



A Coordinated
Natural Resources Protection Strategy

Report and Recommendations

Metropolitan Council Natural Resources Task Force

March 2005



Metropolitan Council

Mears Park Centre, 230 East Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

Metropolitan Council Natural Resources Task Force

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Publication no. 78-05-009

Printed on recycled paper with at least 20% post-consumer waste.

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| I. Introduction | 1 |
| The Challenge | 1 |
| The Opportunity | 1 |
| About the Natural Resources Task Force..... | 2 |
| About This Report..... | 3 |
| II. Task Force Goal | 3 |
| III. Findings and Conclusions | 3 |
| IV. Recommendations | 5 |
| Systems Planning | 5 |
| Capital Investments | 6 |
| Support for Corridors Initiative..... | 6 |
| State/Regional Partnership | 6 |
| Focus of Responsibility | 6 |
| Collaboration..... | 6 |
| Public Participation | 6 |
| Guidance to Local Communities..... | 7 |
| Assistance to Local Communities | 7 |
| Regional Green Space Benchmarks | 8 |
| Funding..... | 8 |
| Support for Innovative Partnerships..... | 9 |
| V. How This Report Will Be Used | 9 |
| VI. Stakeholder Roles | 10 |
| VII. Resources | 12 |
| VIII. Glossary | 14 |

I. Introduction

The Challenge

A strong economy, cultural amenities and a beautiful natural setting have transformed the Twin Cities area into one of the fastest growing metro areas in the northern half of the nation. And more growth is on the way. The Metropolitan Council forecasts that the area's population will increase by nearly one million people between the year 2000 and 2030, the equivalent of two cities the size of Denver, Colorado. In the last three years, the region has grown by more than 98,000 people – the equivalent of the city of Duluth. The region has been producing housing units at a brisk pace during the last several years, adding more than 20,000 units annually. This is up significantly from the 15,000 units a year that were produced throughout the 1990s, and exceeds the number needed to keep pace with the region's projected growth.

As this growth occurs, a key question is how the region can preserve its incomparable natural legacy – three majestic rivers, a thousand lakes, extensive wetlands, and its native prairies and woodlands. Loss of green space has the potential to spoil our envied quality of life and significantly impact wildlife habitat areas. Still unprotected are important natural areas that allow rainwater to replenish our underground water sources, provide habitat and serve other important natural functions. Buildings, roads, parking lots and other changes to the natural landscape promote the flow of polluted runoff into the region's lakes and streams.

Opportunities to conserve these natural lands become more expensive – and less available – with each passing year. As lands develop, their value escalates, particularly around lakeshores and riverfronts. The cost to replace the amenities and vital functions that natural lands provide will be much greater to the future taxpayer than the cost to conserve these lands now. The region's residents recognize the need for increased protection and preservation of important natural resource areas. In the Council's 2001 Survey of Metro area residents, 93 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “as areas develop, governments should do more to protect natural features.”

The Metropolitan Council is working hard to accommodate the region's growth in a cost-effective manner while preserving vital natural assets and maintaining the region's quality of life. The Council's overall regional plan, the *2030 Regional Development Framework*, and its supporting system plans for transportation, wastewater and regional parks are directed at meeting the needs of current and future residents, using land sensibly and protecting the region's prized natural environment. More efficient patterns of development, encouraged by the *Framework*, can go a long way to ease pressures on the region's natural areas. Also needed are measures directly focused on resource preservation and protection.

The Opportunity

There are potent tools at hand that the region can bring to bear on this issue. First, the Council's *Development Framework*, adopted in January 2004, identifies as one of its goals “preserving vital natural areas and resources for future generations” (Goal 4). The corresponding policy states: “work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources” (Policy 4). These and other *Framework* goals and policies help set the parameters for local planning carried out at the municipal and, in some cases, county levels. Communities will soon begin preparing updates to their local comprehensive plans that are due to the Council for review by 2008.

A significant opportunity also resides in the regional parks and open space system. The metropolitan area has already made a substantial investment in conserving its green spaces through its regional parks, park reserves and trails. Since its creation in 1974, nearly \$400 million has been invested in acquiring and improving parkland for the system. Regional parks, encompassing 52,000 acres, draw more than 30 million visitors a year. Federal, state, and local governments own and manage parks, natural areas, and wildlife refuges that provide additional habitat and recreational activities. On top of that, local communities have invested millions in community and neighborhood parks and recreation areas.

