presents the distribution of park land by subregion.

After having categorized the parks, we surveyed local real estate agents, park district officials and county assessors for estimates of per-acre land values for these regions. From these estimates we calculated an average-per-acre value for each of these regions (See Table 1). It should be noted that these estimates do not take into account any park facility development, and are thus very conservative.

TABLE 1  
DISTRIBUTION OF METRO REGIONAL PARKS BY SUBREGION

<i>Subregion</i>	<i>Estimated Per-acre Purchase Price</i>	<i>Estimated Fraction Of Total Land Acres (45,232)</i>
Innercity	\$250,000	11%
Suburban	\$30,000	39%
Rural	\$7,000	50%

SOURCE: Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division, from an informal survey of real estate professionals, May, 1988.

Using the information in Table 1, the estimated total cost of purchasing the metropolitan regional park land was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Total Acres X Weighted Average Price per Acre} = \text{Total Acquisition Cost or} \\ 45,232 [.11 (\$250,000) + .39 (\$30,000) + .50 (\$7,000)] = \$1,913,400,000.00$$

However, this total must be reduced by the amount already contributed by the state for regional parks land acquisition.

$$\text{Total Acquisition Cost} - \text{State Contributions} = \text{Total Acquisition Cost Less} \\ \text{Previous State Contributions, or:}$$

$$\$1,913,400,000 - \$92,050,800 = \$1,821,349,200$$

\* \* \*

## Operation and Maintenance Cost

Regional park operation/maintenance expenditures is another economic issue that needs to be considered in discussing the feasibility of metropolitan regional parks being incorporated into the state park system. In comparing the total annual operation/maintenance expenditures for state and regional parks, the state parks spend about half the amount the regional parks spend.

TABLE 2  
STATE AND REGIONAL PARK ANNUAL OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE  
EXPENDITURES

	<i>Current State Park Operation/ Maintenance Budget</i>	<i>Current Regional Park Operation/ Maintenance Budget</i>
<i>Total:</i>		
1986	\$11,600,410	\$22,656,187
1987	\$12,243,690	\$24,545,929
1988	\$13,401,100	\$26,099,961
<i>Per Acre:</i>		
1986	\$58.44	\$502.15
1987	\$61.39	\$542.67
1988	\$67.00	\$574.33

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Council and Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

Next we considered the increase in operation/maintenance expenditures for the state park system if the metro regional parks were to be included. If the total operation/maintenance expenditures for state and regional parks were combined, annual operation/maintenance expenditures for the state park system would be about three times its current level. However, the most recent data available showed that 10 percent of the 1985 regional park operation/maintenance expenditures, and 30 percent of state park operation/maintenance expenditures, were paid for by visitor fees. It is unlikely that user fees in the regional park system would ever cover 30 percent of operation/maintenance expenditures, because many

of the regional parks are not designed for controlled access and because the system seeks to ensure access by low income population groups. Thus, we assume that the actual increase in state park operation/maintenance expenditures would be that portion of total costs not currently covered by regional park user fees. Table 3 shows that the percent increase in expenditures would range from 175 to 180 percent.

**TABLE 3**  
**INCREASE IN OPERATION/MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURES IF REGIONAL PARKS ARE INCLUDED IN THE STATE PARK SYSTEM (Assuming visitor fees will pay for 10 percent of regional park operation/maintenance expenditures)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>State Park Operation and Maintenance Expenditures</i>	<i>State Park Operation and Maintenance Expenditures If Regional Parks are Included</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>
1986	11,600,410	31,990,978	176%
1987	12,243,690	34,335,026	180%
1988	13,401,100	36,891,065	175%

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Council and Department of Trade and Economic Development.

