

Regional Parks Facts

Regional parks enhance quality of life for residents

The seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area boasts a regional parks system that includes 51 parks and park reserves, and 7 special recreation features totaling more than 54,600 acres open for public use. In addition, the system has 38 regional trails with 231 miles currently open to the public. The parks range from urban lake environments and suburban nature centers to a working farm and large tracts of rural open space. Preserving parkland and open space protects valuable natural resources and makes communities more attractive and livable.

Regional parks provide recreation

Visitors to regional parks can walk, bike, swim, picnic and enjoy dozens of other activities. The regional park system, open year-round, receives nearly 41 million visits annually. The most popular parks include the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Como Zoo and Conservatory, Mississippi River Gorge, Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail and Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park.

Local agencies operate, maintain parks

The regional parks system began with pioneering state legislation in 1974, which put the Metropolitan Council in charge of overseeing acquisition and development of regional parks. The parks are operated by 10 partnering cities, counties and special districts.

Several large parks have free admission for entrance by vehicle while others require daily or annual passes. All parks have free admission for those who walk or ride their bicycle to enter.

The Council and the agencies work together to develop regional parks policies that protect the region's water quality, promote best management practices, and help integrate the parks with housing, transportation and other regional policies.

Funding the system

The Council allocates state and regional funds for ongoing acquisition and development of the parks system. Between 1974 and 2010, the Council authorized a total of \$525 million in grant funds for those purposes. Funding for the grants comes from state bonds, regional bonds issued by the Council, monies from the Minnesota Environmental Trust Fund (recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources), Land and Legacy Fund monies, and interest earnings.

The Council also annually allocates state funds to cover a small share of the cost of parks operation and maintenance. In 2010, the Council distributed more than \$8.8 million to the 10 park implementing agencies for parks operations and maintenance, which covered about 9.8% of their costs.



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Expanding park and trail opportunities

In April 2010, the population of the seven-county metro area was 2.85 million people. The Council forecasts that by 2030 more than 3.6 million people will live in the region. The Council's updated 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan calls for expanding the parks system to protect valuable natural resources and provide additional recreational opportunities for the growing population.

By 2030, the regional parks system is planned to expand to nearly 70,000 acres and nearly 1,000 miles of trails. New regional trail corridors will link regional parks in Scott, Dakota, Carver, Ramsey and western Hennepin counties. New regional parks in Scott, Dakota and Anoka County are planned. The Silverwood special recreation feature in St. Anthony, with art and environmental education in a natural setting, just opened in 2009. The Landing, in Shakopee – a living history museum – became the seventh special recreation feature in the regional parks system in 2010. These planned, and recently opened, park and trail connections will allow residents to have a variety of new park experiences, close to home.

Additional park search areas and trail corridors in Carver and Scott counties have been identified in the policy plan. These facilities may or may not be developed prior to 2030; however, acquisition of land is encouraged as land becomes available and before those opportunities are lost to development forever.

For more information

To locate all the parks and the recreational opportunities they contain, or learn more about regional parks planning, visit www.metrocouncil.org/parks/index.htm

The Council's Regional Parks Map is available free of charge at libraries, park agency offices and from the Council's Data Center. Call 651-602-1140 for more information.

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