Protecting remaining natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on these past investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the regional park and open space system as the region grows by one million more people in the next 30 years.

In another landmark effort, the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have charted highly important natural resources in the seven-county area as part of a region-wide natural resource inventory and assessment (NRI/A). The NRI/A – a geographic database and series of maps – records valuable information about land and water resources that perform significant ecological functions, contain important habitat for animals that are sensitive to habitat fragmentation and destruction, and provide opportunities for people to experience nature and the region's historical landscapes.

The NRI/A builds on existing information, such as Minnesota County Biological Survey data, to provide a comprehensive look at natural resources. The NRI/A is an information tool that the Metropolitan Council and local governments can use to accommodate growth while protecting the environment through implementing effective land protection and restoration tools. This is especially valuable as a resource to help communities develop their 2008 comprehensive plan updates.

The NRI/A revealed that roughly 100,000 (between 75,000 and 120,000) acres of regionally significant natural lands remain unprotected in the metro area, compared to 280,000 acres of total natural lands and 1,900,000 acres of land overall. Identification of these remaining natural lands using the NRI/A provides a great opportunity to prioritize and coordinate conservation action.

With these and other efforts to build on, the future offers a host of opportunities for regional and local partners and the private and public sectors to collaborate and work in partnership to protect our valuable natural resources.

About the Natural Resources Task Force

The Natural Resources Task Force is a group of 14 representatives from the private and public sectors with expertise in natural resource protection. The Task Force was chaired by Metropolitan Council member Natalie Steffen, who is also the Council's liaison to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. The Task Force was established by the Council to develop a coordinated conservation program to protect regionally important natural resource areas. The Task Force reviewed the Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment that was incorporated into the *2030 Regional Development Framework*. The Task Force met monthly from March 2004 through early 2005.

About This Report

This report describes the work of the Natural Resources Task Force, including its goals, findings and recommendations. The report also contains maps of regionally important natural areas, as well as case studies of coordinated conservation strategies that have been used effectively to protect important natural resource areas.

II. Task Force Goal

The goal established by the Natural Resources Task Force is to develop a coordinated conservation strategy to protect natural resource areas and wildlife corridors of regional importance within the seven-county metropolitan area, with elements of the strategy to be implemented by federal, state, regional and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector.

III. Findings and Conclusions

The Task Force considered the views of stakeholders with their respective roles in protecting natural resources, and each of them proposed recommendations. Stakeholders included county and local governments, the state Departments of Natural Resources and Agriculture, watershed districts, soil and water conservation districts, non-profit environmental groups, local consultants and the private development community. The Task Force found that there is a need to:

1. Provide the best and most current data to stakeholders.

The Natural Resources Task Force reviewed the regional Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment (NRI/A) and found that there is a need to continually enhance and refine the available data, and to provide the most current and detailed data and natural resource assessment information available. The Task Force concluded that integration of all of the various data layers should occur through the local planning process, either through the completion and adoption of local natural resource inventories and assessments or, where appropriate, through the integration of the regional Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment and more recent data and information into an implemented local comprehensive plan update.

2. Increase coordination at the regional level to support natural resource planning and protection efforts.

Local units of government, state agencies, nonprofit groups, developers, landowners and associations all need to collaborate in order for the metropolitan area to fully realize this goal in the coming years. Some collaborative efforts are already in, such as the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Regional Greenways Collaborative, Embrace Open Space, and Metro Conservation Corridors.

- Designate staff capacity in the Metropolitan Council to implement natural resource protection and coordination, while recognizing agency budget constraints;
- Increase collaborative implementation efforts for open space and recreation planning;
- Encourage flexibility in regulating and reviewing proposed developments to achieve conservation objectives; and

- Coordinate review efforts, especially among and between watershed management authorities, soil and water conservation districts, and local and sub-regional governments.

3. Recognize key stakeholder roles.

The Task Force reviewed various implementation strategies in light of its goal, including the role of the regional park system and the role of local governments in developing conservation and open space planning programs.

The Task Force concluded that the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* will be one important tool in implementing protection of lands identified by the natural resource inventory. The system's implementing agencies can acquire large parcels of natural resources of regional importance as park reserves or as future regional parks. The implementing agencies can also expand the inter-connected system of greenways and trails, and acquire potentially significant in-holdings of regional importance. Between 2,500 and 6,800 acres of natural resources of regional importance could potentially be included in the current round of regional parks system planning.

