



# 2050 VISION PLAN

DAKOTA COUNTY PARKS, GREENWAYS, AND NATURAL SYSTEMS

*Nature Protected, Community Reflected, All Are Connected*

ADOPTED BY THE DAKOTA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

JULY 29, 2025





## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Dakota County Residents and Park Visitors,

It is with great enthusiasm that I share the 2050 Vision Plan for Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems. As the Director of Dakota County Parks, I have the privilege of witnessing firsthand the transformative power of parks, trails, and natural lands when they become interwoven with the life of our communities. This plan represents a bold step forward in ensuring that our cherished green spaces and our connections to them remain vibrant and relevant for generations to come.



Dakota County is home to some of Minnesota's most treasured natural landscapes. The scenic and meandering greenways that connect communities, our beautiful rivers and lakes, the signature outdoor recreation opportunities at each park and park reserve, the prairies and woodlands being restored and maintained throughout the system, and the ecological impacts of dozens of conservation areas, root our system in service to all. These cherished places are where families gather, individuals find peace, and communities thrive. It is critical that, as our residents and visitors evolve and the needs of our environment change, we take a proactive approach to protect and enhance these resources.

The 2050 Vision Plan is more than just a road map; it is a promise to you—a commitment to stewardship, belonging, sustainability, innovation, and fun! It has been carefully crafted with input from community members, stakeholders, staff and volunteers, and experts who share a deep passion for our parks, greenways, and natural lands. Together, we have envisioned a system that not only meets the needs of today but anticipates the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

This vision is ambitious, but it is also achievable. It will require collaboration, creativity, and a shared commitment from all of us. Over the coming months and years, you will see these ideas come to life. Your input and support will continue to be invaluable as we move forward together.

I want to thank each of you who contributed your ideas, shared your experiences, and voiced your hopes for the future. Your passion and dedication are the foundation of this plan. As we embark on this journey, I invite all Dakota County residents and visitors to take an active role in shaping our parks. Whether you're attending public meetings, participating in volunteer programs, or simply exploring and enjoying our outdoor recreation spaces, your involvement makes a difference.

Our parks are more than just places—they are reflections of who we are and what we value. They remind us of the importance of preserving and connecting with the natural world, fostering community, and creating opportunities for health and happiness. Together, we can continue to create a park system that inspires pride and serves as a model for communities across the nation.

On behalf of Dakota County elected and appointed officials and the amazing staff team from multiple departments that have contributed to the vision plan, I thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm. I look forward to working with all of you as we bring this vision to life and ensure that Dakota County remains a vibrant, thriving place for all.

With Gratitude and Optimism,

Niki Geisler

*Director of Parks*

*Dakota County, Minnesota*



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# INTRODUCTION

During its over 60-year history, the Dakota County Parks System has played a pivotal role in protecting and stewarding lands, enhancing environmental quality, developing and caring for recreational facilities, and serving residents and visitors through access to the outdoors and nature-based education and recreation. Community members routinely share that the work of Dakota County Parks is fundamental to their quality of life. The system operates in a diverse and dynamic environment, serving a wide range of stakeholders with varying interests. The lands and services of Dakota County Parks are emblems of community desirability as a place where people thrive, a healthy environment, a robust atmosphere for business and jobs, and excellence in public service. Dakota County parks are a reflection of the County's overall strategic plan goals.

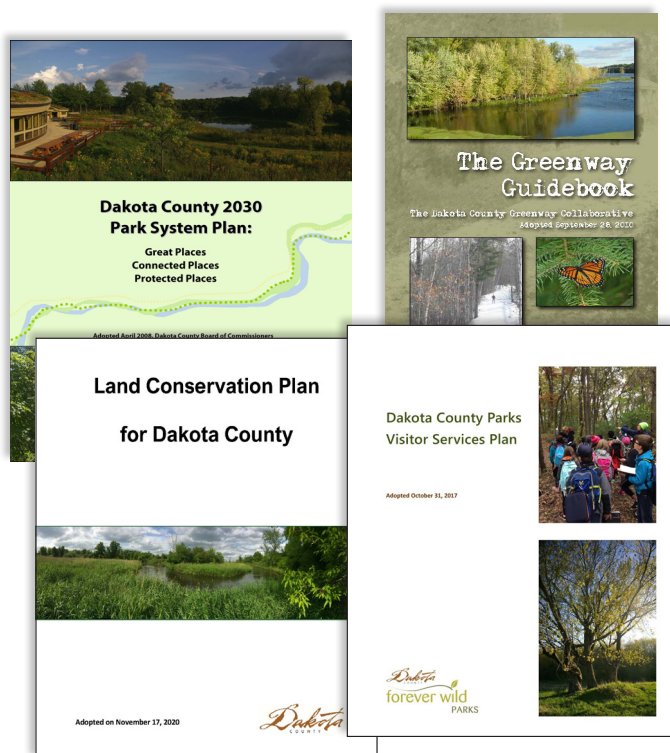
This expansive scope is no accident. From the start of the County parks system in 1960, Dakota County recognized the importance of knitting together sensitive landscapes into a tapestry of protected lands that strengthen an ecological footing, provide recreation, and protect the inherent qualities that make life in Dakota County special. Linking conservation and natural areas with parks, greenways, and partner agency lands has grown into a powerful recipe for environmental impact, recreational value, and quality of life.

Dakota County is one of 10 regional park implementing agencies across the Twin Cities metropolitan area. As a result, the County derives some of its park and conservation funding through the State and Metropolitan Council. In return, Dakota County protects, develops,

and programs its designated "regional" facilities according to certain parameters established for regional facilities.

The previous iteration of this plan, the 2008 Park System Plan and other foundational plans, including the Greenway Guidebook, Land Conservation Plan, Natural Resources Management Plan, and Visitor Services Plan, form the basis for the 2050 Vision Plan. They are rooted in deep and visionary work that continues to guide and shape the physical system of parks, greenways, and natural areas as well as their operation and programming.

This plan looks to the next 25 years, suggesting how community values continue to shape an evolving vision for Dakota County's parks, greenways, and natural systems.





**Across its over 60-year history, the Dakota County Parks System has played a pivotal role in stewarding lands and serving residents and visitors through access to the outdoors and nature-based recreation.**

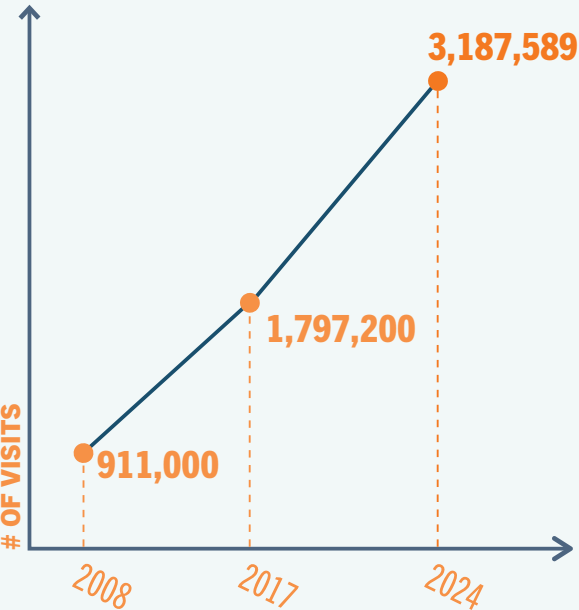
## VISITORSHIP

Since their inception, Dakota County Parks have become an integral part of County life. Park visitation has increased significantly in the last decade.

- Parks welcomed 3,187,589 visits in 2024.
- Participation in events increased by 3,000 people from 2019 to 2023.
- From 2008 to 2022, park and greenway visits increased 220.5 percent.

### FROM 2008-2024, PARK VISITATION INCREASED 250 PERCENT.

Exhibit 1.1, Park Visitation 2008-2024



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community members show their appreciation for the parks. Since 2017, the number of volunteers and volunteer hours have significantly increased.

- **2019** volunteer hours increased by 2,000 hours from previous years to 6,000 hours.
- **2020-2022** The number of volunteer hours dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, 605 volunteers assisted with native plant seed collection, growing and planting, surveyed wildlife, and served as landscape stewards.
- **2023-2024** Volunteer hours rebounded to 5,328 by 2023. Volunteers and restoration crews teamed to plant 1,500 linear feet of shoreline.

## RESOURCES

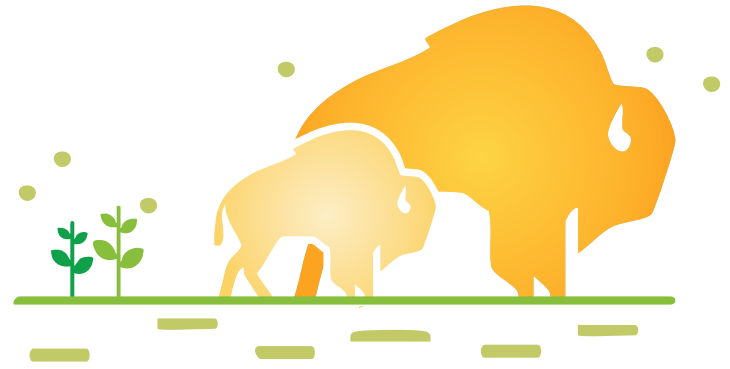
Dakota County currently maintains 6,280 acres of parkland and 48 miles of greenway.

Other resources include:

- **270 acres** of Park Conservation Areas.
- **over 11,000 acres of farmland and natural areas** protected on private property, including 96 miles of shoreline buffers.

# THE PARK SYSTEM TODAY

The previous version of the Park System Plan completed in 2008, established a theme and organizational structure around “Great Places”, “Connected Places”, and “Protected Places”. While the 2050 Vision Plan moves beyond these themes, they remain a great organizational tool for describing Dakota County’s impressive system of lands, facilities, programs, and services.

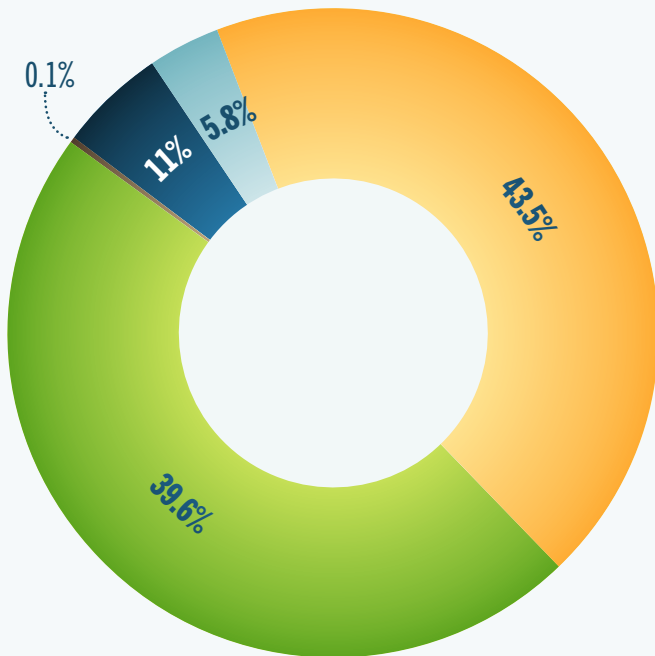


## ACRES RESTORED AND MANAGED

TO DATE (2024)

- RESTORED
- RESTORATION IN PROGRESS
- MANAGE HIGHLY INVASIVE SPECIES
- STABILIZED
- YET TO BE RESTORED

\*\*Includes all Dakota County Park PCA’s, and Greenways (5,508 acres)



**Restored:** Plant communities that are managed so that the existing, or dormant native plants can recover to a former biotic community.

**Managed:** Plant communities that are intentionally managed to control non-native species.

**Stabilized:** Maintenance that targets invasive and exotic plant species for control so they do not expand further than they were at a given time.

**Yet to be restored:** Plant communities that are not currently restored.

## GREAT PLACES:

In 2025, the Dakota County park system includes three regional parks, two regional park reserves, one county park, one dog park, eight greenways, nine county park conservation areas, and 126 conservation easements.

- **Land**
  - 6,280 acres of parkland.
  - 9 county park conservation areas, totaling 270 acres that have been added since 2016.
- **Improvements that provide four seasons of recreation**
  - 34 buildings totaling roughly 80,000 sf.
  - 176 campsites.
    - Lebanon Hills (93 sites)
    - Lake Byllesby (83 sites)
  - Five camper cabins (Whitetail Woods).
  - Six playgrounds / nature play areas.
  - Two swimming beaches.
  - One dog park.
  - One community garden.
- **Unique experiences**
  - Camper cabins at Whitetail Woods Regional Park.
  - Reintroduced bison herd to the prairie at Spring Lake Park Reserve.
  - Mountain bike trails at Lebanon Hills.
  - Archery range at Spring Lake Park.

Exhibit 1.2, Acres Restored and Managed



## CONNECTED PLACES:

The park system currently includes eight multi-purpose regional greenways, totaling roughly 25 percent of the 200-mile vision for greenways expressed in the 2030 plan and carried forward in this 2050 vision. Greenway usage now constitutes nearly 50 percent of the total park system visitation. Accomplishments include:

- Completed 57 miles of greenway trails.
- Established more than 20 active collaborations with city, state, and federal agencies to construct greenways.
- Constructed tunnels and bridges across major roadways for user enjoyment and safety including one partnership public art project, a mural in the Garlough Tunnel on the River to River Greenway.
- Developed Greenway Natural Resource Management Plans (NRMPs) for four corridors.
- Adopted interpretive plans and strategies for greenways.
- Improved habitat within greenways including 62 acres of native vegetation restoration and 84 acres of stabilization.

### **DEFINITION**

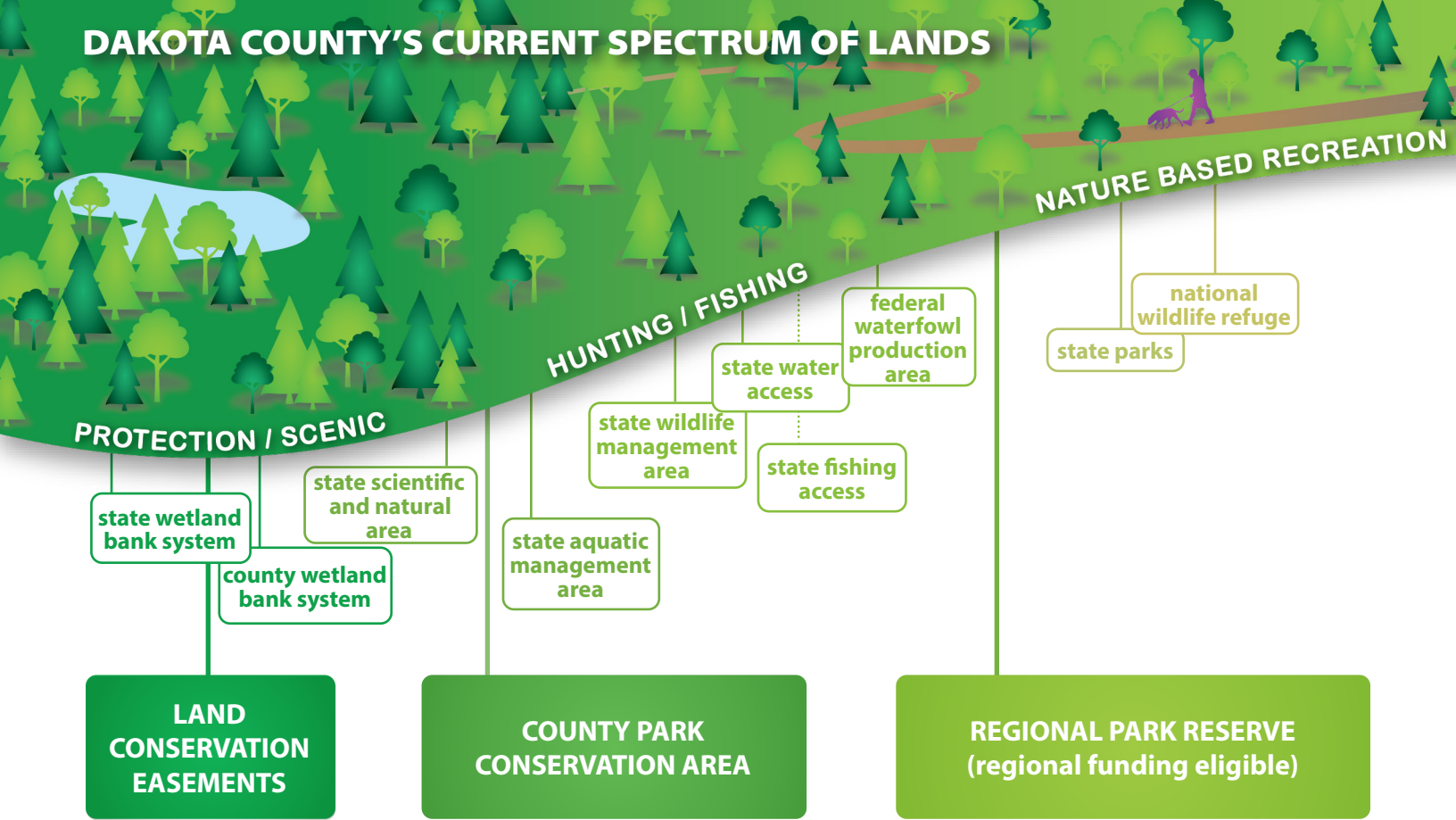
**Greenways** are linear parks that perform multiple functions and provide community benefits in the areas of water quality, habitat, recreation, and nonmotorized transportation.

## PROTECTED PLACES:

In addition to parks, greenways, and conservation areas, the County has worked with numerous public agencies and private landowners to protect and improve other important areas. Accomplishments include:

- Partnered with cities and the Minnesota DNR to protect 2,264 acres of high ecological value.
- Partnered with the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization and Trout Unlimited on trout stream protection and enhancement projects.
- Acquired 71 agricultural easements totaling 7,812 acres, including 1,391 acres of habitat.
- Acquired 55 natural area easements totaling 2,002 acres of habitat.
- Protected more than 96 miles of shoreland through conservation easements.
- Made improvements within parks, greenways and conservation areas, including:
  - Restored 1,434 acres of vegetation from 2017-2023.
  - Improved habitat for rare species such as Blanding's Turtles and butternut in 35 habitat restoration projects.
  - Controlled highly invasive plant species, such as buckthorn and honeysuckle on 324 acres in 2023.

# DAKOTA COUNTY'S CURRENT SPECTRUM OF LANDS



state wetland bank system

county wetland bank system

state scientific and natural area

state aquatic management area

state wildlife management area

state water access

state fishing access

federal waterfowl production area

state parks

national wildlife refuge

**LAND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

Conservation easements primarily provide protection of natural and open space on private lands. The easements protect waterways and provide scenic natural areas across the county. Limited public access or recreation may be permitted depending on the specific agreement.

**COUNTY PARK CONSERVATION AREA**

Park Conservation Areas reserve areas of natural quality such as watercourses, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, areas of high-quality habitat or rare species, and areas of high potential for restoration to high-quality habitat for environmental benefit and natural resource-based recreation. Currently, County Park Conservation Areas must have a provision for public park purposes and related outdoor recreation purposes.

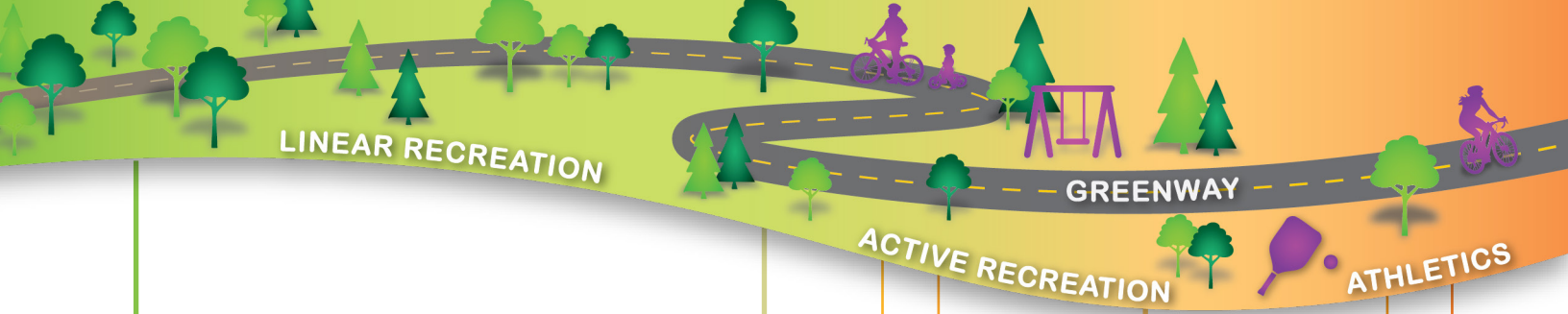
**REGIONAL PARK RESERVE (regional funding eligible)**

Park Reserves protect significant natural resources while providing nature-oriented outdoor recreation, such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, swimming, picnicking, hiking, boating, camping, and trail uses. 80% of the Reserve must be managed as natural lands, ensuring that the majority of the area remains in a natural state.