### Development Costs

Regional park land acquisition and development costs are also expenses that would have to be assumed by the state if metropolitan regional parks are designated as state parks. Acquisition and development expenditures vary a great deal from year to year, depending on the projects to be undertaken. Despite this variation, it is clear that the regional park system spends a great deal more on acquisition and development than the state park system does. If we consider land acquisition and development expenditures together, we find that the state parks spend approximately 15 percent to 25 percent of the level spent annually by the regional parks system. If the state park system's annual spending on land acquisition and development were to include that of the regional parks at their current levels, it would most likely increase by from 400 percent to 700 percent (Table 4).

**TABLE 4**  
**ANNUAL LAND ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURES FOR STATE PARKS IF METRO REGIONAL PARKS ARE INCLUDED**

<i>Year</i>	<i>State Expenditures</i>	<i>Expenditures If Regional Parks are Included</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>
1985	\$3,723,270	\$17,774,540	377%
1986	\$2,042,520	\$10,433,187	411%
1987	\$1,469,460	\$10,680,396	627%
1988	\$2,479,850	\$19,564,860*	689%

\*This 1988 expenditure for metropolitan regional parks is a forecasted value.

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Council and Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

## Efficiency

In comparing state and regional parks' annual expenditures, one may wonder why the regional parks' expenditures are so much higher. Let us start this discussion by considering the operation and maintenance expenditures. Previously, we found that the total annual operation/maintenance expenditures for the state parks are only half of what they are for the regional parks. On a per-acre basis, the state parks spend only about 11 percent of what the regional parks spend. However, it would be more accurate to do this comparison on a per-visitor basis, since operation/maintenance needs are directly related to visitation levels. If we do this comparison, we find that the expenditures are identical. In 1987, the per-visitor operation/maintenance expenditure was \$2.04 for the state parks versus \$2.05 for the regional parks (see Table 5). This indicates that the higher operation/maintenance expenditures for the regional parks are not due to operating inefficiencies, but rather to the higher visitation levels of the regional parks (see Table 6).

TABLE 5  
ANNUAL OPERATION/MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURES FOR STATE AND METRO  
REGIONAL PARKS

	1986	1987	1988
<i>State</i>			
Total	\$11,600,410	\$12,243,690	\$13,401,100
Per Acre	\$58.44	\$61.39	\$67.00
Per Visitor	\$2.13	\$2.04	
<i>Metro Regional</i>			
Total	\$22,656,187	\$24,545,929	\$26,099,961
Per Acre	\$502.15	\$542.67	\$574.33
Per Visitor	\$2.03	\$2.05	

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

TABLE 6  
NUMBER OF VISITORS TO METRO AND STATE PARKS

	1986	1987
Metro	11,142,000	11,943,900
State	5,440,358	6,000,993

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council and the Department of Natural Resources.

The state and regional parks have used comparable definitions of visitor occasion in their collection of visitation data. The higher visitation levels for the metropolitan regional parks are largely due to the comparably high population densities in the metropolitan region.

Another issue in discussing operating efficiencies of the park systems is land acquisition and development expenditures. From Table 7 we see that the regional parks have higher annual land acquisition and development expenditures, even on a per-visitor basis. It should be understood, however, that the projects undertaken by the metropolitan regional parks are often larger than those of the state parks due to higher attendance levels and the nature of the services provided. Also, the price of land and development costs such as labor are typically higher in the metro region than in the area where state park land is acquired. For example, Table 8 shows that base pay for construction laborers is nearly 17 percent higher in the Twin Cities than the next-highest-wage city. Thus, the higher acquisition and development expenditures for the



regional parks is not a sign of inefficiency, but a reflection of higher costs in the metropolitan area and larger-scale park projects to meet a higher visitation demand.