4. Provide educational and technical assistance to local communities.

There is an on-going need, the Task Force concluded, to provide education and technical assistance to local communities in adopting and implementing local policies and ordinances that provide incentives to conserve natural resources. Such education and assistance, the Task Force believes, should build on existing collaborative efforts, such as the partnership between the Metropolitan Council, the State Department of Natural Resources, and local watershed and soil and water conservation districts.

5. Identify funding sources and work to increase funding for protection, restoration and management of natural resource lands.

The Task Force found that another on-going need is identifying and proposing sources of funding to acquire lands supporting regionally significant natural resources from willing sellers, either in fee or as conservation easements; to restore habitat on degraded lands; and to manage these lands. There are a variety of agencies and organizations that can purchase and manage these lands; there is a need to coordinate efforts to identify the most appropriate owners/ managers for each important site.

6. Assist completion of local Natural Resource Inventories.

Still another on-going need, the Task Force found, is to identify and propose funding sources/programs to assist local governments in conducting an inventory and analysis of their own natural resources of local importance.

Local units of government, state agencies, non-profit groups, developers, landowners and associations all need to collaborate in order for the metropolitan area to fully realize this goal in the coming years.

7. Designate a place for natural resources policy and protection implementation in the Metropolitan Council's committee and systems structures.

IV. Recommendations

Building on these conclusions, the Task Force makes the following recommendations to realize Goal 4 of the *2030 Regional Development Framework* (“preserving vital natural areas and resources for future generations) through its corresponding policy (Policy 4): “work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region’s vital natural resources.”

The recommendations cover regional systems planning, priorities, planning for green space and wildlife corridors, advocacy, partnership, collaboration, public participation, guidance to local communities and assistance to local communities. While these recommendations are primarily focused on Metropolitan Council roles and responsibilities, a variety of stakeholders and partners will be crucial to implementing them.

1. Systems Planning: The Task Force recommends that natural resource conservation be integrated into the Metropolitan Council's system policies and plans.

The goals and policies of the *2030 Regional Development Framework* will be implemented by the Metropolitan Council through its system plan and policies and through the local comprehensive planning process. The Natural Resources Task Force did not specifically review the draft updates of the systems plans as part of its work program. However, the Council – in keeping with this recommendation - worked hard to integrate natural resource planning into the plans’ policies and strategies for parks and open space, water resources management and transportation, as well as into its local planning handbook.

The regional parks system is an appropriate and essential mechanism to support the acquisition/preservation of large natural areas of regional importance identified through the Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment. The proposed draft of the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* integrates the Natural Resource Inventory in planning for regional parks by identifying 2,500 to 6,800 acres of regionally significant natural lands that might be incorporated into existing regional parks or designated to create three new regional parks by 2030 and another three later. In addition, the draft parks plan contains policies and strategies to protect natural resource areas of regional importance, and to mitigate nearby land use impacts on regional parks.

The current draft of the revised *Water Resources Management Policy Plan* is under review. The plan includes policies and strategies to address the need for protection of priority lakes as identified in the aquatic-resources data layer of the NRI/A. The system plan calls for increased technical assistance to protect and conserve water resources of regional importance.

The *Transportation Policy Plan* contains specific policies related to environmental issues, including air quality, and preserving and enhancing natural resources. The plan gives special consideration to preservation of regional cultural and natural resources. In response to comments received during the public hearing process in late 2004, the policy plan was revised to add references to the NRI/A and strengthen responses to environmental concerns.

- 2. Capital Investments: Consider the protection of remaining natural resource areas and wildlife corridors of regional importance in making regional capital investment decisions.**

The Task Force recommends that the Metropolitan Council consider the natural resources impact and the opportunity to protect remaining natural lands in making regional capital investment decisions.

- 3. Support for Corridors Initiative: Support the implementation of Metro Conservation Corridors, a regional partnership effort that has identified and mapped potential conservation corridors.**

The Task Force recommends that the Metropolitan Council support the conservation corridors map created by many stakeholders and used by Metro Conservation Corridors to guide implementation of protection and restoration efforts and engage more directly in implementation of the conservation corridors.