**Dakota County includes the full spectrum of recreational lands and conservation areas**

Exhibit 1.3, Dakota County's Spectrum of Lands



LINEAR RECREATION

GREENWAY

ACTIVE RECREATION

ATHLETICS

state trails

state water trails

local parks

local trails

**REGIONAL PARK**  
(regional funding eligible)

*Regional parks provide nature-oriented outdoor recreation opportunities such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses. The parks and trails offer places for gathering and solitary enjoyment, while also protecting green space and wildlife habitat.*

**REGIONAL GREENWAY**  
(regional funding eligible)

*Greenways are linear trail corridors that combine water quality, recreation, habitat, transportation, and interpretation. Recreation is primarily oriented around shared-use paths with pedestrians, bicyclists, and other trail-oriented activities.*

**COUNTY PARK**

*County parks include natural areas for recreation, such as walking, viewing, sitting, off-leash dog areas, and picnicking, but also have more active recreation features.*

***Dakota County is a primary provider of nature-based recreation in the County***

# DAKOTA COUNTY ROLE AMONG AGENCY LANDS

As Exhibit 1.3 illustrates, Dakota County operates alongside and often in partnership with local, state, and federal agencies and private landowners to protect important lands and thoughtfully provide public access to the outdoors. Understanding the context of land protection and recreation helps Dakota County focus their efforts in areas not duplicated by others, so collectively, the greatest value is achieved.

From land conservation to specialized park spaces, Dakota County provides an impressive spectrum of natural resource stewardship and nature-based recreation and education. Dakota County occupies a unique role as the primary provider in the County of nature-based recreation and education. Dakota County, however, does not operate in a vacuum, there are many non-county land protection and recreation providers.

## FEDERALLY MANAGED LAND

- **Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge:** Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the purpose of conserving wildlife and offering connection, education opportunities, and recreational experiences.
- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area:** Managed by the National Park Service in partnership with state and local governments to protect the natural and cultural history of the river and to provide assistance and visitor services.
- **Waterfowl Production Area:** Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect important wildlife habitat.

## STATE-MANAGED LAND

### *Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)*

- **Aquatic Management Areas (AMA):** Publicly accessible waters managed to provide angler/habitat management, and education/research.
- **Fishing Access Sites:** Cooperation with local units of government to install and maintain accessible fishing piers and shore fishing sites.
- **Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA):** Lands

that create a spectrum of representative high-quality natural communities that are part of a national network of ecological areas for research, education, and maintenance of biological diversity, protected against human-caused environment disruptions. Public access is allowed and recreational opportunities are primarily for hunters and trappers.

- **State Parks:** Land for the preservation of natural and cultural areas and nature-based recreational opportunities.
- **State Trails:** Public trails offering a variety of activities such as biking, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and winter recreation.
- **State Water Trails:** Boating routes on lakes and rivers for canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding.
- **Water Access Sites:** Cooperation with local governments to install and maintain public boat launches and carry-in water access sites.
- **Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):** Lands and waters that have high potential for wildlife production, public hunting, fishing, trapping, and other compatible recreation.

### *Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources*

- **State Wetland Bank Easements:** Conservation easements fulfilling wetland bank and some project-specific wetland replacement requirements.

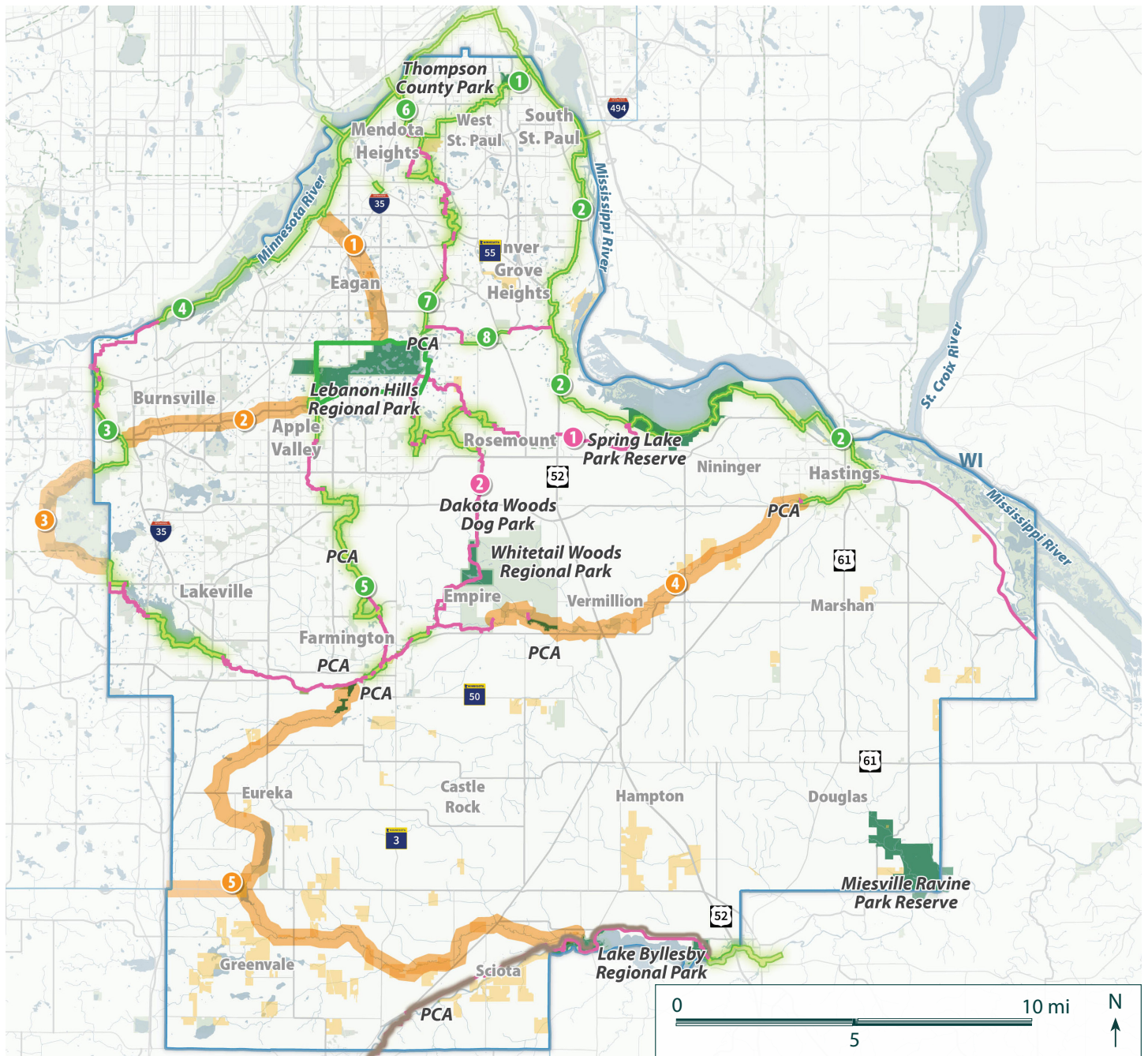
### *Vermillion Watershed River Joint Powers Organization Watershed*

- **Wetland Bank Easements:** Conservation easements fulfilling wetland bank credits used to offset authorized wetland impacts and standards for projects within the Vermillion River Watershed.

## Locally Managed Land

- **City Parks:** Local parks that serve a broad range of active recreational needs at the neighborhood, community, and regional scales plus many park areas devoted to natural settings.
- **Private Institutional:** Corporate and individual ownership that may provide some level of public recreational use.

**Map 1.1, Existing Parks, Greenways, and Conservation Easements**



**LEGEND**

- Reserves, Regional Parks, and County Park
- PCA** Park Conservation Areas (PCA)
- Conservation Easements
- Non-County Public Lands
- Non-County Trails
- Planned Regional Greenways
  - Rosemount Greenway
  - Vermillion Highlands Greenway

- Existing Regional Greenways
  - River to River
  - Mississippi River
  - Lake Marion
  - Minnesota River
  - North Creek
  - Big Rivers Regional Trail
  - Lebanon Hills
  - Veterans Memorial Greenway
- Greenway Linking Route

- Regional Greenway and Trail Search Corridors
  - Lebanon Hills - Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
  - Lebanon Hills - Lake Marion Regional Trail
  - Lake Marion - Big Woods Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
  - Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail
  - Elko New Market Blakely-Dayle Kennefick Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
- Mill Towns State Trail

There are many non-state and non-county, publicly accessible open spaces with trails and other nature-based outdoor recreational opportunities which play an important role in offering nature access to residents and visitors. Representative examples of places and facilities below contain natural areas and nature based recreation.

### Apple Valley

- **Alimagnet Park:** Grills, canoe launch, disc golf, volleyball court, trail, picnic shelter and tables, playground. Programs include: summer camps, watercraft racks rental (for canoes, kayaks, and sailboards)

### Burnsville

- **East and West Terrace Oaks Park:** Paved and natural trails, picnic area, playground, ski chalet, mountain bike trails, nature play area. Programs include: youth paddle boarding
- **Alimagnet Park:** Dog park, cross-country skiing, hard surface trail, nature trail, playground, nature trail.
- **Rudy Kramer Nature Preserve:** Hard surface trail, natural trail.
- **Kelleher Park:** Natural trail, hard surface trail, boardwalk, playground.

### Eagan

- **Holz Farm:** Events and festivals, self-guided tour, playground, canoe launch, walking path.
- **Walnut Hill Park:** Archery range, walking trail, play fields, playground.
- **Patrick Eagan Park:** Hiking trail, walking path, Eagan Art House, sun shelter, nature playground.
- **Thomas Lake Park:** Walking trails, sun shelter, nature prairie, canoe launch and rack, charcoal grill, fire ring, cross-country ski trail, sand volleyball, fishing dock, pavilion.
- **Trapp Farm Park:** Shelter building with fireplace, pavilion, tubing hill, amphitheater, sand volleyball court, charcoal grill, canoe launch, fishing dock, playground, walking path. Events include: Lakefest fishing clinic with food vendors and

pond life display.

- **Caponi Art Park:** Art installations, performance space, trails.

### Farmington

- **Distad Park and Greenway:** Hard surface trail, picnic tables, playground.
- **Rambling River Park:** Fishing, grills, hard surface trail, picnic shelter and tables, playground.
- **Prairie Waterway Greenway:** Fishing, hard surface trail, picnic shelter and tables.
- **Meadow View Park:** Boardwalk trails, grills, hard surface trail, picnic shelter and tables, playground.
- **Vermillion Grove Park:** Boardwalk trail, climbing boulder, grills, hard surface trail, picnic shelter and tables, playground.
- **Jim Bell Park and Preserve:** Basketball, hard surface trail, picnic tables, playground.
- **Farmington Preserve:** Hard surface trail, picnic shelter and tables, playground, natural trail. Programs include: pond and park cleanup, tree planting.
- **Dakota County Fairgrounds:** Fairgrounds.

### Hastings

- **Lake Rebecca Park:** Boat launch, picnic tables, fishing pier.
- **Vermillion River Linear Park/Vermillion Falls Park/Old Mill Park:** Picnic tables and shelter. Programs include: bike with a ranger partnership with NPS.

### Inver Grove Heights

- **Harmon Park/Salem Hills Park:** Playground, trails, tree nursery.
- **South Valley Park:** Playground, picnic shelter, firepit, performance area, plaza for gatherings. Programs include: nature & science camp, survival camp.

- **Heritage Village Park:** Off-leash dog area, hard surface trail, playground.
- **Swing Bridge Park:** Picnicking, grills, trails, swing bridge overlook.
- **Seidls Lake Park:** Playground, fishing, trails.

## Lakeville

- **West Lake Marion Mountain Bike Trail**
- **Ritter Farm Park:** Dog park, fishing, picnic tables and shelter, trails.
- **Orchard Lake Beach:** Fishing, parking, conservation area, perennial garden, picnic areas, playground, swimming beach.
- **East Community Park:** Baseball/softball, grills, picnic shelters, playground, tennis courts, trails. Programs include nature's classroom series, Nature's detective, bird banding, pollinators, watersheds, kid's nature camps.
- **Valley Lake Park:** fishing, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible lake trail, pollinator gardens, nature play, rain gardens, and conservation area, picnicking, public art.
- **East Community Park:** Biking and walking trails, fishing, picnic tables, grills, shelters, playground.
- **Steve Michaud Park:** Picnic facilities, playground, biking/walking trails.
- **Orchard Lake Park and Conservation Area:** Boat/canoe launch, fishing, picnic facilities, playground.

## Mendota Heights

- **Friendly Marsh Park:** Trails, paved trails.
- **Roger's Lake Park:** Basketball, fishing, picnic shelters, playground skate park, trails, volleyball.
- **Oheyawahe:** Ecological restoration trails, interpretation.
- **Valley Park:** Playground, paved trail, picnic facilities.
- **Dodge Nature Center:** Nature trails, guided programs, nature preschool.

## Rosemount

- **Horseshoe Lake Park:** ADA-accessible, fishing, picnic tables and shelter, playground, trails.
- **Erickson Park:** Picnic shelter, softball, tennis course, trails.
- **Carroll's Woods/Schwarz Pond Park:** Grills, picnic shelter, playground, trails, skate park.

## South St. Paul

- **Kaposia Park:** Picnic shelter, pavilion, playground, volleyball, disc golf, trails.
- **Seidls Lake:** Trails.
- **Wildflower Levee Park:** Picnic tables, trails.

## Sunfish Lake

- **Musser Park:** Trails.

## West St. Paul

- **Marthaler Park:** Bike trail, fishing, picnic shelters, playground, volleyball.
- **Garlough Park:** Trail, picnic shelter, disc golf.
- **Dodge Nature Center:** Nature trails, guided programs, nature preschool.

## Goodhue County

- **Lake Byllesby Park:** Boat launch, fishing pier, picnic shelter, trails, swimming beach, playground.

## Scott County/Three Rivers Park District

- **Murphy Hanerhan Regional Park Reserve:** Mountain bike trail, off-leash dog area, trails, fishing, camping, cross-country skiing.

## Northfield/Carleton College

- **Carleton Arboretum:** Trails.

# DAKOTA COUNTY PARKS TIMELINE

## PARKLAND HISTORY

### The Land Before Parks

Native Americans have lived on the land for thousands of years. Centuries after the first Europeans arrived in the area, Euro-American settlement significantly increased in the 1800s. Starting in 1830 and continuing until 1858, the US government took significant amounts of land from the Dakota people, using treaties to officially transfer land rights. In 1849, the Minnesota Territory and Dakota County were established.

Tensions between the Dakota Nations and the government of Minnesota came to a head during the Dakota-US War of 1862. Congress passed The Dakota Expulsion Act of 1863, evicted Dakota people from their homelands, and the state government sold the remaining Dakota land.

After Euro-American settlement, Dakota County land was primarily converted to agriculture. As the population increased in the Twin Cities, the County developed industrial infrastructure to transport people and goods and supply electricity.

In the 1930s, the Locks and Dams on the Mississippi River controlled the river depth for boats to have easier passage. Flooding caused by Lock and Dam #2 led to 700 landowners losing access to floodplain property through flowage easements purchased by the federal

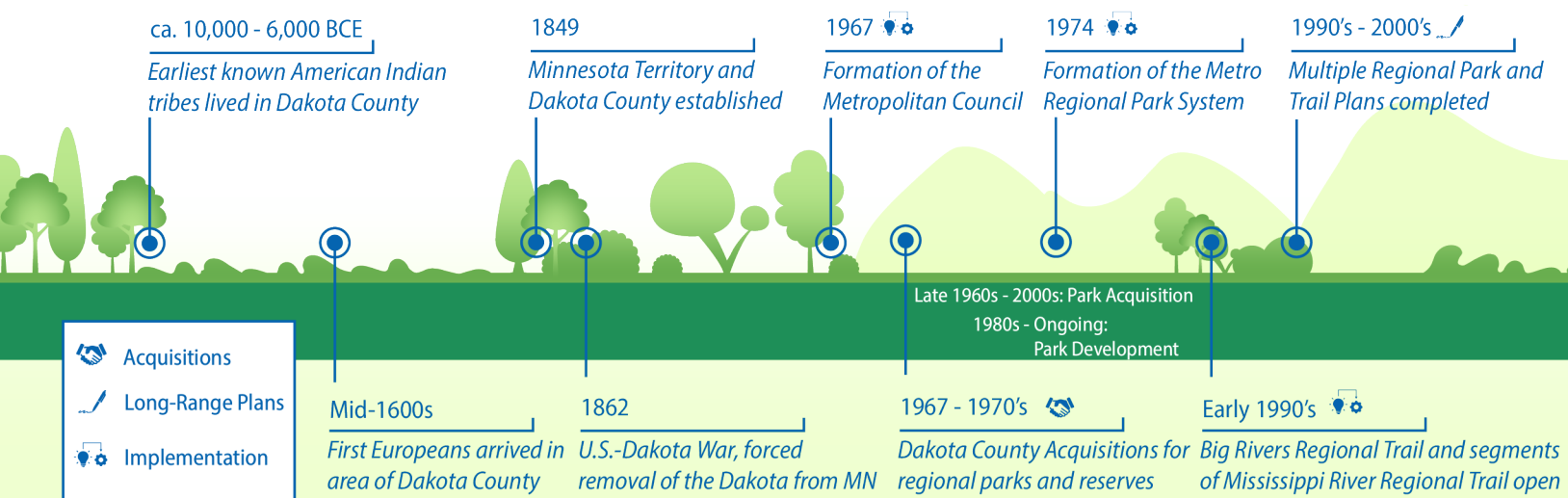
government and the creation of Spring Lake. The US government acquired thousands of acres to create the Gopher Ordinance Works to produce gunpowder for World War II. This land was transferred to the University of Minnesota, and portions of the property will be permanently transferred to the DNR in the future. Today, the U of M, DNR, County, and City of Empire co-manage the 5,000-acre Vermillion Highlands complex which includes Whitetail Woods Regional Park.

In the 1950s and '60s, the primarily agricultural land was transformed into suburbs as America experienced an economic boom and mass production of houses and highways skyrocketed. Most suburban cities in Dakota County became incorporated during the early to mid-1960s.

### Early Park Acquisition

In the mid 1900s, conservationists began advocating for environmental protection from urban sprawl. Dakota County communities required developers to dedicate land for parks as early as the 1950s. The Minnesota Legislature enabled the formation of county park commissions in 1959, which opened opportunities for park funding. In 1960, 30 community representatives met with the Dakota County Planning Commission and formed a parks commission.

In 1967, the State Legislature created the Metropolitan Council and the Parks and Open



Space Commission to advise on planning and financing for park acquisition and development. Regional parks could now be supported by state financial assistance.

In 1970, Dakota County wrote their first Regional Park System Plan, which sought to ensure there would be enough parkland for residents in the 1990s. At the time the plan was written, the County was acquiring parkland for Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Spring Lake Park Reserve, Miesville Ravine Park Reserve, Thompson County Park, and Lake Byllesby Regional Park.

### Land Conservation, Continued Park Acquisition, and Park Development

Dakota County's 2001 Park System Plan set the stage for further park acquisition, and the County created the Dakota Woods Dog Park (2002) and Whitetail Woods Regional Park (2008). The Farmland and Natural Areas Program (which became the Land Conservation Program) began in 2003 and has facilitated the protection of 12,078 acres outside of the County parks and greenways.

Dakota County began constructing park buildings to welcome visitors and support the first park operations in the 1980s including the Lebanon Hills Campground and Schulze Lake Beach. In the 1990s, Lake Byllesby Campground and Camp Spring Lake Retreat Center were added. Then in the early 2000s Thompson Park Center, Schaar's

Bluff Gathering Center, and Lebanon Hills Visitor Center were constructed.