**TABLE 7**  
**ANNUAL LAND ACQUISITION/DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURES FOR STATE AND METRO REGIONAL PARKS**

	1986	1987
<i>State</i>		
Total	\$2,042,520	\$1,469,460
Per Visitor	\$.38	\$.25
<i>Metro Regional</i>		
Total	\$8,390,667	\$9,210,936
Per Visitor	\$.75	\$.77

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

**TABLE 8**  
**CONSTRUCTION LABORERS' BASE PAY (1986)**

Bemidji	\$10.05/hr
Brainerd	\$9.40/hr
Duluth	\$12.05/hr
Faribault	\$12.05/hr
Mankato	\$11.80/hr
St. Cloud	\$11.75/hr
Rochester	\$12.05/hr
Willmar	\$8.90/hr
Twin Cities	\$14.00/hr

SOURCE: Regional Congress of Construction Employers.

"Efficiency" may mean not only efficiency in cost of operation, but also organizational efficiency. However, it is not clear that organizational efficiency would be improved if the state park system assumed the operations and maintenance of the regional park system. For example:

Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park is now operated by the City of Minneapolis as a unit within the regional system. If the Chain of Lakes and other regional parks in Minneapolis were to fall under the state park system, a level of government would not be eliminated because the City Parks Department would still operate and maintain the other smaller city parks as well as the recreation programs. Similarly, Washington County (and others) would not eliminate their park departments if their larger regional parks were administered by someone else.

The Parks Departments and Public Works Departments of park implementing agencies currently share staff and equipment for maintenance and administrative activities. Thus, cooperation would be lost if the state park system included regional parks. Support services such as personnel services, financial management and area maintenance shops would have to be provided by the state park system.\*

\* *Metropolitan Council*

## Summary

Designating the metropolitan regional parks as state parks is likely to be extremely costly. First, it should be noted that the cost of acquiring the metropolitan regional park land, estimated at \$1.8 billion, represents 10,958 percent of the 1988 budget for the state parks and 16 percent of the entire 1987-89 biennial budget for the state of Minnesota.

Once the regional parks had been purchased, the state park annual operation/maintenance expenditures would need to increase 200 percent. The \$2 million currently paid by the state to the regional park implementing agencies covers only about 8 percent of the current annual operation/maintenance expenditures for the regional park system. Another 10 percent might be paid by visitor entrance/use fees. However, the remaining 82 percent, or \$23.5 million in 1988, is currently paid by local property tax and would have to be assumed by the state.

In addition, in order to maintain the development pace set by the regional parks, the state park system would have to increase its annual land acquisition and development expenditures by as much as 700 percent.

Finally, in comparing the operating efficiency of state and regional parks we found no significant differences. Further, designating the metro regional parks system as part of the state park system would not eliminate a level of government in park management, because smaller local parks would still be operated. Thus, the conversion of regional parks to state parks would not contribute to cost efficiency, nor would it clearly improve operating efficiency.

### III

## PARK MISSIONS AND USE

In considering whether it is appropriate to incorporate metropolitan regional parks into the state park system, it is important to investigate whether the regional and state parks serve similar purposes or functions for the public. In this chapter, we analyze the regional and state parks' respective mission statements and visitor characteristics in order to assess whether or not these two systems have duplicative functions.

### Mission Statements

The respective mission statements for state parks and metropolitan regional parks reflect both similarities and differences in the functions they serve.

#### State park mission statement:

The mission of the Division of Parks and Recreation is to provide a state park system that perpetuates Minnesota's scenic beauty and its natural and cultural resources, while being responsive to public needs and expectations and providing a diversity of recreational opportunities. (SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation.)

#### Metropolitan regional park mission statement:

The purpose of the regional recreation open space system is to provide public recreation open space resources to meet the needs of the people of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The system is to be carried out as a partnership with the implementing agencies, in a framework that recognizes that there are other park and open space providers.

(SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Recreation Open Space Development Guide/Policy Plan, April 1986.)

The most notable difference in the function for the two park systems is the geographic area they are meant to serve. The regional park system exists to primarily serve people from the Twin Cities metropolitan area. State parks, on the other hand, are not established to provide services for a specific region. Rather, they tend to attract visitors from throughout Minnesota and from other states and to preserve areas of statewide significance.