- 4. State/Regional Partnership: Strengthen the partnership between the Metropolitan Council and the Department of Natural Resources, including in the areas of community outreach, technical assistance and materials development.**

The Metro Council/DNR partnership produced the initial Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment, and the region could benefit from continuing partnership efforts to enhance and refine the data layers and in assisting local governments with conservation efforts.

- 5. Focus of Responsibility: Clarify natural resources responsibility within the Metropolitan Council.**

The Task Force recommends that the Metropolitan Council designate or increase, within budget constraints, natural resource staff and clarify their authority. The Metropolitan Council should expand the charge of an existing Metropolitan Council committee to include Goal 4 and Policy 4 implementation or create a new standing committee to oversee this implementation.

- 6. Collaboration: Continue existing collaborative efforts, which benefit the region by communicating regional priorities, optimizing government and nonprofit partnership efforts, and coordinating legislative and fund-raising efforts.**

These efforts include the Regional Greenways Collaborative, Embrace Open Space, Metro Wildlife Corridors, and coordination and partnerships with adjacent counties. Natural resources and mapped wildlife corridors extend beyond the Metropolitan Council's seven-county jurisdiction. Regional partnership efforts can communicate these priorities through the Metro Greenways program. These efforts can encourage effective partnerships, share resource and technical information, and improve coordination and conservation efforts.

- 7. Public Participation: Continue at the regional level to seek public input on natural resource issues, and continue to include natural resource questions in the Metropolitan Council's annual survey.**

The Metropolitan Council plays a valuable role in data collection and analysis through its park-visitor surveys and the annual Metro Residents Survey of the general population. Park

visitor surveys help gauge the quality of regional parks and are critical in the effort to determine where new regional parks and trails may be needed in the future.

The Metro Resident Survey allows for tracking the general public sentiment on a variety of important issues, including natural resources management and preservation. For example, the 2001 Metro Residents Survey showed that 93% of the public agreed (73% strongly agreed) that as areas develop, government should do more to protect natural features such as wetlands, woodlands, lakes and streams. Having a comprehensive plan for protecting the region's environmental resources was important to 98% of residents surveyed. Protecting natural features had the highest support for any measure related to accommodating growth.

8. Guidance to Local Communities: Continue to include strong natural resource protection guidance at the regional level through the Metropolitan Council's technical assistance resources for community planning.

Those resources include the Council's local planning assistance handbook, which provides guidance for communities in preparing their comprehensive plan updates. Additional technical assistance could address the types and functions of open space, benefits of land protection, and tools for "green infrastructure" planning, protection, implementation and management. Additional information includes maps and associated data from the NRI/A and parcel specific technical assistance.

The *2030 Regional Development Framework* encourages communities to address protection of natural areas of regional importance in their comprehensive plan or plan update. The Task Force recommends that such integration can be realized by:

- Including a natural resource chapter or component in a community comprehensive plan update; completion or inclusion of a local natural resource inventory and assessment using the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System; proposing a budget for natural resource management and protection, and/or developing or tracking local benchmarks for natural resource protection.
- Integrating the local natural resource inventory and assessment or natural resource elements of the comprehensive plan into the land use element of the plan, and adopting strategies or plans that promote the integration of land use, water and natural resource goals, objectives and strategies.
- Improving coordination of comprehensive planning, natural resource planning, and water planning at the community level and strengthening such coordination with watershed organizations and other local governments and jurisdictions.
- Promoting the use of agricultural preserves in areas planned and zoned to maintain agriculture as the primary long-term land use.

9. Assistance to Local Communities: Include in the Metropolitan Council's local assistance to communities more outreach and direct assistance, including promoting innovative, multi-jurisdictional efforts to conduct natural resource-based land use planning and implementation.

The Council should provide technical assistance in coordination with the Department of Natural Resources to local units, environmental consultants, developers and realtors. This

should be offered as workshops early in the 2008 comprehensive planning process. Specific topics of interest include:

- Low-impact development and development using conservation-oriented design.
- Natural resource protection ordinances.
- Natural resource management plans.
- Natural resource conservation facilitated by development.
- Technical application of the regional Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment.
- Details about the plant communities, plants and animals that comprise important natural resources in the metropolitan area, and information about protection and management needs.
- Agricultural land preservation techniques such as metropolitan preserves and methods for the transfer or purchase of development rights.

10. Regional Green Space Benchmarks: Work on a voluntary basis through the Metropolitan Council, together with interested stakeholders, to develop, monitor and report on regional natural resource benchmarks and indicators.