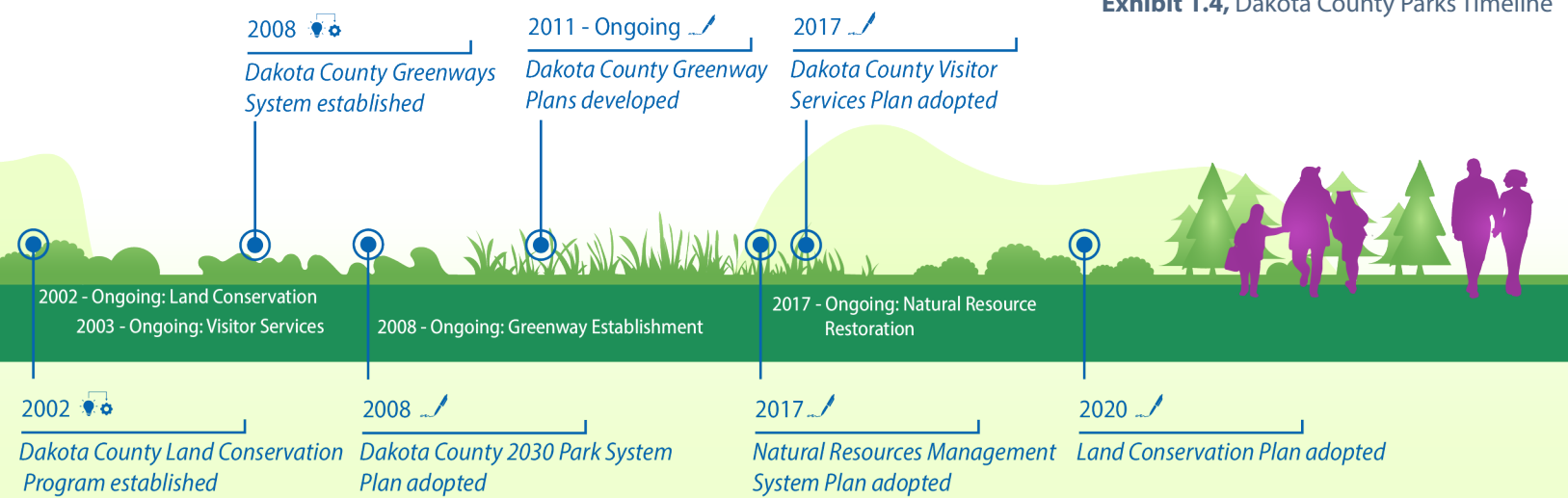
### Great Places, Connected Places, Protected Places

Dakota County's 2008 Park System Plan established a vision to improve, connect, and protect parks. Since 2008, long-range plans for all Dakota County Parks have been updated and facility improvements have been made. The plan led to a more refined focus on Greenways, as well as the growth of the Natural Resources Program.

In 2017, the Parks Visitor Services Plan was adopted, outlining goals for a more responsive visitor service program focused on six service areas: awareness and outreach, outdoor education, events, equipment rentals, volunteerism, and facility rentals. In 2017, the Natural Resource Management System Plan was adopted, followed by development of natural resource management plans for parks and several greenways. In addition, natural resource management plans for private lands with Dakota County held conservation easements, jointly developed by the County and landowners, began being required.

In 2020, the Dakota County Land Conservation Plan was adopted, outlining a county-wide strategy for land conservation on both public and private land, and in 2023, the program moved into the parks department.

Exhibit 1.4, Dakota County Parks Timeline



## TRENDS

# Dakota County Parks are influenced by several national and local trends that help guide the positioning of the 2050 Vision Plan.

By considering these trends, Dakota County Parks can continue to provide valuable recreational and programming opportunities while preserving the natural and cultural resources that define the region.

### Increased Nature-Based Recreation:

In 2021, 164.2 million Americans aged six and over participated in outdoor recreation at least once, marking the highest number on record. This surge reflects **a growing national inclination towards nature-based activities**, leading to higher visitation rates in parks nationwide.

[outdoorindustry.org](https://www.outdoorindustry.org)

### Health and Wellness Focus:

There is a growing recognition of the health benefits associated with outdoor recreation, leading to increased public interest in parks as venues for physical activity and mental rejuvenation. This trend encourages parks to **develop programs and facilities that promote wellness**, such as fitness trails and mindfulness areas.

### Technological Integration:

The integration of technology, such as artificial intelligence and digital platforms, is **transforming park operations and visitor engagement**. These advancements offer opportunities to enhance visitor experiences through interactive guides and efficient resource management.

[nrpa.org](https://www.nrpa.org)

### Economic Contributions of Park Visitors:

In 2023, 325 million park visitors spent an estimated \$26.4 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands across the country, underscoring the **significant economic impact of parks on surrounding communities**.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

### Continued Population Growth:

Dakota County is experiencing ongoing development, influencing land use patterns around park areas. Balancing conservation efforts with urban expansion **requires strategic planning to protect natural habitats while accommodating community growth**.

[farmlandinfo.org](https://www.farmlandinfo.org)

### Climate Change Impacts:

Climate change poses substantial challenges to park ecosystems, including altered weather patterns, increased frequency of extreme events, shifting habitats, and altered wildlife patterns. These **changes can affect biodiversity, water resources, and the ways visitors experience open spaces**, prompting parks to implement adaptive management strategies to mitigate adverse effects.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

### Public Support for Park Funding:

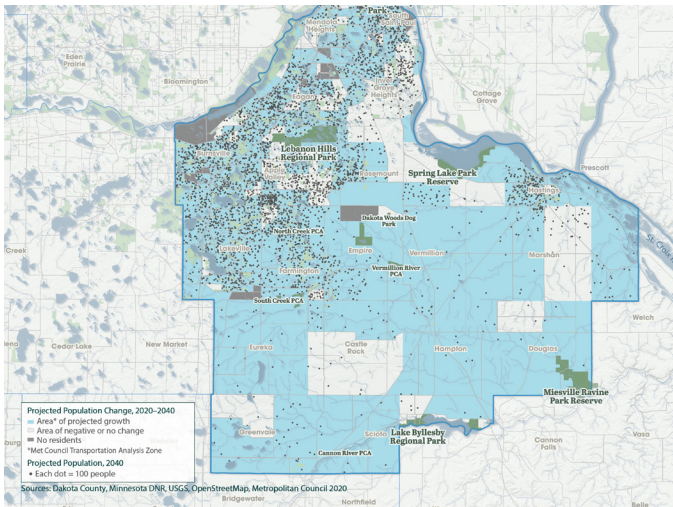
A significant majority of U.S. adults (77%) favor expanding national park field trips, classroom activities, and educational experiences, indicating **strong public support for park-related initiatives**.

[prnewswire.com](https://www.prnewswire.com)

### Financial Constraints and Staffing Challenges:

Despite rising visitation, many parks face financial limitations and staffing shortages. Budget constraints are leading to greater deferred maintenance and strain on services, **impacting the quality of visitor experiences and the preservation of natural resources**.

[wsj.com](https://www.wsj.com)



**Exhibit 1.5, Areas of Projected Population Growth**

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of the Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan, the Dakota County team and their partners conducted in-person and online engagement with the Dakota County community. Engagement was structured to reach multiple perspectives including the spectrum of Dakota County residents, special interests, key stakeholders, elected officials, and County staff.

Engagement was conducted in two rounds. Round one, conducted through the latter half of 2024 was used to understand community interests and values. Input was used to inform initial direction of the Vision Plan, especially, the vision framework, goals, and strategies. Round two was conducted upon release of the draft document in April and May of 2025 and used to gain feedback on its content and recommendations.

Round one engagement included 19 meetings with community groups or pop-up events (i.e., tabling in parks or at existing events) and seven focus groups. Online engagement responses included 65 ideas provided on a vision board in response to a question which asked what people would like to see in the future of Dakota County parks, greenways and natural systems, 423 survey responses, and 146 comments on an interactive map.

The engagement approach reached a wide variety

of residents as well as building upon the existing relationships that Dakota County has formed with community organizations. Engagement teams interacted with approximately 650 people at pop-ups, meetings, and focus groups across the County. Engagement focused on understanding what people love about the park system and what they would like to see changed.

With round two engagement, conducted during the comment period, Dakota County staff and the project engagement team presented the plan at meetings and to stakeholders, gathered input at pop-up events, and hosted a public open house. In addition to in-person engagement, an online survey was posted along with the draft Vision Plan. Feedback was focused on the vision, goals, and strategies of the Vision Plan with other comments (general or specific) also welcomed. During this round of engagement, over 400 people were reached at in-person events and 66 survey responses were submitted.

In addition to the engagement events, the draft plan was presented at city council meetings, work sessions, or parks and recreation advisory committee meetings for the cities of Burnsville, West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, South St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights, Hastings, Farmington, Empire, Rosemount, Apple Valley, and Lakeville between February and May of 2025.

Despite best efforts, participation in the final round of engagement was not as robust as earlier engagement. While certainly helpful, the results are likely not representative of the breadth of interests held by County residents as a whole. Survey responses and input received was weighted toward interests already engaged in the County park system rather than non-park users.

See Appendix B for complete documentation of engagement findings.

# FINDINGS

Recent decades have been a time of growth and increasing depth for Dakota County’s park system, much of it shaped by visionary and thoughtful planning. The planning process for the 2050 Vision Plan has also included analysis of Dakota County as well as the outside influences that shape it.

Key findings from community voices, staff observations, analysis of the park system, and broader influences are identified on the proceeding pages.

-  **The percentage of park visitors who are youth, people of color, lower income, and older adults is lower than their percentage of County population**
-  **Dakota County park visitors expect more accessible facilities**
-  **Visitation of Dakota County Parks is lower than metro area average based on population**
-  **A growing County population will expect additional parks and greenways**
-  **Programming is limited compared to other metro area park systems**
-  **Awareness has grown about parks’ essential role in supporting physical, mental, and spiritual health**

-  **Dakota County is viewed as a leader in providing nature-based recreation and education**
-  **The changing climate threatens natural systems and recreational opportunities**
-  **Urbanization impacts remaining natural areas, habitat, and water quality**
-  **Securing consistent and sustainable funding is a growing challenge**
-  **As the system ages and grows, capital reinvestment and operations demands will also naturally grow**

## Data Sources:

- 2024 Engagement Online Survey
- 2024 Engagement
- 2024 Tribal Engagement Meetings
- 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study
- 2022 US Census ACE Estimates
- 2022 Minnesota State Demographic Center, Long-Term Population Projections for Minnesota, 2020
- 2023 Dakota County Adult Health Survey
- Metropolitan Council Local Forecasts to 2050
- 2020 Dakota County Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan: Report of Community Engagement Findings
- July 2023 Met Council Annual Use Estimates

*A more detailed summary of engagement efforts and analysis reports can be found in the Appendices*



## The percentage of park visitors who are youth, people of color, lower income, and older adults is lower than their percentage in the county population

### Engagement

- 30% of Dakota County adults with incomes less than half the poverty line identify situations of not feeling accepted due to their race, ethnicity, religion, or immigration status. (Source: Dakota County Adult Health Survey, 2023)

### Analysis

- Compared to the Dakota County population, youth, people of color, lower income individuals, women, and older adults are underrepresented in park visitor counts when compared to county population.
- People of color visited Dakota County regional parks at a rate of 33% of their population makeup and visited County greenways at a rate of 28% of their population makup.

*Exhibit 1.6 identifies park visitors as fewer than “under-represented”, roughly equal to “on-target,” and more than “over-represented” when compared to overall county population demographics.*

Exhibit 1.6, 2021 Visitor Demographics

AGE	Under-Represented		On-Target		Over-Represented	
	PARKS	GREENWAYS	PARKS	GREENWAYS	PARKS	GREENWAYS
12 - 17	✓	✓				
18 - 24	✓	✓				
25 - 34			✓	✓		
35 - 54					✓	✓
55 - 74					✓	✓
75 +	✓	✓				
HOUSEHOLD INCOME						
Less than \$40,000	✓	✓				
\$40,000 - \$79,999	✓	✓				
\$80,000 +					✓	✓
GENDER						
Male					✓	✓
Female	✓	✓				
RACE						
People of Color	✓	✓				
White					✓	✓
ETHNICITY						
Hispanic/Latino	✓	✓				

Sources: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DP05

### Definition of Overrepresented and Underrepresented:

**Overrepresented:** In the context of this plan, overrepresented refers to demographic groups for whom the percentage of members visiting Dakota County regional parks is higher when compared to their percentage in the overall county population.

**Underrepresented:** Underrepresented refers to demographic groups for whom the percentage of members visiting Dakota County regional parks is lower when compared to their percentage in the overall county population.



# Dakota County park visitors expect more accessible facilities

## Engagement

- Accessible facilities are identified by users as a key need within the park system. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey and Tribal Engagement Meetings)

## Analysis

- 10.9% of Dakota County residents have a disability. The most prevalent disabilities are:
  - Cognitive difficulty (5%)
  - Independent living difficulty (4.9%)
  - Ambulatory difficulty (4.5%)

(Source: 2021 Met Council Visitor Study and 2022 US Census)

- 8.2% of residents 65-74 years of age have a disability. 38.2% of residents age 75+ have a disability. (Source: 2021 Met Council Visitor Study and 2022 MN Demographic Center)
- 12% of groups visiting a Dakota County park included a resident with a disability. (Source: 2021 Met Council Visitor Study and 2022 US Census)
- As the population ages and grows, demand for accessible facilities will increase.
- The percentage of Dakota County residents 75 or older is expected to jump from under six percent in 2020 to nearly 10 percent in 2035. (Source: 2022 MN Demographic Center)

**Exhibit 1.7, Shoreline Accessible Trails**

Trails within Parks	2008	2023	Name of Waterbody
Lebanon Hills	0	1	McDonough Lake
Spring Lake	0	2	Spring Lake
Lake Byllesby	0	1	Lake Byllesby
Miesville Ravine	0	0	Cannon River
Thompson	0	1	Thompson Lake
Whitetail Woods	N/A	1	Empire Lake
Trails within Greenways			Location
Mississippi River Greenway	0	1	Lake Rebecca, Mississippi River
Minnesota River Greenway	0	1	Black Dog Lake, Minnesota River
River to River Greenway	0	2	Marthaler Lake, Thompson Oaks Lake
Vermillion River Greenway	N/A	1	Vermillion River
Rosemount Greenway	N/A	1	Horseshoe Lake
Lake Marion Greenway	N/A	2	Lake Marion, Sunset Lake
North Creek Greenway	0	2	Cobblestone Lake, East Lake, North Creek
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	



## Visitation of Dakota County parks is lower than metro area average based on population

### Engagement

- People report that Dakota County parks are not as conveniently located as they would prefer.
- In the 2020 Dakota County Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan: Report of Community Engagement Findings, Hmong, South Asian Indian, American Indian, Latinx, Moroccan, and Somali community audiences noted limited knowledge of parks within some parts of their communities.
- Ways to better attract diverse and under-represented populations include cultural awareness, partnerships, welcoming spaces, accessibility, and involvement in decision making. (Source: 2020 County Parks Awareness and Promotion Engagement)

### Analysis

- To reach its share of visitors to suburban regional parks based on population, Dakota County would need over three million more annual visits. (Source: 2023 Met Council Use Estimates)
- Despite being the 3rd-most populous geography of the 10 regional park implementing agencies, Dakota County is 6th in visitation. (Source: 2023 Met Council Use Estimates & 2022 US Census)
- Dakota County parks have a lower level of facilities, programs, and events compared with other metro regional parks.
- Many Dakota County greenways have trail gaps planned to be completed in future years.



## Programming is limited compared with other metro area park systems

### Engagement

- Community members requested more programming that provides education or recreation and allows for social interaction. (Source: 2024 Engagement)
- Community members highlighted the importance of cultural information and programming, language, and cultural practices as keys to welcoming diverse visitors and fostering belonging in parks. (Source: 2020 County Parks Awareness and Promotion Engagement and 2024 Engagement)

### Analysis

- Dakota County has fewer outdoor education programs and fewer outdoor education staff compared with other regional park agencies.
- Compared with other regional park agencies, Dakota County offers fewer outdoor education programs.
- Outdoor education program participation has been growing by roughly 20% annually in recent years. (Source: 2023 Parks Programming Waitlist Numbers)
- Demand exceeded capacity with 1,085 youth or adults wait-listed for programs in 2023. (Source: 2023 Parks Programming Waitlist Numbers)
- Seasonal and temporary staffing model impacts capacity and efficiency in program delivery.
- Limited indoor program space impacts the ability to provide outdoor education programming throughout the park system.



## A growing population will expect additional parks and greenways

### Engagement

- 39% of visitor survey respondents noted that “better walking or biking access” or “a trail closer to me” would help them visit trails more often. (Source: 2021 Met Council Visitor Study)

### Analysis

- Some of the most populous municipalities in Dakota County lack regional park acreage.
- Residents without a vehicle would have a difficult time reaching most of Dakota County’s parks.



## Awareness has grown about parks' essential role in supporting physical, mental, and spiritual health

### Engagement

- Over 50% of community survey respondents ranked the health benefit of time in nature as the most important benefit of the park system. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey)
- Community survey respondents identified physical and mental health benefits of time in nature and/or nature-based recreation as the highest priority for the future park system. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey)

### Analysis

- 46% of all Dakota County adults surveyed met "Healthy People Physical Activity Guidelines" for exercise. (Source: 2023 Dakota County Health Survey)
- Greenspace use for adults results in a variety of health benefits including stress reduction, improved sleep quality, and reduced cancer risk. (Source: Barcelona Institute for Global Health, 2020)
- Greenspace use for children results in improved attention capacity, concentration, emotional and behavioral development, coordination, balance, self-confidence, self-discipline, and social skills. (Source: Barcelona Institute for Global Health, 2020)
- In 2023 the US Surgeon General named loneliness as an epidemic in the U.S. Parks counter this as places of social connection.



## Dakota County is viewed as a leader in providing nature-based recreation and education

### Engagement

- Community members identified time in nature as a key benefit and ranked nature-based recreation (e.g., hiking, canoing, and picnicking) as important to their appreciation of Dakota County parks. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey)
- Favorite activities in Dakota County parks:
  1. Hiking/walking
  2. Biking
  3. Mountain biking
  4. Dog walking/dog park
  5. Running(Source: 2021 Met Council Visitor Study)

### Analysis

- "Tranquility," "Peace," and "Oasis" are words commonly used to describe Dakota County parks. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey)
- Overall park visitation has increased 250% since 2017. (Source: 2024 Met Council Use Estimates)
- Outdoor Education Program participation has grown by roughly 20% annually in recent years.
- The Dakota County Parks Outreach program began in 2020 and quickly grew. In 2022, 5,733 people participated in the program (240% increase over 2020) and the number of outreach activities was 141 (171% increase over 2020). One strategy leading to this success has been collaborating with community liaisons and instructors to develop and facilitate programs and events.



# The changing climate threatens natural systems and recreational opportunities

## Engagement

- Native American participants suggested bringing the ecosystem back to the point where animals can thrive through a changing climate. *(Source: 2024 Tribal Engagement)*
- Staff suggests more research and understanding occur on climate adaptive plants and species to ensure green spaces thrive amidst a changing climate.
- 34% of community survey respondents identified climate change as a major concern and 22% as a moderate concern. *(Source: 2022 Dakota County Residential Survey)*

## Analysis

- Beach closures due to water quality, warm winters, air quality, and fire danger have impacted all aspects of the visitor experience and services including equipment rentals, programming, and recreation.
- Dakota County is expected to experience a 168% increase in extremely hot days and a 4% increase in days with heavy precipitation across the next 25 years. *(Source: Headwaters Economics)*

**Exhibit 1.8, 2023 Projected Heat Change for Dakota County**

### HEAT

#### Days per year above: 90°F 95°F 100°F

By 2050, Dakota County is expected to experience **11 more days** that reach above 95°F (from 6 days to 17 days per year).



Extremely hot days are the leading cause of weather-related fatalities in the U.S. and contribute to economic stress as the need for (and cost of) air conditioning rises.

#### Average annual temperature

By 2050, Dakota County is expected to have a **3°F increase** (from 48°F to 51°F) in average annual temperatures.



Increasing annual temperatures contribute to droughts, longer and more catastrophic wildfire seasons, and warmer oceans that fuel hurricanes and offshore storms.

Data Sources: Headwaters Economics, Climate Projections - Dakota County, MN



## Urbanization threatens remaining natural areas, habitat, and water quality

### Engagement

- Community survey participants ranked “protection and restoration of natural habitat” as the second highest priority for the future park system. (Source: 2024 Engagement Online Survey)

### Analysis

- Dakota County population is anticipated to grow by approximately 15 percent to 524,186 by 2050. (Source: Met Council 2050 Forecasts)
- Urban and suburban development continues to move south, replacing remnant natural areas and agricultural areas. Developing communities include Rosemount, Lakeville, Farmington, and Empire.



## Securing consistent and sustainable funding is a growing challenge

### Engagement

- County staff and leadership routinely identify a need for reliable funding sources as a critical issue to be addressed. (Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff and County Board)

### Analysis

- Park visitation has grown, leading to increased demand for programming that, in turn, demands more infrastructure and maintenance while staffing experiences only modest growth. (Data Source: Dakota County Parks annual budgets).
- There are more external funding opportunities for new capital projects than for management, operations, and maintenance. (Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff)
- As additional acres of natural resources are restored, there will be increasing need for on-going funding for natural resources management.