Another difference between state parks and metropolitan regional parks is in the services they provide. Both regional and state parks seek to provide recreational opportunities for their visitors. However, in addition to this, state parks have a mission to exemplify Minnesota's scenic beauty and to preserve its natural and cultural resources. In the regional park system, only the park reserves serve a similar purpose. Park reserves seek to preserve representative areas of each of the original major landscape types in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

In all, the state parks seek to preserve and promote Minnesota's natural beauty while providing recreational opportunities for visitors from Minnesota and from other states. The mission of the metropolitan regional parks is to provide recreational open space resources primarily for people living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

## Visitor Origin

It is evident from the mission statements that the two park systems clearly intend to target differing geographic visitor groups. Since the state parks are generally intended for visitors from throughout the state, one would expect a large percentage of the state park visitors to come from outside the community or area in which the park is located. Minnesota state parks are located in one of six different regions, defined by the Department of Natural Resources as: northwest, northeast, central, southwest, southeast and metro. In Table 9 we see that 61 percent of state park visitors come from outside the DNR region they are visiting. Furthermore, 20 percent of state park visitors are from outside Minnesota. In other words, state parks clearly attract a significant portion of their visitors from throughout Minnesota and from other states.

TABLE 9  
ORIGIN OF STATE PARK VISITORS

Percent of visitors from within DNR region of park	38.79%
Percent of visitors from elsewhere in Minnesota	40.88%
Percent of visitors from out-of-state	20.33%
Total percent of visitors from outside DNR region of park	61.21%

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, 1987 Summer Use Survey of Minnesota State Park Visitors, April 1988. Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

Regional parks in the metropolitan area mainly attract visitors from within the seven-county metropolitan region. It is estimated that only 10 percent of the overall annual visits to metropolitan regional parks are by people living outside the metropolitan area. In the 1982 Metropolitan Recreational Demand study, in-park surveys were conducted to find the fraction of park visitors that live outside the metropolitan area. The park selection for this study was not random; rather, it focused on representing a wide spectrum of regional park use. The study cautions us to be aware of this when using the data to study the regional park system as a whole. For the purpose of our study, we considered only the parks belonging to the metropolitan regional park system\* and calculated the average proportion of visitors from outside the metro region for each of the five categories for all regional parks (Table 10). The Baker Camp Ground, which represents only a small fraction of the total visitors to the regional park system, had 19 percent visitors from outside the metro region. The averages for the other four activities, representing the vast majority of visits, ranged from about 3 percent to 7 percent visitors from outside the region. In contrast to state parks, which had 61 percent of visitors coming from outside the DNR region it is located in, metropolitan regional parks seemed to primarily attract visitors from within the metropolitan area.

\* Parks belonging to the regional park system are listed in Appendix.

**TABLE 10**  
**ORIGIN OF VISITORS TO METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PARKS**

	<i>Average Fraction of Metropolitan Residing Visitors</i>	<i>Average Fraction of Non-metro Residing Visitors</i>
Picnic/Swimming	94%	6%
Bike/Hike Trails	93%	7%
Interpretive Areas	97%	3%
Boat Access	94%	6%
Campgrounds*	81%	19%

\*Only one campground surveyed belonged to the metro regional park system.

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Metropolitan Recreation Demand Study, 1982. Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

### **Day Versus Overnight Usage**

Clearly, the origin of the visitors to regional and state parks differs markedly, reflecting their differing target audiences. It will also be useful to examine the activities these visitors engage in once they visit these parks. One distinct type of park usage is overnight camping.

In considering state parks and regional parks, one may expect state parks to have a larger proportion of overnight visitors since visitors often travel longer distances. Table 11 shows a positive correlation between travel distance and camping for state park visitors, and Table 12 shows the percentage of overnight visitors to state parks in 1986 for each of the six DNR regions and for the state as a whole. Overnight visitors ranged from about 20.9 percent in the northwest region to about 5.5 percent in the metro region. Of all Minnesota state park visitors in 1986, about 12.5 percent were overnight visitors.