These efforts should set specific goals and record progress with biennial benchmarks. Where practical, these benchmarks should be recorded and tracked spatially using Geographic Information System technology. These benchmarks should be developed using a shared methodology for evaluating and reporting this information in collaboration with other resource professionals. Examples include:

- Acres Protected: The number of acres and the percentage of natural resources of regional importance that are permanently protected.
- Acres Converted: The number of acres converted from open space to agricultural/silviculture to development.
- Acres Restored: The number of acres of natural resources restored in natural corridors of regional importance.
- Land Cover Inventory Completion: Identification of communities with natural areas of regional importance that have completed and updated a land cover inventory using the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System at a high resolution level, as well as an assessment and prioritization to be integrated into a new comprehensive plan in 2008.
- Communication and Outreach: Number of individuals seeking technical assistance or participating in outreach sessions/technical workshops;
- Conservation Developments: Number of completed developments incorporating low-impact design or conservation-oriented design.

11. Funding: Provide incentives for protection and restoration of natural resources through Livable Communities grants, and other grant programs. Identify and encourage the use of innovative and creative funding tools for planning and implementation efforts.

12. Support for Innovative Partnerships: Support innovative public/private partnerships to fund natural resource protection.

The Task Force recommends support for the strategy outlined in the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* to pursue alternative land acquisition funds.

The Metropolitan Council and Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission – in consultation with regional park implementing agencies, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association and nonprofit organizations devoted to acquiring and protecting land for natural resource-based recreation and environmental education – will evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of creating a park/trail land acquisition reserve fund financed with State revenues and matched with funds from other public sources.

These entities will also evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of establishing a park/trail land acquisition fund endowment composed of private donations managed by a private nonprofit organization, and will look at other alternative funding sources and mechanisms. The endowment could provide private sector funds as match to public-sector funds to acquire parks and trails and/or provide up-front financing to acquire land until public-sector funds are appropriated.

V. How This Report Will Be Used by the Metropolitan Council and Stakeholders

The Natural Resources Task Force report and recommendations will be used in several ways within the timeline specified:

- The Task Force will report its findings and recommendations to the Community Development Committee of the Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan Council. (April - May, 2005)
- The report, preliminary recommendations and underlying natural resource data layers have informed and, where appropriate, been integrated into the 2005 draft of the revised *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*. (Spring 2005)
- The Task Force recommendations and natural resource data layers will inform the Council's water resources planning. The 2005 draft of the Council's revised *Water Resources Management Policy Plan* reflects the *Development Framework's* benchmark of protecting water resources so that the quality of the water leaving the region is as good as the quality of water entering the region. (Spring 2005)
- The data layer of the NRI/A showing aquatic resources has been used to identify priority lakes in the region. The list of priority lakes is included in the draft *Water Resources Management Policy Plan*, cited above.
- Priority lakes represent the most valuable lakes in the region. Since 1982, the Council has paid close attention to these lakes because they have high recreational value, have the best water quality or are part of the water supply system for the city of St. Paul. The Council focuses its limited resources – staff technical assistance or funding if grants are available – on the priority lakes. The priority lake designation is important in the Council's review of development projects as well. For example, as part of the environmental review process, the

Council asks the developer to prepare a nutrient budget analysis to determine what impact, if any, the development will have on a priority lake.

- Resources and recommendations will be incorporated, where appropriate, into the Council's planning assistance handbook to guide communities as they begin the 2008 round of comprehensive plan updates. (Summer 2005)
- The report has identified areas where Metropolitan Council staff should offer technical assistance to local communities and other interested parties, and has identified areas to be pursued for future opportunities. (Fall 2005 - Fall 2007)
- The Task Force has proposed potential funding sources, such as watershed districts and federal grant opportunities. The report stresses the need for natural resource coordination efforts at the Council to increase technical assistance and accountability in regional planning efforts.
- The Task Force recommendations will help in developing new benchmarks and monitoring measures to increase regional accountability for natural resource protection. (annual or biennial process)

VI. Stakeholder Roles

Regional Parks

Legislation governing the regional parks system is extensive:

- In 1974, the Legislature enacted the Metropolitan Parks Act, which states that "...the pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large recreational open space areas in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased." (Minn. Statutes 473.302)
- "The [regional recreation open space] policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.... The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and development." (Minn. Statutes 473.147, Subd. 1)
- "*Regional recreation open space* means land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities." (Minn. Statutes 473.121 Subd. 14)
- "The Metropolitan Council with the advice of the [Metropolitan Parks and Open Space] commission may make grants, from any funds available to it for recreation open space purposes, to any municipality, park district or county located wholly or partially within the metropolitan area to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring or developing regional recreation open space in accordance with the policy plan; and all such agencies may enter into contracts for this purpose or rights or interests therein. The cost of acquisition

shall include any payments required for relocation pursuant to sections 117.50 to 117.56." (Minn. Statutes 473.315)

Thus, according to statute, the Metropolitan Council is authorized to:

1. Identify lands to be acquired and managed by regional park implementing agencies, which together with state lands, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area. Some of these lands may contain regionally important natural resource features. Examples include amending existing park reserve boundaries to include adjacent natural resource lands, and designating new park reserves or regional parks that may contain natural resource lands that provide for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation not provided for by the State of Minnesota. (Minn. Statutes 473.147)
2. Establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds to acquire and develop regional recreation open space. (Minn. Statutes 473.147)
3. Grant funds available to the Council to regional park implementing agencies to acquire and develop regional recreation open space that is consistent with the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*. (Minn. Statutes 473.315).

Local Governments

The 2030 Regional Development Framework offers the following community strategies for natural resource protection and preservation:

- Complete a local Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment.
- Integrate the Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment into local planning decisions.
- Adopt and enforce erosion control ordinances, environmental preservation and conservation techniques.
- Include natural resources of high quality in local parks planning.
- Approve and permit projects that reclaim contaminated lands and restore natural resources.
- Adopt conservation subdivision ordinances, cluster development ordinances or environmental protection provisions in land use ordinances.
- Maintain agricultural land uses through at least 2030. Develop and implement strategies for protecting farmland.

Nonprofit Advocacy and Implementation Organizations

Nonprofit and other advocacy organizations will play a key role in raising public awareness, advocating for preservation efforts, lobbying for increased funding, helping to set regional priorities and implementing strategies. Specifically, these groups can:

- Advocate for increased regional funding and incentives for natural resource conservation efforts.
- Encourage the use of the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System and Assessment by local communities, and provide public recognition accordingly to communities with exceptional efforts.

- Advocate for increased incentives for planning that integrates land use, water and natural resources, prioritizes lands for protection, and engages the public and stakeholders. Provide public recognition to communities with exceptional efforts in this regard, such as the Dakota Farmland and Natural Area Program.
- Advocate for the protection of natural areas of regional importance and conservation-oriented development design.
- Advocate for matching funds and public recognition of exceptional efforts, and for the integration of conservation design into the Livable Communities grant program.
- Work with willing landowners, committed citizens and supportive communities to get some of the remaining natural lands restored, managed and / or protected as parks and open spaces.

Other Stakeholders

The private development community can encourage the use of conservation subdivision techniques. Developers can provide models and examples of good development techniques from which other communities can learn. These examples could include the long-term financial and environment benefits of cluster development techniques.

Additionally, the private development community can identify and prioritize natural resources areas of high quality, as well as endorse flexible and innovative land use regulation techniques that allow better development of sensitive areas. Developers and community associations can encourage the use of conservation easements and expanded restrictive covenants, where appropriate, in order to preserve sensitive natural resource areas. In rural and agricultural areas, developers can encourage communities to plan longer term for expected development with rural reserve areas.

Watershed management authorities can identify and prioritize natural resource areas of high quality, as well as advocate for flexible and innovative land-use regulation techniques that allow low-impact development of sensitive areas. Authorities can, and often do, act as the regulatory agency for all development that may impact water resources. Districts are required to develop plans that provide for integrated water resource management (WRMPs). Districts are required to develop such plans to provide for integrated water resource management for their entire watershed and require the municipalities within their watershed to develop their own ordinances that are in keeping with the tenets of the WRMP. These districts are the only type of government body in Minnesota that has levy authority solely for the conservation of the state's surface water resources.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources offers a wide range of tools and resources that can help implement natural resource preservation (see "Resources" below).

VII. Resources

Resources Available from the DNR: Technical Assistance and Grants

- The Community Assistance program, Regional Plant Ecologist, and Non-game Specialist are available to provide technical assistance, resources, and referrals to other experts on natural resource management and protection.