## As the system grows, capital reinvestment and operations demands will also naturally grow.

### Engagement

- Staff has identified challenges to making significant capital investments that are sometimes not supported by adequate operational resources. *(Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff)*
- Community members emphasized the importance of well-maintained physical infrastructure for parks to feel safe, accessible, and inviting. *(Source: 2020 County Parks Awareness and Promotion Engagement)*

### Analysis

- Dakota County began constructing park buildings in the mid-1980s. Some of these structures (e.g., the Lebanon Hills Regional Park campground office and Schulze Beach) are in their fourth decade and require significant capital investment or replacement. As the park system ages, these situations will become more pressing. *(Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff)*
- The Dakota County Facilities Management Department maintains a condition database for all County buildings. Investment in park buildings flagged by the database competes with deferred maintenance of other existing County-wide buildings plus additional investment demands for new buildings (e.g., replacement of the campground office at Lake Byllesby Regional Park). *(Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff)*
- In addition to impacts from use and age, evolving building codes demand investments. Dakota County is roughly halfway through a 10-year program to address ADA-accessibility compliance. *(Data Source: 2024 Engagement with staff)*

# VISION FRAMEWORK

This section articulates a framework for the overall Vision Plan as the basis for policy guidance, budgeting, and the spectrum of operational demands needed to successfully run the system and meet the needs of the County’s growing and diverse population.

The vision framework is constructed around four elements: Mission, Vision, Goals, and Values. The framework is intended to establish the basis for the 2050 Vision Plan and the work of the organization in decades to come.

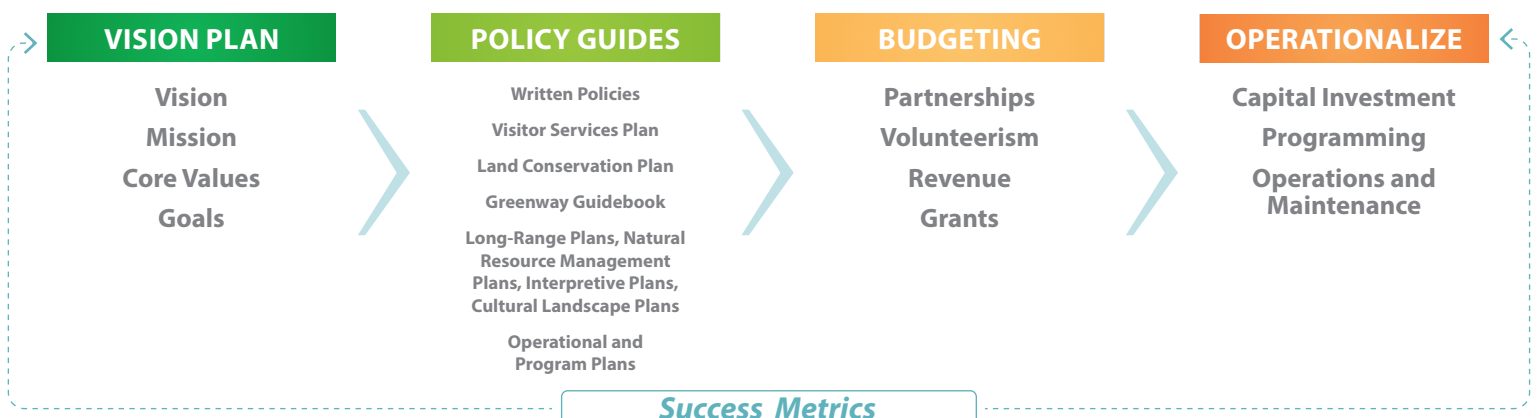
The framework acts as a compass, ensuring that activities and initiatives align with community values and Dakota County Parks’ core purpose and future aspirations. It is more than just words. It is the foundational toolkit that guides the organization’s work.

The selected words and statements are the result of community, staff, and leadership engagement as well as analysis conducted for the project since and even before the planning process.

Like any long-range plan, community interests and organizational demands will change and evolve through the life of the 2050 Vision Plan, making it important to periodically evaluate the relevance of the plan and vision framework.

## THE VISION FRAMEWORK WILL

- Guide strategic planning and decision-making, assisting with setting priorities, evaluating programs, and adapting to change.
- Drive organizational culture and workforce development by creating a sense of purpose, encouraging innovation, and fostering accountability.
- Unlock potential partnerships by establishing trust, attracting those with shared values, and revealing potential funding streams.
- Shape public engagement and advocacy through education, mobilization, and feedback loops.
- Provide a foundation for flexibility in meeting the important topics of the day such as climate, equity, access, relevance, and economics.



**Exhibit 2.1,** Use of the Vision Plan

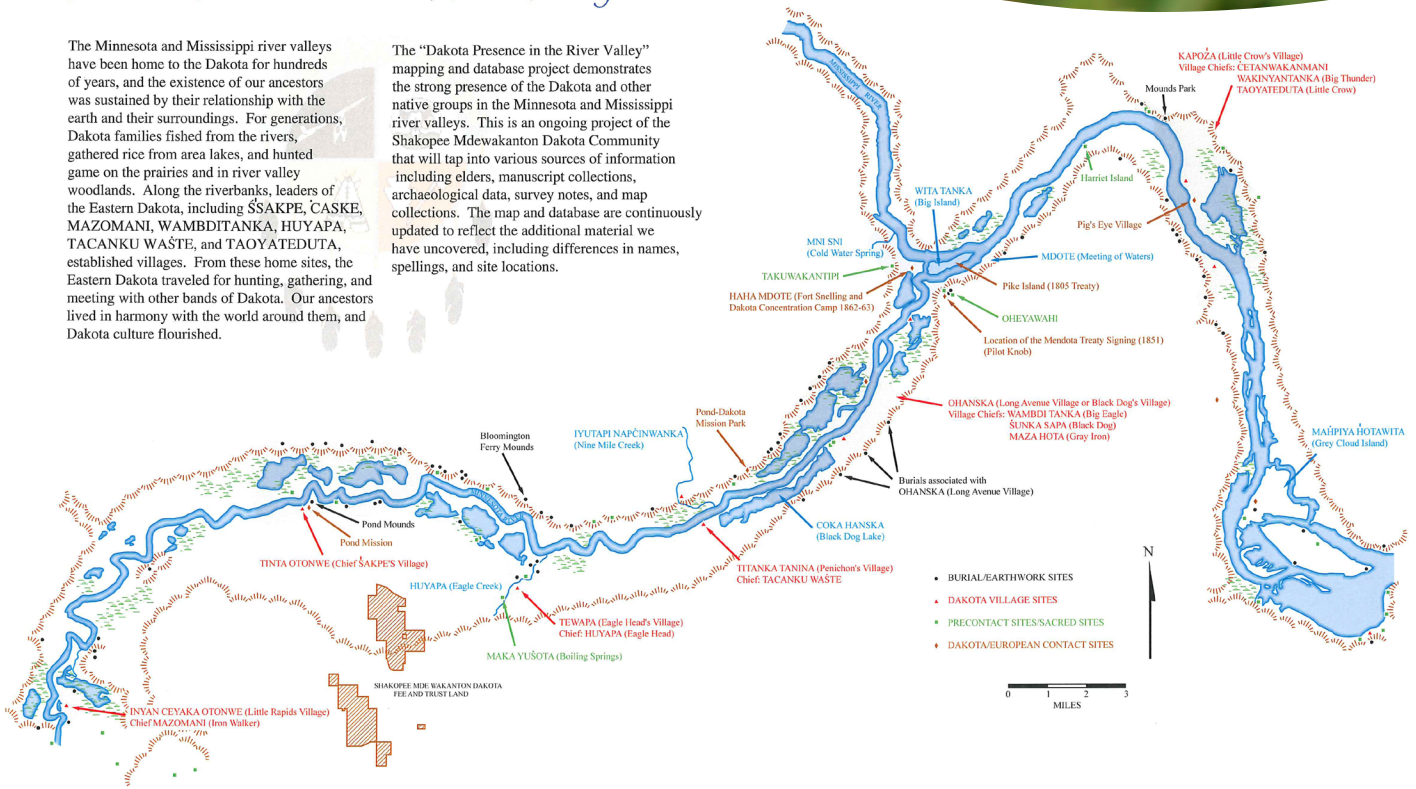
# Dakota County Parks Native Land Acknowledgment

We at Dakota County Parks respectfully acknowledge that Dakota County is Dakota homeland, land significant and sacred to the cultural identity of past, current, and future generations of the Dakota people, and other native peoples from time immemorial. We commit to understanding, respecting, and partnering with Indigenous communities as together we care for the land, wildlife, air and water here. Let our actions demonstrate our resolve and commitment, bringing to life the truth of these words.

## Dakota Presence in the River Valley

The Minnesota and Mississippi river valleys have been home to the Dakota for hundreds of years, and the existence of our ancestors was sustained by their relationship with the earth and their surroundings. For generations, Dakota families fished from the rivers, gathered rice from area lakes, and hunted game on the prairies and in river valley woodlands. Along the riverbanks, leaders of the Eastern Dakota, including ŠSAKPE, ČASKE, MAZOMANI, WAMBĎITANKA, HUYAPA, TACANKU WAŠTE, and TAOYATEDUTA, established villages. From these home sites, the Eastern Dakota traveled for hunting, gathering, and meeting with other bands of Dakota. Our ancestors lived in harmony with the world around them, and Dakota culture flourished.

The "Dakota Presence in the River Valley" mapping and database project demonstrates the strong presence of the Dakota and other native groups in the Minnesota and Mississippi river valleys. This is an ongoing project of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community that will tap into various sources of information including elders, manuscript collections, archaeological data, survey notes, and map collections. The map and database are continuously updated to reflect the additional material we have uncovered, including differences in names, spellings, and site locations.



For more information about the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, please visit [www.shakopeedakota.org](http://www.shakopeedakota.org) or contact the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, Cultural Resources Department, 2330 Sioux Trail NW, Prior Lake, MN 55372, E-mail: [culturalresources@shakopeedakota.org](mailto:culturalresources@shakopeedakota.org).



© 2003 Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community  
 Printed for Big River Journey Program, National Park Service  
 For additional classroom resources, please visit the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community web site: [www.shakopeedakota.org](http://www.shakopeedakota.org).

Exhibit 2.2, Dakota Presence in the River Valley

## DAKOTA PARKS AND DAKOTA LAND

Dakota County is committed to embedding learning, respect, and appreciation for Native American people and land into our practices. All of Dakota County and adjacent lands are within the vast ancestral homelands of the Dakota people who were the original stewards of this place for thousands of years. Anishinaabe and Native people from other Tribal Nations also traveled and traded through this land and have made this area their home.

We will continue listening, learning, and acting - because a just future requires more

than acknowledgment. We are committed to strengthening authentic, long-term relationships with Indigenous communities, relationships grounded in trust and accountability. This means creating spaces where Indigenous voices lead, where cultural practices are honored, and where the presence of Native people are visible and valued.

The Dakota County Parks Department land acknowledgment at the top of the page expresses commitment to build a practice of active land acknowledgment every day into our work. We anticipate that this practice and these words, informed by long and deep relationships, will evolve and mature over time.

In alignment with Dakota County's core values of Integrity, People, Service, and Innovation, this plan's core values are:

**To Connect...**

people to each other and the natural world, fostering a sense of belonging for all.

**To Protect and Improve...**

natural spaces, ensuring a resilient and healthy environment for future generations.

**To Inspire...**

wellbeing, wonder, adventure, and learning through engaging and inclusive outdoor experiences.

**To Nurture...**

and heal the vital relationship between people and nature.

**To Celebrate...**

our vibrant and richly diverse communities.

**CORE VALUES**

**Vision Statement**

Nature Protected, Community Reflected, All Are Connected

**VISION**

**Mission Statement**

To enrich lives by providing high-quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.

**MISSION**

**Goal A**

Nurture the reciprocal relationship between people and nature.

**Goal B**

Cultivate belonging by engaging and serving the community, with an emphasis on those who are under-represented in the outdoors.

**Goal C**

Provide safe and positive core services, amenities, and experiences.

**Goal D**

Create dynamic spaces with unique and memorable experiences.

**Goal E**

Expand environmental stewardship through outdoor programs, learning, and volunteerism.

**Goal F**

Offer opportunities to improve physical, mental, and spiritual health.

**Goal G**

Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities for the protection of lands and traditions.

**Goal H**

Locate new park units close to people or to protect natural areas and recreational assets.

**Goal I**

Lead and support ecological stewardship and climate resilience.

**Goal J**

Protect, improve, and manage the natural resources of Dakota County.

**Goal K**

Elevate cultural richness through arts, historic preservation, interpretation, and storytelling within the park system.

**Goal L**

Seek and sustain values-based and mission-driven partnerships.

**Goal M**

Care for the system through sustainable and innovative funding.

**Goal N**

Invest in a thriving parks workforce that represents the communities served.

**Goal O**

Support local and sustainable economic development.

**GOALS**

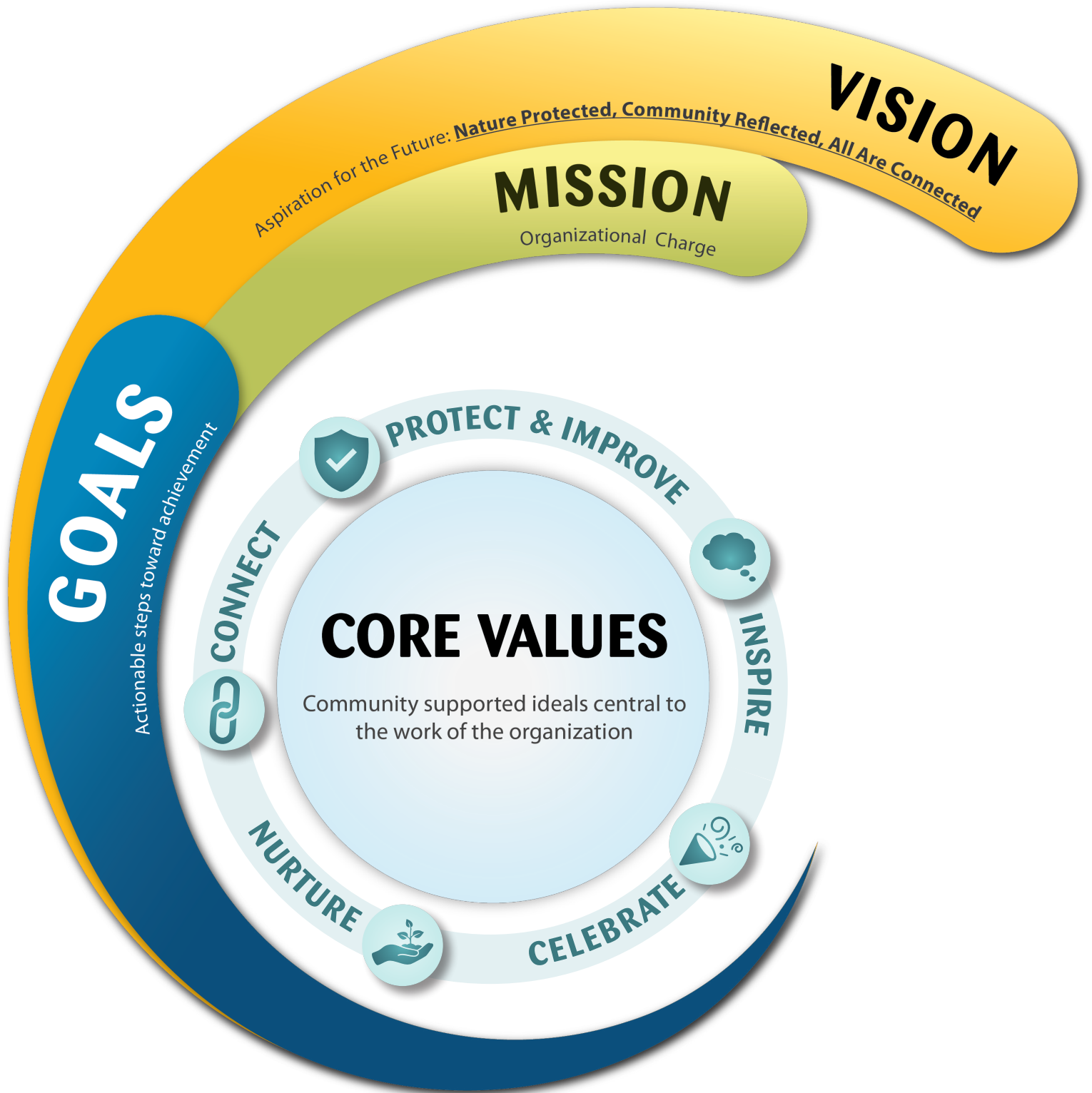


Exhibit 2.3, Vision Framework



## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goals and strategies are intended to drive the 2050 Vision Plan into the inner workings of Dakota County Parks. Goals are umbrella statements that address the breadth of demands and interests raised by the plan. Strategies are slightly more detailed statements that help operationalize each goal.

By setting clear goals and actionable strategies in this plan and subsequently using them going forward, Dakota County positions itself to incrementally achieve its vision and operationalize its mission. By “working the plan,” Dakota County in unison with policymakers, community members, partner organizations, and local communities can work together toward a shared vision of thriving parks, interconnected greenways, and protected natural systems that serve as a foundation for a healthy and vibrant Dakota County in 2050.

Vision Plan goals described on the following pages are not listed in order of importance.

# A Nurture the reciprocal relationship between people and nature.

The park system recognizes people’s place as a part of the natural world and ecological processes and the crucial role people have in conserving and managing healthy natural areas and natural features and attributes. Nature-based experiences in enhanced and diverse environments foster a reciprocal cycle of well-

being and care.

## Strategies

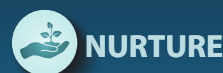
1. Expand nature-based experiences (staffed programs and self-guided) and volunteer opportunities across the seasons to encourage connection with nature as a fundamental part of daily life.
2. Maintain impactful land conservation, visitor services, and natural resource management plans as budgeting, capital implementation, and operating tools.
3. Commit to systematic care, management, and enhancement of lands across the system.
4. Exemplify sustainability and innovation in design, implementation, and maintenance practices.

***Community surveys identify time in nature as a key benefit and ranked nature-based recreation (e.g., hiking, paddling, and biking) as important to their appreciation of Dakota County Parks.***

## Metrics

- Visitor awareness/satisfaction surveys.
- Program and volunteer participation metrics.
- Visitors counts.
- Habitat management metrics.
- Budget metrics.
- Volunteer involvement.

## SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:



## **B Cultivate belonging by engaging and serving the community, with an emphasis on those who are under-represented in the outdoors.**

Community members of all backgrounds, interests, and abilities are welcome and included. People feel pride in their parks and a sense of responsibility in stewarding a renowned park system.

**Definition of “Underrepresented”:** In the context of this plan, “underrepresented” refers to demographic groups for whom the percentage of members visiting Dakota County regional parks is lower when compared to their percentage in the overall county population.

### **Strategies**

1. Establish a co-creation process that engages a broad range of community to inform the development of programs and services.
2. Establish direct communications and long-term, meaningful relationships with demographic groups who are under-represented in park visitor makeup.
3. Nurture partnerships that provide unique and exceptional programs.
4. Establish accessibility goals to reduce barriers to park services through supportive, accessible, affordable service.
5. Provide timely public awareness/information about processes, programs, and resources.
6. Celebrate and reflect diverse cultures through programming, staffing, interpretation, art, wayfinding, and communications.
7. Provide programs and spaces that support intergenerational experiences.
8. Consider additional advisory committees at the regional, county, parks, or project level.
9. Consider developing a process for modification of the Dakota County Parks tagline to better reflect new vision and mission as well as community feedback.

***In the 2050 Vision Plan planning process, community members highlight the importance of culturally important spaces, programs, and removal of barriers to participation.***

### **Metrics**

- Visitor awareness/satisfaction surveys.
- Visitor demographic analysis.
- Program participation metrics.
- Cultural representation in planning and decision making.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**PROTECT & IMPROVE**



**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **C Provide safe and positive core services, amenities, and experiences.**

As a baseline to the broader recreational experience, visitors have confidence that Dakota County facilities will be clean, cared-for, and thoughtful to their needs. Visitors are comfortable in the parks and become loyal advocates.

### **Strategies**

1. Adopt and implement core service/amenity guidelines for each unit type found in the Parks and Greenways Chapter. Guidelines address base levels of visitor support facilities (parking, wayfinding, toilets, drinking water, furnishings, shelter, boundary markers), safety (lighting, visibility, surveillance, emergency preparedness), and base-level amenities (paths, interpretation, rec facilities).
2. Strive for universal access to services/amenities and key programs beyond minimum ADA requirements.
3. Maximize capital investment life cycles through data-driven approaches to asset management and maintenance practices.
4. Enhance self-guided and self-directed visitor amenities such as interpretive and wayfinding features and digital content.
5. Care for and invest in existing assets and provide relevant, responsive service levels.