**TABLE 11**  
**MILES DRIVEN TO STATE PARKS BY CAMPERS**

<i>Miles Driven to State Parks</i>	<i>Percent of Visitors Camping</i>
Under 25	8.2%
26-50	8.9%
50-100	17.0%
100-200	32.3%
Over 200	33.6%

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, 1987 Summer Use Survey of Minnesota State Park Visitors.

TABLE 12  
OVERNIGHT VISITORS TO STATE PARKS

<i>DNR Region</i>	<i>Total Visitors 1986</i>	<i>Total Overnight Visitors 1986</i>	<i>Percent of Visitors Camping</i>
1: Northwest	873,107	182,506	20.90%
2: Northeast	1,583,793	141,950	8.96%
3: Central	954,195	125,960	13.20%
4: Southwest	774,715	97,744	12.62%
5: Southeast	618,856	98,232	15.87%
6: Metro	724,153	40,115	5.54%
All Regions	5,528,819	691,651	12.51%

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, March 1988. Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.

The regional parks, in comparison, have very few overnight visitors. They are estimated to account for only 1.4 percent of total annual use in 1987, or one-tenth of the state park system's proportion of overnight visitors. Table 13 shows that 1.6 percent of total visitors are campers, but this includes both night and day campers. If we subtract the portion attributed to day camping (20,300), the overnight visitation becomes 172,100 or 1.4 percent of total annual use. This is only one quarter of the proportion of visitors that use the metro area state parks for this purpose.

TABLE 13  
REGIONAL PARK CAMPING 1987 ANNUAL USE ESTIMATES (in 1,000s)

	<i>Camping Use</i>	<i>Total Use</i>	<i>Percent Campers</i>
Anoka County	10.2	565.0	1.8%
Bloomington	NA	303.9	-
Carver County	11.4	101.4	11.2%
Dakota County	29.8	366.3	8.13%
Hennepin Parks	141.0	1,985.0	7.10%
Mpls. Park & Recr. Board	NA	4,804.2	-
Ramsey County	NA	759.0	-
City of St. Paul	NA	2,862.2	-
Washington County	NA	196.9	-
TOTAL	192.4	11,943.9	1.6%

NA: Camping facilities not available.

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Annual Use of the Regional Recreation Open Space System, 1987.

### Motivations For Park Visits

Another factor that would indicate whether state and regional parks fulfill the same purpose is to compare visitors' motivations for park visits. In the 1987 Summer Use Survey of Minnesota State Park Visitors, visitors were asked to indicate from 31 possible items which ones were motivating factors behind their visits to state parks. Table 14 lists the top 10 motivating factors for state park visits. The most common

visitor motivation was to experience nature. Along with the natural experience went activities such as exercise, being with family, relaxing, exploring and studying nature, or just plain having fun.

TABLE 14  
MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR STATE PARK VISITORS (TOP 10 OF 31)

	APPROXIMATE PERCENT OF VISITORS
1. Enjoyscenery	78%
2. Enjoy the peace and calm	75%
3. Enjoynature	59%
4. Havefun	57%
5. Exploreshings	47%
6. Getexercise	46%
7. Relaxphysically	44%
8. Be with family	44%
9. Escape daily routine	43%
10. Study nature	39%

SOURCE: Department of Natural Resources, 1987 Summer Use Survey.

Of the 31 possible motivations, the ones least frequently identified as motivations for state park visits were: 1) to obtain a challenging outdoor experience; 2) to be where the social action is; and, 3) to reflect on personal values. State parks are, thus, used primarily for engaging in recreational activities or relaxing while experiencing nature in Minnesota rather than for developing personal strengths or reflecting on one's life.

The only data available for metro regional parks regarding motivation for park visits is from the 1982 Metropolitan Recreation Demand Study. As was mentioned earlier, the parks in which the survey was conducted were not randomly selected, so caution must be exercised when interpreting the data in view of the entire regional park system.