- Metro Greenways will continue to fund acquisition and restoration projects as funds are available.
- Natural and Scenic, Conservation Partners, Environmental Partners, State Wildlife Fund, Remediation Fund grants available for land acquisition, education, restoration and stewardship.
- Planning grants to fund community natural resource inventory, assessment and planning efforts are currently unfunded, but may be funded in the future.
- The Department of Natural Resources Trails and Waterways, Ecological Services, Fish and Wildlife and Forestry divisions will consider additions to existing units and acquisitions of other priority areas that meet division goals.
- The environmental review process addresses issues related to development.
- Regional Hydrologists provide community outreach for water and shoreline protection.
- Enforcement of shoreline rules, wetland laws, and endangered species laws will protect some lands.

Hard Copy and Web-Based Resources and Tools

- Cover page with links to Metro Greenways Program, Metro Wildlife Corridors Program, Regionally Significant Ecological Areas, Financial Assistance Directory, natural resource guidance checklists for local governments, and Minnesota Land Cover Classification Program: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/greenways/index.html>
- *Guide to Using Natural Resource Information in Local Decision-Making*. Available free on compact disk (CD) from the DNR. Includes how to do natural resource inventories and assessments, links to many ordinances, case studies, data sources, and other useful information. Soon to be on the DNR web site. A shorter version is available as a free brochure from the DNR.
- Case studies highlighting communities that have used ecological information to plan for and protect their natural heritage. Links to all of them on the following Web page: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecological_services/
- *Natural Areas: Protecting a Vital Community Asset; A Sourcebook for Minnesota Local Governments and Citizens*. 148 page book available free from DNR: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecological_services/pubs_landuse.html
- *Land Protection Options: A Handbook for Minnesota Landowners*. 81 page booklet available free from DNR, or on the internet: <http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/landprot.pdf>
- Natural resource data in GIS format: <http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us/>
- Northland NEMO program (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials): http://nemo.uconn.edu/national/stateprograms/mn_wi.htm

VIII. Glossary

Aquatic resource assessment:

The aquatic resource assessment is an assessment of selected physical, biological, and cultural indicators for surface water resources in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (TCMA). This assessment was conducted using GIS and the best available data. The results from this assessment are relative rankings of the regional importance of the region's surface water resources for various purposes (i.e. water supply, recreation, ecological). This assessment is not intended as a position for any particular management strategy of the region's aquatic resources, but rather it is intended to provide information for planning purposes. The decision of how the water bodies in each of these categories should be managed or protected is a policy decision that involves social, economic, as well as scientific information.

Embrace Open Space:

Embrace Open Space is a multimedia campaign created by a group of nonprofit organizations to protect open space in the Twin Cities region. The Embrace Open Space campaign uses advertising, special events, awards, publications, and a website to help citizens understand the issue, what it means to them, and how to get involved.

Web address: <http://www.mcknight.org/openspace/index.aspx>

Metro Wildlife Corridors:

A strategy for accelerating and enhancing habitat protection by targeting limited funds toward high-priority focus areas and better coordinating the efforts of conservation organizations. More information is available at:

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/metrowildlifecorridors/q_a.html

Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS):

The Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) is a method of GIS land cover mapping that describes what is on the ground based on the type of vegetation (or lack of it) and the amount of impervious surface (such as pavement and buildings). MLCCS was developed specifically for Minnesota, and classifies urban, suburban, agricultural areas, and vegetated areas. The MLCCS can help communities identify lands and natural corridors to conserve; model impacts of impervious areas on water resources; develop natural resource management plans; model ecological quality of natural resources; and track land cover change.

Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment NRI/A:

- **The Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)** is a compilation of information describing the location and character of natural resources in the region.
- **The Natural Resource Assessment (NRA)** is an evaluation that ranks and prioritizes areas for open space protection, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, resource production and community character based on the NRI.

Natural resources of regional importance:

Natural resources of regional importance are natural areas identified by the June 2002 NRI/A and adopted by the Metropolitan Council in its *2030 Regional Framework*.

Regional Greenways Collaborative:

The Regional Greenways Collaborative is an alliance of governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals dedicated to protecting, restoring, connecting and managing a

green network comprised of significant ecological areas, important open spaces, recreational areas and working lands within the 13 counties of the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area.

System plans:

System plans are long-range comprehensive plans for the regional systems-transportation, airports, wastewater services, and parks and open space.

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