***In community surveys, respondents note the importance of comfort amenities including bathrooms and drinking water, as well as cleanliness and maintenance as critical features.***

### **Metrics**

- Visitor awareness/satisfaction surveys.
- Visitor counts.
- Budget and operational metrics.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



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**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **D** Create dynamic spaces with unique and memorable experiences.

Dakota County Parks has worked throughout its over 60-year history to protect many of the most interesting and special landscapes in the County and knit them together through a network of greenways. Each place is a unique attraction with

an abundance of fun and engaging experiences for all ages. The collection of parks, greenways, and natural lands offers a breadth of activities and experiences.

### **Strategies**

1. Within long-range park and greenway plans, identify special landscape characteristics to be celebrated and leveraged for memorable experiences appropriate to their setting.
2. Develop a system-wide plan strategy to determine signature park features that identify a targeted spectrum of distinctive experiences, location prospects, implementation road maps, and operations/revenue strategies.
3. Integrate a rotation of events, food, arts, and culture.
4. Offer nature-immersion experiences in all seasons and in extraordinary natural landscapes.
5. Provide multi-generational spaces and experiences and places for families and community groups to gather.

***In surveys, respondents requested a variety of multi-generational spaces to connect with community and the outdoors.***

### **Metrics**

- Unique and memorable park features added.
- Visitor counts and feedback.
- Program participation.
- Vendor revenue metrics.
- Long-range plan implementation.
- Number of rental space reservations, including campgrounds.
- Number of public events held.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



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**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **E Expand environmental stewardship through outdoor programs, learning, and volunteerism.**

The impact of parks and natural areas transcends physical boundaries by motivating actions by individuals in all parts of their lives. Community outreach and education bring programs to people who become lifelong advocates of healthy environments.

### **Strategies**

1. Offer year-round program and volunteer opportunities for all ages, abilities, and skill-levels.
2. Partner with cities, schools, libraries, watershed organizations, and other organizations to advance environmental learning.
3. Provide community outreach and education that inspires environmental awareness and understanding.
4. Encourage volunteerism to restore natural resources and build a conservation ethos.
5. Offer cultural programming and partner with community organizations for involvement in planning and programs.
6. Develop and implement self-guided interpretation that inspires environmental stewardship and tells the story of the land, people, and place.

***Community members routinely request more programming that provides the combination of learning, recreation, and social interaction.***

### **Metrics**

- Visitor awareness/satisfaction surveys.
- Program and volunteer participation data.
- Number of collaborative community partners and cultural events.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**PROTECT & IMPROVE**



**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **F Offer opportunities to improve physical, mental, and spiritual health.**

Parks have a direct impact on public health and positively impact individual health through belonging, fun, exercise, access to nature, and social connection.

### **Strategies**

1. Institute a health impact checklist for use in planning documents to identify influence across seasons, ages, cultures, and incomes.
2. Promote healthy, active lifestyles with a variety of recreational amenities and an emphasis on lifelong activities.
3. Partner with health-related organizations to integrate care and wellness education into park environments.
4. Offer spaces that encourage consistent creative play, healthy food, and nature immersion.
5. Offer instruction and equipment for affordable and supportive activity participation.
6. Provide celebration venues for birth, death, life, and family milestones.

***Over 50% of survey respondents ranked the health benefits of time in nature as the most important benefit of the park system.***

### **Metrics**

- Health trend indicators.
- Frequency of repeat visits.
- Visitor surveys.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**PROTECT & IMPROVE**



**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **G Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities for the protection of lands and traditions.**

Respecting the significance of this land for Native Nations and people is evolving and action-based. Indigenous culture, language, and people are thriving and visible within parks and greenways. Through partnership, the park system reinforces understanding and respect of Indigenous cultures by all people.

### **Strategies**

1. Partner with Indigenous communities and organizations to establish consultation protocols and collaborative processes.
2. Expand the relationship with Tribal communities to holistically address culturally important sites. Conduct Traditional Cultural Places surveys and develop ownership, management, and access plans, as well as messaging and protection.
3. Reconnect Native people with park lands.
4. Infuse a naming policy that considers Indigenous culture.
5. Elevate Indigenous connections, traditions, stories, and cultural practices and promote deep and immersive intergenerational learning. Partner with Native schools, support language, host lodges and gatherings, and provide harvesting opportunities.
6. Employ Indigenous experts for teaching and planning and apply Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that stewards healthy water and land.
7. Expand public awareness about Native American people, land, history.

***Tribal workshop participants suggested conducting more robust engagement with descendants of village sites, expanding liaison work, and returning more Indigenous presence to the Dakota County landscape.***

### **Metrics**

- Tribal Nation and Native Organization partnerships and a framework for collaboration.
- Completion of consultant protocols.
- Positive feedback from Native American agencies, people, and organizations.
- Completion of plans and surveys.
- Completion of interpretive planning.
- Alignment with Met Council's work and policies developed with the American Indian Advisory Council.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



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**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **H** Locate new park units close to people or to protect natural areas and recreational assets.

Parks, greenways, and open spaces are central to healthy and dynamic communities and continuous ecosystems throughout the County. Connecting natural areas supports ecological function and elevates the entire network to a regional experience.

### **Strategies**

1. Secure new park units that fill service area gaps, increasing system offerings within convenient distance to people's lives.
2. Complete current greenway search corridors and add new greenway search corridors that interconnect Dakota County parks, other open spaces, and popular community gathering areas.
3. Leverage greenways to create a rural hiking network through farmland and natural areas.
4. Develop public water access facilities to establish water trails.
5. Protect park land and greenway corridors ahead of development pressure.
6. Collaborate with local communities and partner organizations toward establishing new parks, greenways, and bridging facilities.
7. Employ land protection tools to conserve shorelines, springsheds, and sensitive landscapes.
8. Work with partners to protect regionally important private recreational lands if they are threatened.
9. Support local communities in their efforts to develop local trails and trail loops that connect to greenways.
10. Collaborate with other agencies to provide more nature-based offerings along greenways (e.g., fishing piers, trail loops, nature play areas).

***Residents in some parts of the County do not have ready access to County parks or greenways.***

### **Metrics**

- Acres and miles added to the system.
- Visitor counts.
- Number of residents living within a 10 minute drive of a regional park or greenway.
- Number of residents living within a 15 minute walk of a regional park or greenway.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

# I Lead and support on ecological stewardship and climate resilience.

The Dakota County Park system is a leader in integrating protected natural areas under a unified umbrella. Parks and conservation areas are resilient reservoirs of ecological service that

reaches beyond sustainability to impact climate resilience.

## Strategies

1. Develop and maintain a systemwide approach to identify, protect, connect, improve, and manage landscapes. Regularly update this approach based on data and best practices and integrate into long-range plans.
2. Develop climate adaptation and mitigation strategies and resilient restoration practices.
3. Continually innovate to reduce environmental impacts of park development, programming, and operations.
4. Prioritize habitat in environmentally sensitive areas.
5. Be a cooperative platform, providing technical support to others' protection efforts.
6. Reduce the park system's carbon footprint.
7. Use preliminary Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs) as a framework for protecting and connecting natural areas and habitat.
8. Continually assess new environmental threats and plan for responsive actions.
9. Assess cumulative effects and impacts on natural systems when planning new development and improvements in parks, greenways, and conservation areas. Minimize, mitigate, or prevent impacts.
10. Develop a process and criteria for identifying and designating resource-sensitive areas where special management or limited access may be needed to protect resources or sites.

***Public comments indicate the belief that parks can be demonstrations of sustainability and environmental leadership.***

## Metrics

- Carbon footprint assessments.
- Habitat and wildlife health metrics.
- Quantification of guideline and plan implementation.
- Acres restored.
- Acres maintained.

## SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:



CONNECT



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NURTURE

# J Protect, improve, and manage the natural resources of Dakota County.

Working collaboratively with private and public stakeholders, ecologically important areas are prioritized for protection in Conservation Focus

## Strategies

1. Use Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs):
  - As a landowner discussion framework for protecting and connecting natural areas.
  - To prioritize, protect, and restore surface/ground waters and reduce flooding.
  - To protect critical habitat on public and private lands.
  - To provide compatible and appropriate outdoor recreation activities.
2. Partner with the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization (WMO), the North Cannon River WMO, the Black Dog WMO, the Eagan-Inver Grove Heights WMO, the Lower Minnesota River WMO, and others to promote, incentivize, and implement water management and soil health practices in agricultural areas.
3. Protect and restore critical infiltration areas outside CFAs identified by the County Groundwater Plan and in springsheds to protect cold water trout streams.
4. Develop and implement a Pollinator Habitat Network.
5. Provide timely Land Conservation Program information to public and private partners.
6. Implement the Dakota County Land Conservation Plan and support implementation of the Dakota County Ground Water Plan in collaboration with other Dakota County departments.
7. Restore and manage natural spaces to support and nurture wildlife and plant communities.

Areas, park inholdings, and easements.

Surface and ground water are improved, natural resources are restored and strengthened, and the public is deeply engaged in the effort. Measured and deliberate recreational access offers immersion in nature.

**Nearly 70% of survey respondents ranked “protection and restoration of natural habitat” or “ecological benefits” as their first priority.**

## Metrics

- Landowner awareness surveys.
- Habitat management data.
- Water quality data.
- Budget measures.
- Acres and miles protected.

## SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:



CONNECT



PROTECT & IMPROVE



INSPIRE



NURTURE

## **K Elevate cultural richness through arts, historic preservation, interpretation, and storytelling within the park system.**

Dakota County collaborates with the full spectrum of communities around arts, historic preservation, and cultural interpretation, ensuring the parks system reflects the rich diversity of the community. The system inspires cultural appreciation, and all people feel included and connected.

### **Strategies**

1. Increase the amount and diversity of arts and cultural programming/events.
2. Identify multicultural stories, voices, and history.
3. Identify and prioritize places important to diverse cultures.
4. Connect visitors with the histories of the land and people.
5. Integrate art in parks and develop a public art plan.
6. Adaptively reuse physical structures within parks for recreational and educational purposes.
7. Develop and implement self-guided interpretation.

***Community members highlight the importance of cultural programs, language, and practices as keys to welcoming diverse community members and fostering belonging in parks.***

### **Metrics**

- Quantification of implemented strategies.
- Number of performance art events.
- Number of interpretive exhibits installed.
- Number of public art installations.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**PROTECT & IMPROVE**



**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**



**CELEBRATE**

## **L** Seek and sustain values-based and mission-driven partnerships.

Effective teaming elevates the Parks Department's work and reach. The Parks Department finds optimal roles and maximize effectiveness with partners to create an extensive network of environmental and community benefits.

### **Strategies**

1. Expand strategic partnerships with cities, watershed organizations, nature based nonprofits, and other agencies, nonprofits and organizations to provide nature-based recreation, restoration, and other services to avoid duplication and enhance service levels.
2. Work with cities and outreach partners to engage the public, provide affordable events and programs, and build relationships with under-represented groups.
3. Develop a suite of tools (agreements, return-on-investment [ROI] analysis, vendor policies, and others) that allow for streamlined communication/collaboration with potential vendors and service partners.
4. Continue the Greenway Collaborative with cities, state agencies, federal agencies, and other partners to create a robust and integrated network of trail-based recreation, water quality, natural resource corridors, and active transportation.
5. Partner with state and federal agencies to improve parks/sites with state and federal significance.
6. Partner with private land owners on conservation and land management.
7. Maximize interdepartmental partnerships for stacked benefits.

***Respondents to the 2024 online survey identified community organizations and key connections into the park system.***

### **Metrics**

- Quantification of implemented strategies.
- Number of different partnerships: landowners, agencies, community partners.
- Number of targeted programs.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



# M Care for the system through sustainable and innovative funding.

The system operates efficiently and effectively supported by diverse revenue sources. Stable funding provides for consistent levels of service and for the care of assets. Innovative funding is

continually pursued to reach beyond the core services.

## Strategies

1. Identify and allocate consistent and dedicated funding for operations and maintenance.
2. Analyze Met Council visitor counts and visitor demographics as measures of success that directly impact regional funding levels.
3. Partner with a non-profit philanthropic organization for fund development.
4. Seek out grants, legislative funding, and sources of private funding.
5. Explore revenue capture such as:
  - . Carbon offset credits.
  - . Donor giving and stewardship programs that align with the County gift policy and incorporate a financial assistance program to increase philanthropic interest.
  - . Vendors and public/private partnerships.
6. Infuse the budgeting process with metrics that illustrate the balance between capital investments, programming costs, operational demands, and revenue streams.
7. Evaluate organizational structural changes that would consolidate the full scope of parks, greenways, and natural systems operations either continuing as a department within Dakota County or as an autonomous park district.
8. Explore the possibility of a voter-approved bond referendum to fund parks, greenways, and natural system projects.

## Metrics

- Budget data.
- Partnership tallies.
- Grant data.
- Donor data.

## SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:



## **N Invest in a thriving parks workforce that represents the communities served.**

Investment in people inspires energy and creativity that enriches the parks system and boosts confidence among constituents. A renowned work environment at Dakota County Parks elevates career opportunities in the outdoor industry.

### **Strategies**

1. Develop staffing models to adequately support all park service areas (Parks Visitor Services, Facilities Management - Grounds and Buildings, Sheriff's Office - Park Rangers) and that are responsive and relevant to the park and greenway service level needs of today's parks system.
2. Collaborate with schools and professional organizations to elevate park and natural resource career pathways.
3. Maintain an organizational structure and culture that provides opportunities for career growth and fulfillment.
4. Invest in innovative recruitment and retention strategies.
5. Identify and implement adequate staffing levels to operate and maintain amenities and services and adjust growth accordingly.
6. Invest in staff training and development to deepen cultural competencies.
7. Invest in youth programs, outdoor education, mentorship, and training that supports pathways to outdoor careers and future workforce diversity.

***Community members identified representation in staffing and communications as important to their comfort in parks.***

### **Metrics**

- Workforce demographic analysis and satisfaction surveys.
- Workforce recruitment and training metrics.
- Regular compensation and classification reviews.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



**INSPIRE**



**NURTURE**

## **O Support local and sustainable economic development.**

The parks system contributes to broader economic systems and is fundamental to Dakota County's desirability as a place to live, work, and visit. Parks support sustainable economic development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Dakota County is celebrated as a place

where carefully managed natural resources, positive environmental impact, and social equity are promoted alongside economic progress.

### **Strategies**

1. In future planning efforts, consider how broader economic systems are being served and enhanced.
2. Communicate that robust and healthy natural systems are essential infrastructure to a thriving economy.
3. Bolster environmentally based local businesses and agri-tourism through proximity, interconnections, vendor relationships, and partnerships.
4. Support the local creative economy through vendor and partnership agreements in arts programming, design, and events.
5. Continually innovate engaging visitor destinations and signature events that attract from a broad region.
6. Develop parks that are environmentally and economically sustainable with the imperative of promoting social equity while preserving environmental health and quality.
7. Integrate parks and greenways with community development and redevelopment.

***A 2009 study estimated that people walking, running, and biking on Twin Cities metro trails spent \$4.7 million annual dollars in connection with their activities.***

### **Metrics**

- Vendor revenue and sustainability data.
- Economic impact studies.

## **SUPPORTS CORE VALUES:**



**CONNECT**



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**NURTURE**

# LAND CONSERVATION, PARKS, AND GREENWAYS



The Dakota County system has three basic categories of land holdings: conservation lands, greenways, and parks. Together, these areas form a diverse and well-integrated network that plays a crucial role in preserving the county's natural resources, fostering outdoor recreation, and enhancing overall community well-being.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Conservation Lands** serve as vital habitats for native plant and animal species, protecting biodiversity while also improving air and water quality.

**Greenways** provide essential corridors that connect communities, facilitate active transportation, and support active lifestyles.

**Parks**, ranging from mostly natural park reserves to recreationally focused regional parks, offer residents and visitors a broad array of nature-based recreation.

This well-balanced portfolio delivers an impressive array of benefits, from ecological preservation and climate resilience to contribution to economic growth and public health improvements. As Dakota County continues to grow, with population increases and shifts in community demographics, the interests and needs of residents are also evolving. Expanding knowledge about sustainability, environmental stewardship, and equitable access to natural spaces highlights the importance of carefully planned growth within the system. Strategic investment in land acquisition, restoration projects, and infrastructure improvements will be necessary to ensure the system continues to serve both current and future generations effectively.

This chapter provides a framework for guiding system growth through the life of the 2050 Vision Plan. It outlines key priorities, identifies opportunities for enhancement, and offers strategies to balance conservation efforts with increased public demand for outdoor recreation. By proactively planning for the future, Dakota County can continue to foster a resilient, vibrant, and accessible network of conservation lands, greenways, and parks.

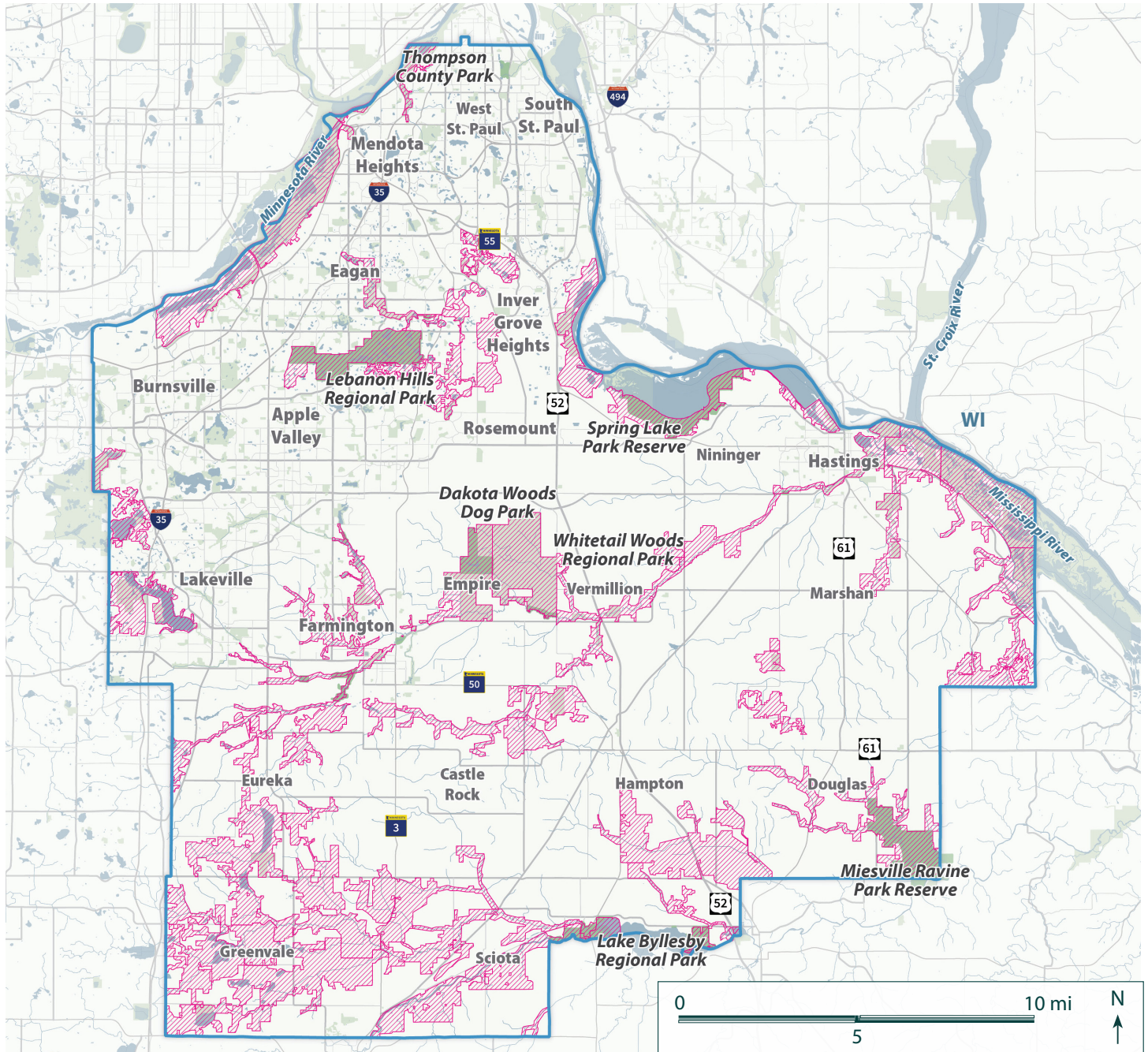
## **CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS**

Dakota County's 2020 Land Conservation Plan identifies and prioritizes land protection based on the combination of natural features, connectivity, hydrology, and land ownership with a renewed emphasis on water. Protection of these lands, called Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs), aims to increase voluntary protection and stewardship of private lands and improve coordination with other land conservation agencies and organizations. The plan identifies 24 preliminary CFAs, encompassing a wide variety of habitats throughout the County, including 28 specific native communities and 25 Species of Greatest Conservation Need.