Regional park visitor motivation was studied for each of the five categories of regional parks: picnic/swimming areas, bike/hike trails, interpretive areas, boat accesses and campgrounds. As could be expected, visitor motivation was often strongly related to the park category visited. For example, scenery and separated bicycle paths are important for bike/hike trail visitors, while spaciousness and wilderness are important for interpretive area visitors and boating facilities are important to the boat access visitors (Table 15). There are, however, some motivating factors that occur throughout the different park categories; these include factors such as: a chance to be with family and friends, closeness to home, and clean and well-maintained park facilities. In general, while regional park visitors are drawn by the natural setting of regional parks, they are often also motivated by proximity, an opportunity to engage in physical fitness activities, or spending time with family and friends. The importance of the parks' closeness to home re-emphasizes the mission of the regional parks to primarily serve the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

**TABLE 15**  
**MOTIVATIONS FOR CHOOSING A REGIONAL PARK FACILITY**

<b>Picnic/Swimming Area</b>	<i>Average Percent of Visitors:</i>	<b>Bike/Hike Trails</b>	<i>Average Percent of Visitors:</i>
<i>Important Factors:</i>		<i>Important Factors:</i>	
1. Being with family and friends	82%	1. Scenery	94%
2. Maintenance	75%	2. Separate bike-hike paths	87%
3. Close to home	63%	3. Experience nature	80%
4. Swimming beach	62%	4. Close to home	74%
5. Restrooms	60%	5. Maintenance	74%
6. Experience nature	59%	6. Solitude, privacy	68%
7. Picnic facilities	56%	7. Lack of auto traffic	67%
8. Open play areas	52%	8. Being with family and friends	59%
9. Water quality	47%	9. Being with other people	28%
10. Being around other people	45%	10. Restrooms	26%
<b>Interpretive Areas</b>	<i>Average Percent of Visitors:</i>	<b>Boat Accesses</b>	<i>Average Percent of Visitors:</i>
<i>Important Factors:</i>		<i>Important Factors:</i>	
1. Spaciousness	96%	1. Close to home	82%
2. Wilderness feeling	95%	2. Good boating lake	67%
3. Plants and wildlife	90%	3. Good ramp	65%
4. Solitude, privacy	89%	4. Ample parking	57%
5. Close to home	87%	5. Clearwater	51%
6. Low cost/trails	87%	6. Good shore facilities	45%
7. Being with family and friends	85%	7. Good fishing	36%
8. Support facilities	80%		
9. Interpretive building	72%		
10. Exhibits/displays	63%		
		<b>Baker Campground*</b>	<i>Average Percent of Visitors:</i>
		<i>Important Factors:</i>	
		1. Cleanliness	97%
		2. Clean restrooms	95%
		3. Swimming area	91%
		4. Water	89%
		5. Being with family and friends	89%
		6. Close to home	89%
		7. Patrolled grounds	83%
<b>* Other campgrounds were surveyed, but they were not part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System.</b>			

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council, Metropolitan Recreation Demand Study, 1982. Department of Trade and Economic Development-Policy Analysis Division.



## Summary

Regional and state parks serve slightly different purposes for the public; these varying purposes are reflected in their respective mission statements. The mission of the state parks is to preserve natural and cultural resources unique to Minnesota, while providing opportunities for recreational activities in this natural setting. The regional parks, on the other hand, are established to provide recreational open-space resources primarily for people living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The regional parks system does not serve a statewide area, and devotes less of its resources to preserving scenic beauty unique to Minnesota or the region.

Another difference between regional and state parks is visitor origin. Approximately 61 percent of state park visitors come from outside the DNR region in which the park is located. In comparison, only about 10 percent of regional park visitors are from outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Reflecting the state parks' larger portion of visitors from beyond the local region, state parks also have a larger percentage of overnight campers. State parks have approximately 12.5 percent overnight camping, while regional park overnight camping is estimated at about 1.4 percent.