Map 3.1 illustrates Conservation Focus Areas within which additional conservation easements and landowner agreements will be considered.



Map 3.1, Conservation Focus Areas



**LEGEND**

-  County Parks, Regional Parks, Park Reserves
-  Preliminary Conservation Focus Areas

# PARKS

## EXISTING PARK SYSTEM

### CURRENT PARK OFFERINGS

PARKS	CURRENT PARK OFFERINGS												
	Picnicking	Fire Ring	Ice Fishing	Visitor Center	Hiking	Snow-Shoeing	Dog Off-Leash	Biking	Fishing	Geocaching	Play and Nature Play Areas	Sledding Hill	Cross-Country Skiing
Dakota Woods Dog Park					Y		Y						
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y		
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	Y				Y	Y			Y	Y			
Spring Lake Park Preserve	Y	Y			Y	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y
Thompson County Park	Y	Y			Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Y	Y			Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Exhibit 3.1, Existing Systems Chart

#### Dakota Woods Dog Park:

- 16 acres
- Fenced off-leash dog area
- Visitor parking

#### Lake Byllesby Regional Park:

- 620 acres
- 258,000 visits in 2023 (approx.)
- Lake recreation, camping

#### Lebanon Hills Regional Park:

- 2,000 acres
- 872,000 visits in 2023
- Staffed visitor center, swimming beach, trail recreation (mountain biking, equestrian, hiking, cross-country skiing)

#### Miesville Ravine Park Reserve:

- 1,600 acres
- 33,000 visits in 2023 (approx.)

Dog Sled Trails	Ice Skating	Kick Sledding	Skate Skiing	Mountain Biking	Equestrian Trails	Campgrounds	Nature Education	Archery	Gardening	Swimming	Paddling	Camper Cabins	ADA Accessible Trails
Y			Y			Y				Y	Y		Y
	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y		Y
											Y		
			Y				Y	Y	Y				Y
													Y
					Y							Y	Y

- Trout fishing, Cannon River access

**Spring Lake Park Preserve:**

- 1,100 acres
- 177,000 visits in 2023 (approx.)
- Mississippi River views and access, bison, indoor event space rental, archery

**Thompson County Park:**

- 57 acres
- 350,000 visits in 2023 (approx.)

- Accessible playground, community gathering, indoor event space rental

**Whitetail Woods Regional Park:**

- 456 acres
- 97,000 visits in 2023 (approx.)
- Camper cabins, events, largest lake loop, sledding hill, nature play area

## PARK CLASSIFICATION

	County Park Conservation Area	Regional Park Reserve	Regional Park
<b>CLASSIFICATION</b>	Parks	Parks	Parks
<b>DEFINITION AND PURPOSE</b>	Land protection with County-owned fee title of area of natural quality such as watercourses, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, rare species, high-quality habitat, or potential restoration to high-quality habitat that are preserved for environmental benefits and natural resource-based recreation. Currently, County Park Conservation Areas must have provisions for public park purposes and related outdoor recreational purposes per Minnesota State Statute 398.32.	Park reserves contain large areas of land or water and provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities such as viewing and studying nature, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, boating, camping, and trail uses. What distinguishes park reserves from regional parks is the larger size and the emphasis on preservation and ecological integrity. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high-quality natural resources, at least 80% of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. Up to 20% of a park reserve may be developed for compatible recreational activities.	Area of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses. Most regional parks are adjacent to lakes, rivers, or streams.
<b>LOCATION</b>	Within a Conservation Focus Area, adjacent to an existing County or regional park, or along an existing or planned greenway corridor or greenway search corridor, if another protection mechanism is not practical. Exceptions can be considered by the Dakota County Board.	Where high-quality natural areas occur. Park reserves aim to protect significant portions of one or more of eight regional landscape types.	Where natural resource occurs or has high potential to occur.
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Where resource occurs.	10-minute drive.	10-minute drive.
<b>SIZE</b>	Based on resources present.	1,000+ acres	200-500 acres typically (100 acres min.)
<b>EXAMPLES</b>	Nine existing sites	Miesville Ravine Park Reserve   Spring Lake Park Reserve	Lake Byllesby Regional Park   Lebanon Hills Regional Park   Whitetail Woods Regional Park

Exhibit 3.2, Park Classification Chart

## Regional Special Recreation Feature

## Regional Greenway

## County Park

### Parks

### Greenways and Trails

### Parks

Special features that provide specialized or single-purpose recreational activities. Special features may include arboretums, unique ecological areas, display gardens, bridging facilities, or cultural landscapes. Bridging facilities are a sub-classification. They may be nested within a regional park, park reserve, or trail. They seek to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks and Trails System. Their purpose is to help address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates among prioritized communities. Bridging facilities have a clear and unique purpose. Bridging facilities are not designed as a one-size-fits-all approach. Cultural Landscapes are a sub-classification that recognize lands with significant cultural value to American Indian Tribes, organizations, and communities. Dakota County will evaluate if the new classifications are desired.

Linear park and trail corridor that combines water quality, recreation, habitat, transportation, interpretation. These support nature-based recreation close to where people live.

An area of natural quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, and picnicking. These could have some field and court games and specialized activities.

Located where unique natural and or cultural conditions exist, offering a compelling sense of place. Bridging facilities are located close to their target audience.

Adjacent to natural resources and/or connect components of the regional system. The County collaborates with national, state, and city park agencies with land adjacent to greenways to improve access to nature-based recreation and non-motorized connectivity to greenways.

Proximity to community and/or where a resource allows.

Regional (metropolitan area).

Regional and local communities. Approximately one-and-a-half-mile spacing between corridors.

5-minute drive.

Appropriate to feature.

Multiple communities.

25-200 acres

**Currently no regional special recreation features in Dakota County. Bridging facilities and cultural landscapes are a new regional designation, with no existing facilities.**

**Minnesota River | Mississippi River | River to River | North Creek | Vermillion River | Veterans Memorial Greenways**

**Thompson County Park | Dakota Woods Dog Park**

# PARK AND GREENWAY SEARCH AREAS

## GREENWAY CORRIDORS

Dakota County is home to a diverse and growing network of greenways that serve as essential connections between communities, natural landscapes, and recreational destinations. Dakota County intends to build out this system, fill current gaps, and expand into future residential growth areas, ensuring that greenways remain accessible, functional, and ecologically beneficial for generations to come.

To guide this expansion, Dakota County has identified greenway search corridors (Map 3.2 and Exhibit 3.3) where future greenways are planned or envisioned. These search corridors are selected based on a combination of factors, including existing gaps in the greenway network, community needs, environmental significance, and opportunities for land acquisition or partnership with local communities. The identification of these corridors is a proactive step toward creating a fully connected and comprehensive system that maximizes recreational, environmental, and economic benefits.

The process of identifying greenway search corridors has involved comprehensive planning and collaboration among County officials, city governments, community organizations, and residents. Factors such as land availability, environmental sensitivity, transportation needs, and funding opportunities are carefully analyzed to determine where future greenway corridors can be most effectively developed.

Dakota County prioritizes search corridors based on their potential to close network gaps, provide equitable access to underserved communities, and enhance regional connectivity. Special attention is given to locations where greenways can link existing parks, nature areas, and trail systems, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable experience for users.

In 2010, Dakota County created a program called the Greenway Collaborative as a model for building greenways with partners (local

communities, developers, and stakeholder organizations). The program has been widely successful and contributed to the creation of much of the current County greenway system and prompted the development of several local trail loops that connect with County greenways. The Greenway Collaborative program is intended to be expanded to include greater County technical and political support for local trail loops and nature-based recreation linked with city parks. Expansion of the greenway collaborative will be further explored and defined in the update to the Dakota County Greenway Guidebook.

The expansion of greenways in Dakota County represents a forward-thinking investment in sustainability, recreation, and community well-being. By strategically identifying greenway search corridors, the County is laying the groundwork for a future where residents can enjoy safe, scenic, and environmentally friendly routes that enhance both mobility and conservation efforts. This chapter outlines the framework for identifying, planning, and implementing these greenways to create a stronger, healthier, and more connected Dakota County.



## RAILROAD CORRIDORS

In addition to the new greenway search corridors identified, Dakota County will consider converting rail corridors to greenways when opportunities arise. Corridors include but are not limited to: Dan Patch Corridor (CPKC), Union Pacific between east and west Lake Byllesby Regional Park, CPKC in Inver Grove Heights, and Progressive Rail in Rosemount, Eagan, and Mendota Heights.

## **PARK AREAS**

Dakota County parklands provide highly valued, nature-based recreation, environmental benefits, and community spaces. Parks serve as hubs for outdoor activity, nature preservation, and social gatherings, contributing to the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. As the County's population expands and recreational needs evolve, there is an increasing demand to enhance and extend the park system. To address this, Map 3.3 and Exhibit 3.4 identify park search areas where future parks may be developed or existing parklands expanded.

Park search areas represent a strategic approach to ensuring that residents across the county have equitable access to high-quality nature-based parks, especially where they serve demographic groups who visit parks at a lower rate than expected, compared to the demographics of the county population. The designation of these search areas is based on data-driven planning, community input, and environmental considerations, ensuring that each new park contributes meaningfully to the County's overall vision for open spaces and outdoor recreation.

The identification of park search areas is guided by Dakota County's long-term commitment to enhancing recreation, conservation, and public well-being. Selection considers factors including:

- Population growth and development trends.
- Environmental and natural resource value.
- Existing park gaps.
- Connectivity to trails and greenways.
- Access to the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.

Potential candidate sites are identified as a starting point for future discussion and assessment of regional park suitability. Candidate site designation does not imply that a location must become a future park, and there may be candidate sites that have not yet been identified.

## **COUNTY PARK CONSERVATION AREAS**

County Park Conservation Areas (CPCA) are a tool for land protection using fee title ownership by Dakota County. The focus is on natural quality, such as watercourses, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, rare species, high-quality habitat (or potential restoration thereof) that are preserved for environmental benefits and/or natural resource-based recreation. Currently County Park Conservation Areas must have provisions for public park purposes and related outdoor recreational purposes per Minnesota State Statute 398.32.

New County Park Conservation Areas could be pursued adjacent to existing (Map 1.1) or future (Maps 3.2 and 3.3) County parks, regional parks or greenways if another protection mechanism is not practical.

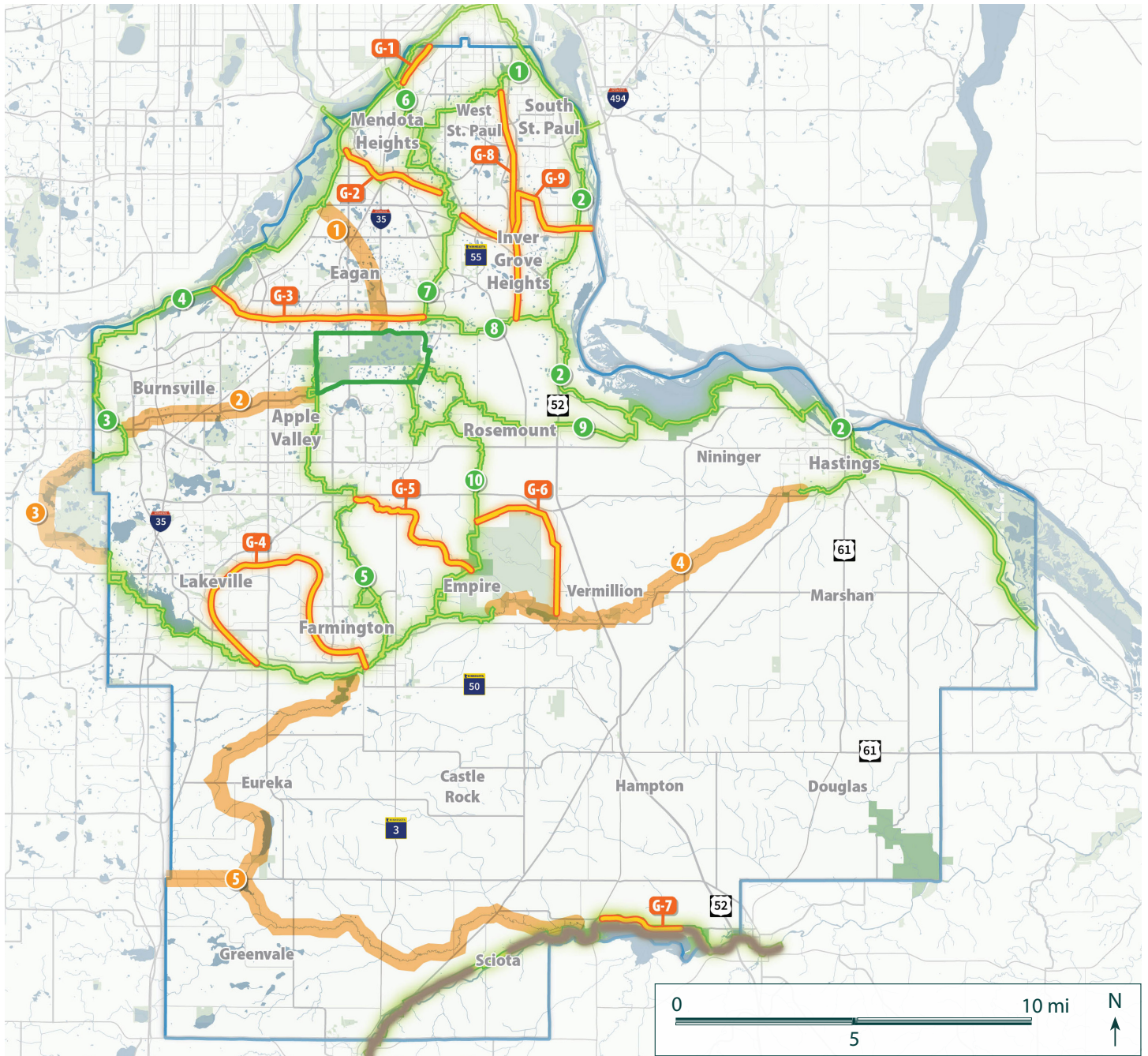
## **PRIVATELY OWNED RECREATION AREAS**

In addition to the park candidate sites identified, Dakota County will consider preserving land previously owned/operated by private or public entities that may no longer be in active use but that provide significant community recreation or natural resources value by transforming into protected public open spaces. This approach can serve expanded community benefits including:

1. **Land Conservation:** Preserving areas with historical, ecological, or scenic value.
2. **Public Access and Recreation:** Expanding open space for outdoor recreation, which can enhance community well-being and increase public engagement with natural spaces.
3. **Historic Preservation:** Retaining historical significance of former recreational sites by converting them into accessible public resources.

Dakota County may consider evaluating sites nearing the end of their operational lifespan and working with stakeholders—landowners, local governments, and community members—to transition these spaces into public ownership or conservancy partnerships.

**Map 3.2, New Greenway Search Corridors**



**LEGEND**

Existing and Planned Regional Greenways

- 1 River to River
- 2 Mississippi River
- 3 Lake Marion
- 4 Minnesota River
- 5 North Creek
- 6 Big Rivers Regional Trail
- 7 Lebanon Hills
- 8 Veterans Memorial Greenway
- 9 Rosemount Greenway

- 10 Vermillion Highlands Greenway
- Regional Greenway and Trail Search Corridors
  - 1 Lebanon Hills - Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
  - 2 Lebanon Hills - Lake Marion Regional Trail
  - 3 Lake Marion - Big Woods Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
  - 4 Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail
  - 5 Elko New Market Blakely-Dayle Kennefick Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
- Mill Towns State Trail

New Greenway Search Corridors

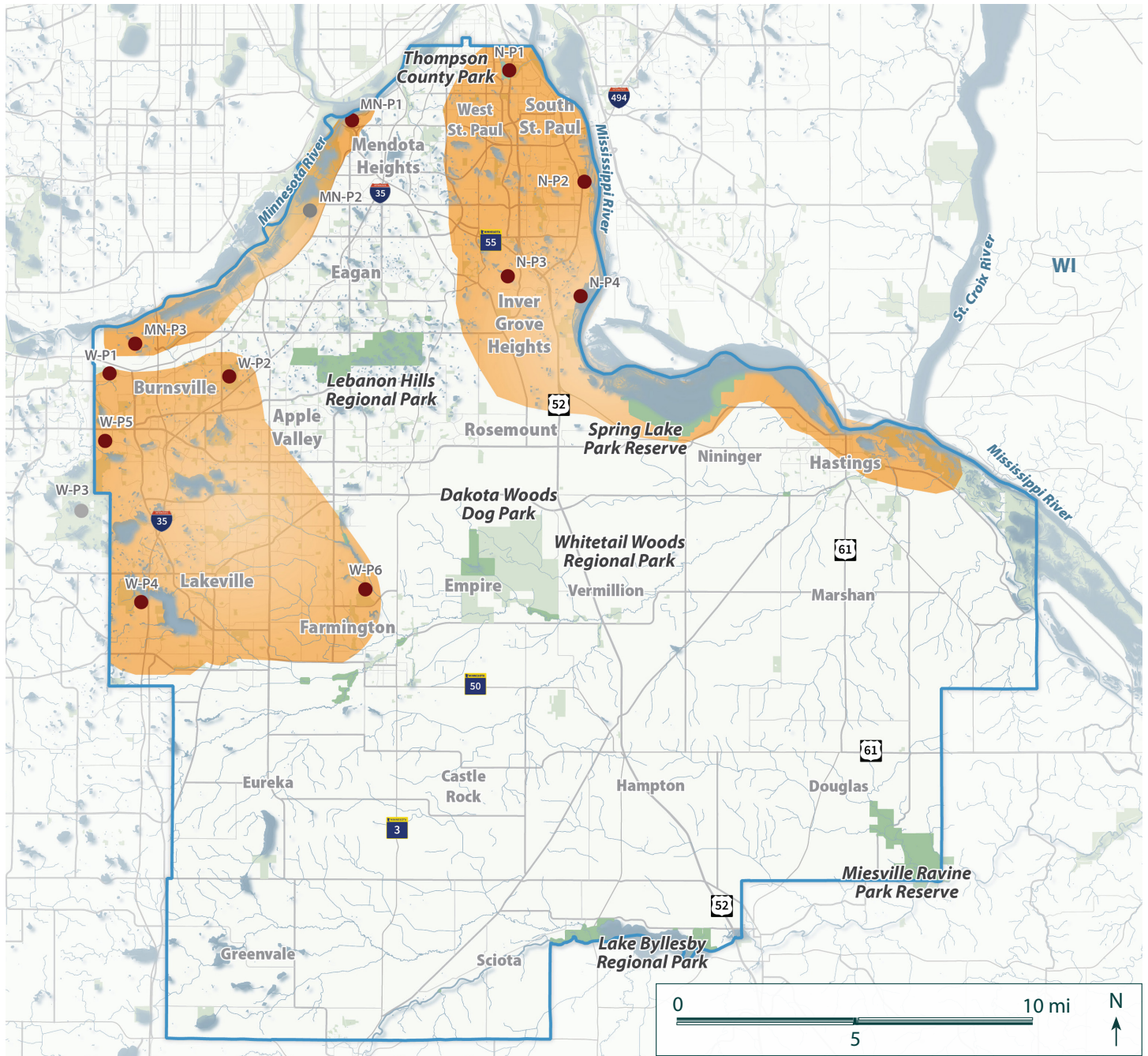
- G-1 Lilydale - St. Paul
- G-2 Soo Line
- G-3 Highline Trail
- G-4 Farmington - Lakeville
- G-5 Empire Greenway - Mining Lakes
- G-6 Vermillion Highlands - Vermillion River
- G-7 Lake Byllesby Greenway
- G-8 Highway 52 Trail
- G-9 Lebanon Greenway - Mississippi River
- Greenway Linking Route

## NEW GREENWAY SEARCH CORRIDORS





Map ID	Corridor Name	Potential Partnership	Suitability / Feasibility
<b>G-1</b> Lilydale	Lilydale - St. Paul	Lilydale, St. Paul	Feasibility study needed. Connects Cherokee Regional Park and trail in St. Paul. 1.5-mile gap from Highway 55 bridge to Cherokee Regional Park on top of bluff.
<b>G-2</b> Eagan, Mendota Heights	Soo Line (alignment study)	Cities, MN Vikings	Feasibility study completed. Addresses freeway barriers. 3.5 miles. Serves northern Eagan residential growth.
<b>G-3</b> Eagan, Burnsville	Highline Trail	City	Six-mile extension of Veteran’s Memorial Greenway to the east. Facility 90% in place. Feasibility study for Burnsville segment needed.
<b>G-4</b> Lakeville, Farmington	Farmington - Lakeville	Cities	Feasibility study needed. Most land in private ownership. Seven mile east-west connection between North Creek and Lake Marion Greenways. Potential to establish corridor in advance of/along with development.
<b>G-5</b> Empire	Empire Greenway - mining lakes	Private Industry	Feasibility study needed. Opportunity to establish greenway with reclamation of gravel mining areas and newly created lakes.
<b>G-6</b> Empire	Vermillion Highlands - Vermillion River	Township	Feasibility study needed. Most land in public ownership. Greenway with trail six edge of Vermillion Highlands VMA. Added 6-mile greenway would create 14-mile recreational loop trail.
<b>G-7</b> Randolph, City of Randolph, Waterford, Sciota	Lake Byllesby Greenway	DNR, Randolph, Townships	Current partnership with MnDNR; part of planned Mill Towns State Trail. Connection between Lake Byllesby east and west sections; currently identified in the Lake Byllesby Regional Park Master Plan.
<b>G-8</b> Inver Grove Heights, West St. Paul	Highway 52 Trail	Inver Grove Heights, West St. Paul, MnDOT	Feasibility study needed. Most land in public ownership. Six of eight miles existing. Would allow regional funding for gaps. Increases local community proximity to greenway.
<b>G-9</b> Inver Grove Heights	Lebanon Greenway - Miss. River Greenway	City	Feasibility study needed. Five miles connecting Lebanon Greenway to Mississippi River Greenway. Addresses east-west service gap in northeastern part of Dakota County.

**Exhibit 3.3,** New Greenway Search Corridor Chart

**Map 3.3, New Park Search Areas**



**LEGEND**

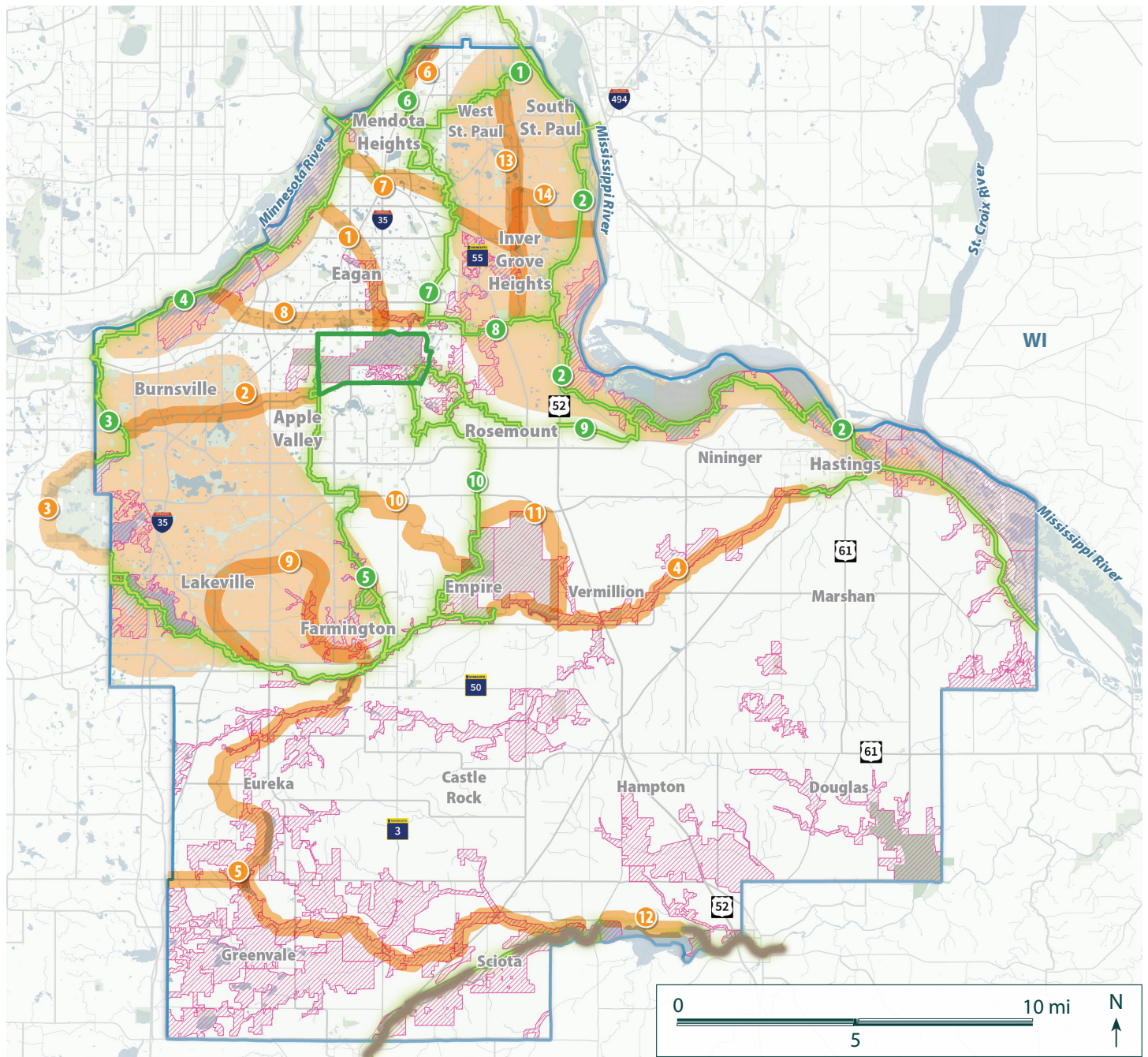
-  County Parks, Regional Parks, Park Reserves
-  Potential New Park Candidate Sites
-  Potential Partnership Candidate Sites
-  New Park Search Areas

## NEW PARK SEARCH AREAS AND CANDIDATE SITES

Map ID	Name	Potential P'ship	Suitability / Feasibility	Recommendation
<b>N-P1</b> W. St. Paul, S. St. Paul	Thompson/ Kaposia/K. Landing	City	In public ownership. Meets regional size min. Lakes and streams present.	Explore reg. status and bridging facility status with Met Council, city, ISD 197.
<b>N-P2</b> Inver Grove Heights	Swing Bridge Marina	City, private marinas, DNR, NPS	Partial public ownership. Could meet regional park size limit. River frontage. Motorized landing service gap. High visibility, vehicle access.	Explore as regional park or regional special use candidate site.
<b>N-P3</b> Inver Grove Heights	Marcott Lakes Nature Ctr.	Dodge Nature Center	Private ownership (some conservation easements). Could meet 200 ac. size. Lakes present. Within CFA.	Explore as regional park or regional special use candidate site (feasibility study needed).
<b>N-P4</b> Inver Grove Heights	Pine Bend Bluffs-Riv. Lake Area	NPS, DNR, private marinas	Partial public ownership. River frontage. Boat landing serving a gap. Somewhat remote. Within CFA.	Explore as regional park or regional special use candidate site.
<b>MN-P1</b> Mend. Hts, Mendota	MN River Bluffs-Fort Snelling	Cities, DNR, Tribal	Potential cultural district, improved nature-based recreation, and natural res. management on Fort Snelling Park land. MN River. Within CFA.	Explore as regional special use candidate site or partnership project.
<b>MN-P2</b> Burnsville	US Fish and Wildlife Refuge	USFW	Potential to improve nature-based recreation and natural resource management on USFW land.	Explore as regional special use candidate site or partnership project.
<b>MN-P3</b> Burnsville	MN River Quarry Lake	City, USFW, industry	In private ownership designated for redevelopment. MN River frontage. Potential for park and water recreation. Within CFA.	Consider as regional park candidate site (long-term).
<b>W-P1</b> Burnsville	R. Kramer Nature Preserve	City	In city ownership along Lake Marrion Gnw. Current mix of sports invites new users.	Explore as bridging facility or partnership candidate site.
<b>W-P2</b> Burnsville	Terrace Oaks Park	City	In city ownership. Meets regional park size threshold. No lake or river access. East and West is 240 ac.	Explore as bridging facility or partnership candidate site for further exploration.
<b>W-P3</b> Scott Cnty	Murphy Han Reg Pk	Three Rivers Park District	Existing regional park reserve could better serve with added facilities.	Explore partnership with Three Rivers.
<b>W-P4</b> Lakeville	Ritter Farm Area-Lake Marion Park	City	Partial City ownership. Offer mix of rec. and natural resources. Meets 200-acre size. Lakefront. Within CFA.	Explore as regional park or partnership candidate site.
<b>W-P5</b> Burnsville	Kelleher Park	City	Adjacent to Murphy Hanrehan. Does not meet 200-acre threshold. Along Lake Marion Greenway. Within CFA.	Explore as bridging facility, partnership candidate or Lake. Marion Greenway tailhead.
<b>W-P6</b> Farmington	Jim Bell Nature Preserve	City	Does not meet 200-acre size (130 acres). Along North Creek Greenway. Within CFA.	Explore as partnership candidate site, or North Creek Greenway Trailhead.

Exhibit 3.4, New Park Search Areas & Candidate Sites Chart

Map 3.4, 2050 Vision Map



**LEGEND**

Existing and Planned Regional Greenways

- 1 River to River
- 2 Mississippi River
- 3 Lake Marion
- 4 Minnesota River
- 5 North Creek
- 6 Big Rivers Regional Trail
- 7 Lebanon Hills
- 8 Veterans Memorial Greenway
- 9 Rosemount Greenway

- 10 Vermillion Highlands Greenway
- Regional Greenway and Trail Search Corridors
- 1 Lebanon Hills - Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
- 2 Lebanon Hills - Lake Marion Regional Trail
- 3 Lake Marion - Big Woods Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
- 4 Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail
- 5 Elko New Market Blakely-Dayle Kennefick Regional Trail 'Coordinate with Scott County'
- 6 Lilydale - St. Paul
- 7 Soo Line

- 8 Highline Trail
- 9 Farmington - Lakeville
- 10 Empire Greenway - Mining Lakes
- 11 Vermillion Highlands - Vermillion River
- 12 Lake Byllesby Greenway
- 13 Highway 52 Trail
- 14 Lebanon Greenway - Mississippi River
- Greenway Linking Route
- Mill Towns State Trail
- Preliminary Conservation Focus Areas
- New Park Search Areas

Map 3.4 combines the information contained in Maps 3.1 through 3.3 to create a consolidated 2050 Vision Map depicting existing parks, greenways, and natural areas along with search areas for new units.

# CORE SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Goal C highlights the importance of core provisions in fostering safety and comfort in parks as well as provided access to popular activities. Establishing a foundation of facilities that provide essential visitor support and and the most sought-after activities helps visitors know what to expect and look for. For some visitors, particularly first-time or infrequent visitors, large natural areas can be disorienting. The goal is to allow all visitors to enjoy the full park experience with the comfort of knowing that they are supported along the way.

## DEFINITIONS

An **Activity** is a specific action that someone does or participates in.

An **Amenity** is a feature or facility that enhances the quality of a place.

A **Service** is something provided by parks staff to improve the visitor experience.

**Exhibit 3.5, Activity Menu by Facility Type, provides examples of the types of activities expected in each park classification and is intended to be a starting point for determining the program that will be guided in long-range plans. Three tiers of activities can be expected:**

1. Base activities and facilities that can be expected in all parks (Y)
2. Activities that have broad popularity and can be expected in many parks (M)
3. Activities that can be expected in some parks (S)

*Community members identified comfort amenities such as bathrooms and water/drinking fountains as critical features.*

## ACTIVITY MENU BY PARK CLASSIFICATION

Activity and Service	Example Amenity/ Program	*CPCA	County Park	Regional Park	Regional Reserve	Regional Special Use	Greenway
<b>Unit Access and Trail Heads</b>							
<b>Identification</b>	Signage with unit name, boundary signage	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Orientation</b>	Kiosk with rules, wayfinding signs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Parking</b>	Lot or on-street area	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Visitor Safety, Comfort, and Convenience</b>	Shade, benches, water, electric charging, bike fix-it station, trash, recycling, pet waste bags, lighting	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Non-motorized access</b>	Paved trail connection to main trailhead	S	Y	M	M	Y	Y
<b>Maintenance and upkeep</b>	General maintenance and upkeep needed to ensure a positive visitor experience ( <i>note, level of service may vary based on park classification and/or location</i> )	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Exhibit 3.5, Activity Menu by Facility Type Chart** \* County Park Conservation Areas (CPCA)

## ACTIVITY MENU BY PARK CLASSIFICATION

Activity and Service	Example Amenity/ Program	*CPCA	County Park	Regional Park	Regional Reserve	Regional Special Use	Greenway
<b>Access to Nature</b>							
<b>Access to Nature</b>	Natural habitat and/or water access near trailheads/visitor areas	M	Y	Y	Y	M	Y
<b>Immersion in nature</b>	Natural habitat further from park trailheads/visitor areas	M	Y	Y	Y	S	M
<b>Wildlife Viewing</b>	Habitat restored/managed for specific species (e.g., bird, bison)	M	Y	Y	Y	S	M
<b>Scenic views</b>	Overlooks, benches	M	Y	Y	Y	S	Y
<b>Visitor Health and Safety</b>							
<b>Drinking water</b>	Fountains and bottle fillers	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Restrooms</b>	Restroom buildings		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Warming / cooling</b>	Heating or cooling areas, shade structures		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Emergency preparedness</b>	Storm shelter, cell service, phone, internet and/or emergency call posts, National Grid signage, public-facing emergency response plan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Staff Presence</b>	Greeting desk		Y	Y	M	Y	S
<b>Equipment Rental</b>							
<b>Winter</b>	Rental pod/trailer (e.g., skis, snowshoes, adaptive equipment)		M	M	M	S	M
<b>Summer</b>	Rental pod/trailer (e.g., paddle boards, canoes, adaptive equipment)		M	M	M	S	M

## ACTIVITY MENU BY PARK CLASSIFICATION

Activity and Service	Example Amenity/ Program	*CPCA	County Park	Regional Park	Regional Reserve	Regional Special Use	Greenway
<b>Trail Activities</b>							
<b>Hiking</b>	Natural-surface trail	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	S
<b>Walking, accessible</b>	ADA-accessible trail, winter snow removal		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Biking</b>	Paved trail		Y	M	M	Y	Y
<b>Cross Country Skiing</b>	Groomed trails, classic or skate		Y	Y	Y		
<b>Snowshoeing</b>	Existing trails or overland	Y	Y	Y	Y	M	
<b>Resting, viewing</b>	Overlooks	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Geocaching</b>	Existing soft and paved trail network		Y	Y	Y	Y	S
<b>Dog-powered sports</b>	Natural surface trail		S	S	S	S	
<b>Water Recreation</b>							
<b>Boating (power boating, rowing, sailing)</b>	Launch, put-in, trailer parking		S	Y	Y	S	
<b>Paddling (canoe, kayak, paddle board)</b>	Put-in, portage, signed water trail		Y	Y	Y	S	S
<b>Swimming, wading</b>	Beach, lagoon		Y	Y	Y	S	
<b>Fishing, ice fishing</b>	Designated shore areas, piers		Y	Y	Y	Y	
<b>Ice skating</b>	Frozen water		S	S	S	S	

## ACTIVITY MENU BY PARK CLASSIFICATION

Activity and Service	Example Amenity/ Program	*CPCA	County Park	Regional Park	Regional Reserve	Regional Special Use	Greenway
<b>Programming</b>							
<b>Outdoor, nature, recreation, and cultural education</b>	Indoor and outdoor classrooms, equipment storage, and other amenities needed for desired staff-led programs		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Nature and cultural interpretation</b>	Self-guided displays		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Events (festivals, concerts)</b>	Gathering areas, indoor and/or outdoor performance spaces, equipment storage		Y	Y	Y	M	Y
<b>Volunteerism</b>	Organized volunteer program for stewardship, event	M	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Public art</b>	Displays, participatory activities, performance		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Gathering Areas</b>							
<b>Public community space</b>	Indoor and outdoor public gathering spaces		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Picnicking and community meal space</b>	Picnic tables, grounds, non-reservation picnic shelters, and associated amenities	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Play</b>	Nature play area, inclusive playgrounds		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Private event rentals</b>	Visitor centers, picnic shelters		Y	Y	Y	M	S
<b>Lawn sports</b>	Flexible flat lawn area		Y	Y	Y	Y	S
<b>Sledding hill</b>	Hill suitable for sledding		Y	Y	Y	S	
<b>Community kitchen or shared campground kitchen</b>			M	M	S	S	

## ACTIVITY MENU BY PARK CLASSIFICATION

Activity and Service	Example Amenity/ Program	*CPCA	County Park	Regional Park	Regional Reserve	Regional Special Use	Greenway
<b>Camping</b>							
<b>Rustic tent</b>	Designated camping areas and pit toilet		S	Y	Y	S	S
<b>Tent</b>	Staffed tent area with restroom/shower building		S	Y	Y	S	
<b>RV</b>	Staffed RV area with hook-ups, access roads, restroom/shower building		S	Y	Y	S	
<b>Indoor (rentals)</b>	Cabins, yurts with restroom/shower building		S	Y	Y	S	
<b>Other</b>							
<b>Sauna</b>	Sauna		S	S	S	S	
<b>Food Production</b>	Community garden, foraging plantings, community forest	S	S	M	M	S	S
<b>Hammock posts/ hammock camping options</b>			Y	Y	Y	Y	M



Whitetail Woods Camper Cabins

## SIGNATURE FACILITIES

Many activities and facilities will occur less frequently within Dakota County parks and along greenways but contribute greatly to a park's or place's overall identity. Strategically locating these unique amenities across the system, paired with core services, creates a consistently supportive park environment that also offers a variety of experiences. The concept of service areas may or may not be relevant to these amenities, as the character of the land and community may influence their provision. The following classifications and lists are intended to illustrate examples and are not exhaustive. These activities and facilities will be explored and recommended in individual park and greenway long-range plans.

### SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES

If an activity is not indicated as base or appropriate for many or some parks and greenways, it can be considered a signature activity for that park and greenway classification as part of the unit long-range plan. Examples of signature facilities include but are not limited to:

- Disc golf
- Archery (Spring Lake)
- Climbing wall
- Mini-golf
- Farmers market
- Horse trails
- Maze (labyrinth)
- Sustainable perennial agriculture display
- Ropes/adventure course
- Sailing (Lake Byllesby)
- Snow making and lit ski trails
- Nature center / interpretive center
- Retreat center
- Support facilities for signature events for each park (e.g., overflow parking, electrical outlets, shelters)
- Support facilities and equipment for signature activities

- Facilities for astronomy
- Zip line ropes course
- Tubing
- Community gardens / food productive landscapes
- Water trails
- Group camping with group gathering facilities
- Pet activities
- Virtual reality
- Outdoor ceremony locations
- Outdoor amphitheaters/performance spaces
- Observation deck
- Wildlife management hunts
- Horseback riding
- Mountain biking

# ACCESSIBILITY

Embracing accessibility and universal design is an important way for Dakota County to set expectations that make visitors confident and comfortable in core services. Universal design strives to move beyond “separate but equal” access to make places and facilities functional for everyone. While the goal is universal design across the system, this standard is especially important for the core services and amenities. Inviting all people to integrally use the essential visitor support functions sends a strong message about belonging and equity. This section provides initiatives and guidelines to maximize accessibility across the system and is included as a starting point for developing more robust accessibility guidelines.

*“Universal design is a design that is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”*

*- Ron Mace*

## ORGANIZATIONAL STEPS:

- Complete/update the system’s ADA transition plan, in accordance with US Access Board’s Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) guidelines and information from other agencies and organizations (e.g., National Park Service, US Forest Service, State Parks, Minnesota State Council on Disabilities).
- Develop public-facing tracking to communicate progress being made to improve access.
- Conduct training to advance the efforts, streamline the provision of services, and to connect staff with resources.
- Build a team of internal and external experts that can help Dakota County navigate complex decisions and codes.

## UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATIONS:

- Engage groups and individuals living with disabilities to gain insight on their needs and interests.

- Provide information on the system’s accessibility improvements through a central accessibility webpage and in other public communications.
  - Include information on what parks will do to improve access in the future.
  - Consider virtual park tours to help visitors understand what to expect in each location.
  - Include information about when ADA is not possible and why.
  - Include a process for reporting maintenance and safety needs.

## PROJECT/PROGRAM/PLACE-BASED:

- Incorporate programs and services to serve a broad range of disabilities, where possible, including mobility, visual, hearing, and sensory needs.
- Ensure that visitor facilities are accessible and provide comparable experiences for park defining activities (e.g., buildings, picnic areas, water access points, beaches, play areas, access paths, camping, and viewing areas).
- Provide at least one accessible trail loop in every park that is close to primary visitor facilities and provides a natural immersion experience, such as loops around lakes or loops with scenic views.