Activities of visitors and motivation for visiting the park also exemplify the differing needs served by the two park systems. The main motivation for state park visits was an opportunity to experience Minnesota nature. In contrast, visits to regional parks were generally motivated by the opportunity to either relax or to engage in some physical fitness activity.

Whether examining missions, origin of visit, or usage characteristics, it is evident that the public purpose of the two park systems differs. Thus, merging the two systems does not appear to be efficacious from a public use perspective.

## IV CONCLUSION

Incorporation of the metropolitan regional parks into the state park system is not likely to be cost efficient. First of all, the state may have to purchase the regional park land, at an estimated cost of roughly \$1.8 billion. This would represent a 10,958 percent increase in the 1988 budget for state parks. In addition, the annual operation and maintenance expenditures for state parks would increase 175 percent to 180 percent, or \$23.4 million, in 1988. State development expenditures, including land acquisition, would have to increase by 700 percent to maintain the development pace set by the regional parks.

Regional parks have higher total operation/maintenance expenditures, but this is due to higher visitation levels and not to operating inefficiencies. State and regional parks have identical per-visitor operation/maintenance expenditures. It is, therefore, unlikely that designation of regional parks as state parks would lead to increased operating efficiency.

Incorporating the regional parks into the state park system would not lead to the elimination of a level of government. Many of the regional park implementing agencies would still operate and maintain local parks that are not designated as metropolitan regional parks.

The state and regional parks have differing functions to the public. The mission statement for the regional parks indicates that the regional park system is established to provide recreational open-space resources primarily for people living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The mission statement for state parks goes beyond providing resources for recreational activities. It calls for the preservation of Minnesota's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of visitors from throughout Minnesota as well as from other states.

Our study of various visitor characteristics showed them to be consistent with the mission statements of the park systems. State parks clearly serve a much larger geographical area than regional parks do. Sixty-one percent of visitors to state parks come from outside the DNR region in which the park is located. In contrast, an estimated 10 percent of visitors to regional parks reside outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Visitor motivations are also consistent with the mission statements of the parks. Visits to state parks are primarily motivated by the opportunity to relax and to experience Minnesota's scenic beauty. Visits to regional parks are motivated by a natural environment as well, but the parks' proximity is also of great importance. The natural setting and closeness to home that regional parks offer make them a perfect place to relax, engage in physical fitness activities, or spend time with family and friends.

The high expenses to the state of incorporating the regional park system into the state park system cannot be justified on the basis of cost efficiency, visitor characteristics or park use.

## APPENDIX

### 43 REGIONAL PARK UNITS

#### Regional Parks

1. Anoka County Riverfront
2. BattleCreek
3. Baylor
4. Bald Eagle-Otter Lake
5. BryantLake
6. BunkerHills
7. Clifton E. French
8. Cottage Grove Ravine
9. Lilydale-Harriet Island
10. Cleary Lake
11. Central Mississippi Riverfront
12. Como
13. Coon Rapids Dam
14. Grass-Vadnais
15. Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm
16. Phalen-Keller
17. Lake Byllesby
18. Lake George
19. Lake Minnewashta
20. Lebanon Hills
21. Long Lake
22. Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes
23. Mississippi Gorge
24. Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes
25. Minnehaha
26. Noerenberg Gardens (special feature site)
27. Nokomis-Hiawatha
28. Rum River Central
29. Theodore Wirth

#### Park Reserves

1. Baker
2. Carver
3. Crow-Hasson
4. ElmCreek
5. Hyland-Bush-AndersonLakes
6. LakeElmo
7. LakeRebecca
8. Murphy-Hanrehan
9. Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes
10. Spring Lake (Dakota County)

#### Regional Trails

1. MinnehahaParkway
2. NorthHennepin
3. RiceCreek
4. Wirth-Memorial

SOURCE: Metropolitan Council