Thompson County Park is currently the Dakota County Park in proximity to the most senior housing units in the county.

About 12 percent of groups visiting a Dakota County Park surveyed by Met Council had a resident with a disability.

## Dakota County Parks and Greenways in Proximity to Elderly and Disabled Populations

<b>Residents with an ambulatory difficulty</b>	River to River Greenway (7.2% of people within 1 mile)
	Spring Lake Park Reserve (4.7% of people within 3 miles)
<b>Residents with any other disabilities</b>	River to River Greenway (6.3% of people within 1 mile)
	Spring Lake Park Reserve (5.3% of people within 3 miles)
<b>Residents Age 65+</b>	River to River Greenway (27.5% of people within 1 mile)
	Spring Lake Park Reserve (17.4% of people within 3 miles)

**Exhibit 3.6, Proximity to Elderly and Disabled Populations Chart**





# IMPLEMENTATION

The Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas 2050 Vision Plan lays out a bold and transformative path for the future of the County's outdoor spaces. To bring this vision to life, a well-structured implementation strategy is essential: one that balances ambition with feasibility, leverages available resources, and fosters strong partnerships. This chapter outlines the key components necessary for translating long-term aspirations into actionable steps that will sustain and enhance Dakota County's parks, greenways, and natural areas for generations to come.

Successful implementation will require a combination of funding strategies, organizational capacity building, strategic partnerships, and clearly defined priorities. This plan identifies the multiple funding tools available to Dakota County for diverse and sustainable financial resources for land acquisition, park development, and ongoing maintenance. Also, as part of the financial equation, this chapter introduces the long-term opportunity of partnering with a philanthropic organization dedicated to securing private funding and fostering community investment in Dakota County's green spaces.

To maximize financial sustainability, the implementation strategy also explores a cost recovery model that aligns funding sources with park services while maintaining affordability and access. Expanding revenue opportunities such as concessions, programming, lodging, and rental services will further support the financial viability

of the system and enhance visitor experiences. At the same time, ensuring that the County's organizational structure is equipped to effectively manage and implement the vision will be crucial.

Establishing clear priorities will help Dakota County focus its efforts on projects and initiatives with the greatest impact guided by community needs, environmental benefits, and financial feasibility. Finally, this chapter concludes with priorities and next steps, outlining the actions needed for a thriving and resilient park system through 2050 and beyond.

## FUNDING TOOLS

Dakota County has historically and continues to apply a broad range of funding tools to its system of parks, greenways and natural areas. The following charts offer an overview of general funding sources (Exhibit 4.1). Specific state and federal funding opportunities can be found in Appendix C.

Exhibit 4.1 distinguishes between "sustainable" and "innovative" types of funding. Sustainable funding can be thought of as typical revenue streams that can be expected year-over-year even though the level of funding may vary from each. Innovative funding requires deliberate and dedicated pursuits, partnerships, and actions that go beyond the typical.



## DAKOTA COUNTY PARKS PROGRAMS

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
<b>Regional Funding</b>	Local	Sustainable	State funding (bonding, Legacy, ENRTF, etc) partially matched by Met Council and distributed to impl. agencies.	Land acquisition, capital investment, operations and maintenance.
<b>County Levy</b>	Local	Sustainable	Direct funding from Dakota County's general fund or special levies.	Operations, maintenance, and park development.
<b>Federal Grants and Programs</b>	Federal	Innovative	Federal grants for parks and recreation projects through NPS, Forest Service, and others.	Land acquisition, infrastructure, conservation.
<b>State Grants and Programs</b>	State	Innovative	Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, Minnesota DNR, etc.	Habitat restoration, park devel., trail expansion, historical preservation.
<b>Bond Measures</b>	Local	Innovative	Voter-approved bonds for major park natural resource and land conservation investments.	Major capital improvements, new park facilities, land conservation.
<b>Sponsor Recognition</b>	Local	Innovative	Corporate sponsorship of facilities or events (subject to legal and statutory review).	Signage, amenities, community events funding.
<b>Philanthropic Donations</b>	Public Private Partnership	Innovative	Contributions from individuals, foundations, or non-profits.	Cap. and conservation projects, youth programs, ed. initiatives.
<b>Program and User Fees</b>	Local	Sustainable	Rental fees, program fees.	Facility maintenance, event funding, staffing.
<b>Public/Private Corporate Partnerships</b>	Public Private Partnership	Innovative	Collaborations with businesses or non-profits for shared programs.	Recreational programming.
<b>Revenue-Generating Activities</b>	Local	Sustainable	Programs, classes, events, concessions, merchandise.	Supplemental funding for services and programs.
<b>Special Park District</b>	Local	Innovative	Transition from department of Dakota County to autonomous organization.	Full spectrum of agency expenses.

Exhibit 4.1, Core Funding Chart

## PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIP

The partnership with a philanthropic organization could enhance funding, engagement, and long-term sustainability. Agencies with philanthropic partners can experience benefits through private donations, grants, and sponsorships while fostering community involvement and stewardship.

A critical early decision in partnering with a philanthropic partner is determining the extent of direct engagement by Dakota County. Some agencies find success through direct formation and hands-on operational leadership, while others take an arms-length approach to the relationship with a not-for-profit specifically organized to support the mission of the park agency. The former may demand special legislative authority.

Either way, success will be built around shared values, common mission, and a deeply collaborative relationship. A formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) can define roles, expectations, and shared goals. Dakota County can provide expertise, project priorities, and logistical support, while the nonprofit secures funding, mobilizes volunteers, and builds long-term philanthropic relationships. Transparent communication and aligned objectives ensure efficiency and prevent conflicts over responsibilities. Philanthropic organizations leverage multiple revenue streams to support parks. These can include:

- **Individual Donations:** Annual giving programs, major gifts, and planned giving campaigns can create a steady funding source.
- **Corporate Sponsorships:** Local businesses may sponsor park events, trail restorations, or facility upgrades in exchange for recognition.
- **Grants:** Foundations and government entities offer grants for environmental conservation, recreational programs, and infrastructure projects.
- **Special Events and Campaigns:** Fundraising galas, community festivals, and crowdfunding

initiatives can generate significant contributions.

- **Membership Programs:** Offering tiered memberships with perks such as free event access, exclusive tours, or discounts on rentals can encourage ongoing support.

Beyond financial support, a philanthropic partner organization can drive volunteerism and community engagement. Organizing clean-up events, nature education programs, and citizen science, arts, and cultural initiatives strengthens public investment in park stewardship. Engaged volunteers often become donors, advocates, and long-term supporters of park initiatives.

A well-structured philanthropic partner organization could enhance Dakota County's ability to achieve its vision by securing a broader diversity of funding, engaging the community, and deepening a culture of stewardship. A mindful approach, strong partnerships, and transparent governance are key to success in the endeavor.



# COST RECOVERY

In recent years, park agencies across the United States have been rethinking their cost recovery models to prioritize equity and access. Traditionally, these models were designed to maximize revenue generation through user fees, partnerships, and sponsorships. However, as communities recognize the vital role parks play in community well-being, agencies are shifting to models that ensure access for all.

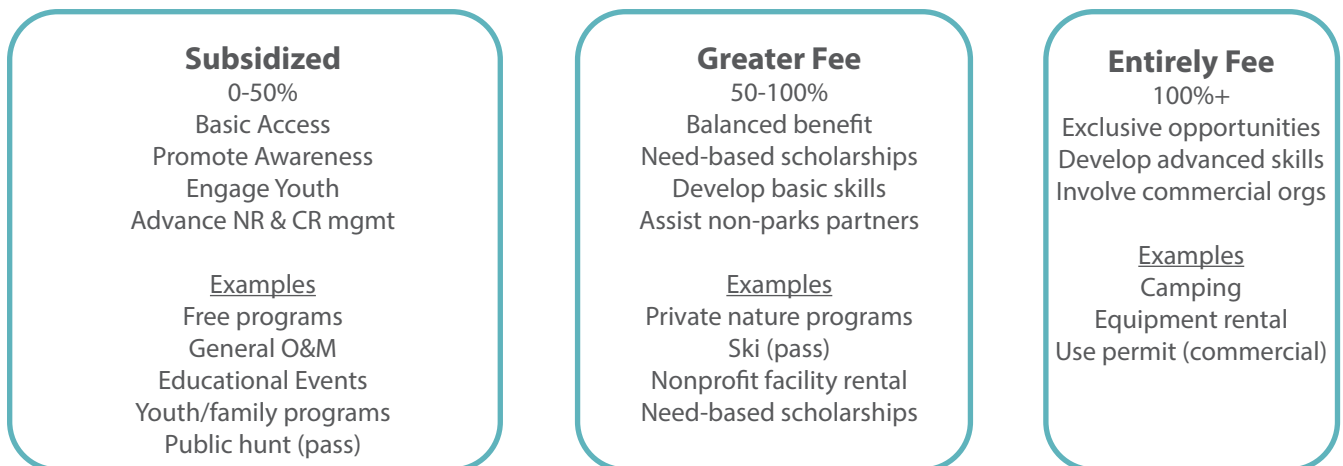
This newer approach to cost recovery acknowledges that parks facilities are public goods that should be available regardless of income, race, or geography. Rather than relying heavily on user fees, agencies are developing tiered pricing structures, sliding-scale fees, and scholarship programs to reduce financial barriers. Many are also reallocating funding toward communities with fewer resources, ensuring that historically marginalized populations receive fair access to high-quality recreational opportunities.

Another shift in cost recovery models involves diversifying funding sources to reduce dependence on user fees. Agencies are seeking increased public funding through general tax revenues, bonds, and grants to sustain parks as essential services. Philanthropic partnerships and corporate sponsorships are also being structured to directly support equity initiatives, such as free programming for targeted groups or investment in underfunded park infrastructure.

Data-driven decision-making is also playing a key role in this transformation. Many park agencies are using equity mapping tools to identify gaps in service and prioritize funding in areas where residents face financial or geographic barriers to accessing parks. This allows agencies to allocate resources where they are needed most, rather than distributing funding evenly without considering disparities.

Additionally, community engagement is becoming a cornerstone of equitable cost recovery. Agencies are involving community members in budgeting decisions, seeking input on fee structures, and ensuring that revenue-generating programs do not disproportionately burden some communities.

The transformation of cost recovery models to prioritize equity and access represents a fundamental shift in how park services are valued. Rather than over-emphasis on revenue-generating entities, parks are increasingly recognized as vital public assets that should be accessible to everyone. As this shift continues, the challenge will be balancing financial sustainability with the goal of ensuring that no one is excluded from the benefits of parks due to cost.



**Exhibit 4.2, Equity and Access Based Cost Recovery Framework**

# REVENUE GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Even in evolving approaches to cost recovery, revenue-generating activities remain an important subset of services. They are intended to generate at least as much revenue as the cost to provide them. They serve to buffer challenging financial times, bolster operating efficiency, and enhance visitor experience. Most importantly, they diversify revenue streams to support the broader mission and vision. Revenue generating activities can:

## GENERATE AND DIVERSIFY REVENUE

- Special use permit fees: Access charge to premium facilities, campgrounds, amenities, and select activities.
- Membership programs and passes: Offering annual or seasonal memberships that provide benefits like discounts or exclusive access.
- Facility rentals: Renting out venues such as cabins, lodges, pavilions, and amphitheaters for weddings, corporate events, vendor fairs, open houses, or gatherings.
- Concessions and retail: Partnering with vendors or operating in-house concessions for food, beverages, and merchandise. Examples of partnering with vendors include food truck profit sharing and authorized catering contracts.
- Guided tours: Offering nature-based tours in topics such as wildlife, ecology, or archeology.
- Equipment rental: Offering equipment for outdoor skills and adventure experiences.
- Eco-tourism and adventure recreation: Providing revenue-generating activities like ropes courses, kayaking, rock climbing, and biking.
- Public-private partnerships (P3s): Funding infrastructure projects, operating attractions, or managing services.
- Philanthropy: Engaging with corporations and nonprofit foundations to support park initiatives through donations or grants.

## INCREASE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND COST RECOVERY

- Implementing a cost-recovery pricing structure, where user fees contribute to maintaining and improving facilities.
- Optimizing staff allocation based on seasonal demand to reduce labor costs.
- Leveraging technology (e.g., automated kiosks, digital ticketing, and reservation systems) to streamline operations.
- Using data analytics to track visitor trends, identify popular services, and adjust pricing models accordingly.

## ENHANCE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND ASSET OPTIMIZATION

- Expanding or modernizing accommodations like cabins, lodges, and campgrounds.
- Upgrading trails, restrooms, parking facilities, and visitor centers to attract more visitors.
- Implementing green infrastructure projects, such as solar-power and eco-friendly transit.
- Repurposing underutilized spaces for new attractions and amenities.

## ENHANCE MARKETING, BRANDING, AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Digital marketing campaigns, social media promotions, and optimized websites.
- Loyalty programs, referral discounts, and seasonal promotions to encourage repeat visits.
- Community partnerships with local businesses and tourism agencies to cross-promote attractions.
- Leveraging storytelling and branding to highlight unique aspects of the park, such as historical significance, wildlife conservation, or adventure tourism.

Leveraging innovative revenue streams, strategic investments, and efficient operations through revenue generating activities can deepen a healthy balance between community service, conservation, and fiscal responsibility.

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

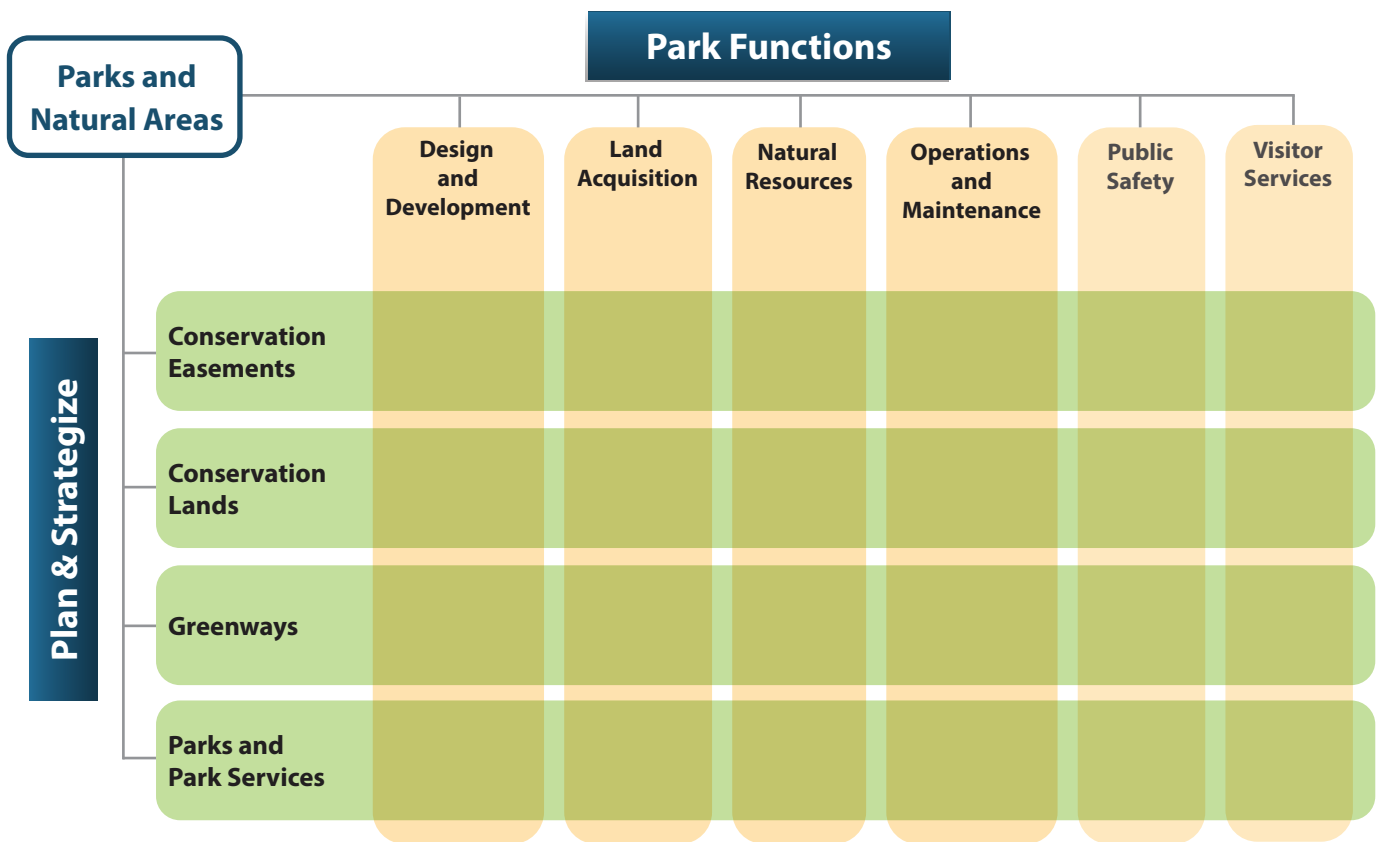
Dakota County’s structural approach to operating parks and natural areas plays a crucial role in its ability to effectively manage and maintain resources, deliver services, and fulfill its mission. The organizational structure into which Dakota County Parks have evolved is fairly dispersed across multiple arms of county government. While Dakota County manages it amazingly well, it is possible that a more consolidated organizational structure would lead to greater and more efficient achievement of the 2050 Vision and organizational mission. The benefits and drawbacks of moving to consolidated organizational structure is something the organization may choose to explore further.

A consolidated organizational structure or even the creation of a special park district where all park operations are unified can offer significant advantages. By centralizing leadership, improving coordination, and streamlining decision-making, this approach enhances efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. A unified structure fosters better resource management, strengthens

strategic planning, and ensures a consistent visitor experience. Ultimately, consolidating operations could empower the agency to operate as a cohesive entity, better fulfilling its mission. Some key areas of benefit include:

- Streamlined operations and efficiency
- Improved budgeting and resource allocation
- More coherent strategic planning and long-term visioning
- More consistently exceptional visitor experience
- A more effective, resilient, and visionary system
- Readiness for transition to a Special Park District should that become desired

A consolidated structure could strengthen day-to-day operations, ensuring that it remains financially sustainable, highly valued by the public, and true to its mission.



**Potential Structural Realignment**

Exhibit 4.3, Potential Structural Realignment

## NEXT STEPS

The vision, goals, and strategies in the 2050 Vision Plan are aspirational and general. Detailed tactics, along with metrics and targets needed to operationalize the vision, goals, and strategies will be identified in updated five-year plans for Visitor Services, Natural Resources, and Greenways. Nonetheless, there are key steps that are needed to achieve the Vision Plan. Some, like taking care

of what we have, are a continuation of what Dakota County Parks is currently doing and are on-going. Others, like developing a sustainable funding plan for the Parks will lead to new practices and programs. Exhibit 4.4 identifies the key steps for the first 10 years of the plan to advance goals.

## NEXT STEPS

Next Steps	Status (continuation, expansion, new)	Goals Supported
<b>Land and Natural Systems Conservation</b>		
Update Natural Resource Management System Plan (NRMSP) every 5 years. In the update of the 2017 plan, incorporate tactics and metrics from the 2020 Land Conservation Plan	continuation	A, I, J
Implement NRMSP 5-year work plan and deliver 5-year CIP	continuation	A, J
Prepare Natural Resource Management Plans(NRMP) for all greenways	continuation	A, I, J, L, O
Work with land conservation easement landowners to develop Natural Resource Management Plans	continuation	A, I, J, O
Update Natural Resource Management Plans for parks and greenways every 10 years	continuation	A, I, J, O
Develop Natural Resource Management Plans for County Park Conservation Areas	new	A, I, J
Use preliminary Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs) as a framework for protecting and connecting natural areas and habitat	continuation	I, J, L
Employ Indigenous experts and apply Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that stewards healthy water and land	new	A, G, J, L
Seek legislative authority to own land for conservation purposes	new	I
Help landowners to protect park inholdings, greenway corridors, conservation focus areas, and groundwater recharge areas	continuation	A, H, J, L

**Exhibit 4.4,** Next Steps

## NEXT STEPS

Next Steps	Status (continuation, expansion, new)	Goals Supported
<b>Operations</b>		
Maintain high-quality programs, facilities, and grounds	continuation	A, B, J
Incorporate Vision Plan goals and strategies into daily operations and track implementation/achievement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIP Development</li> <li>• Design Process</li> <li>• Long-range planning</li> <li>• Annual programs/events</li> <li>• Hiring of personal</li> <li>• Goal tracking</li> </ul>	new	A - O
Update the 2010 Greenway Guidebook: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codify greenway collaborative cost-share</li> <li>• Establish level of County support for local trail loops and greenways connections</li> <li>• Establish guidelines to provide support for nature-based recreation facilities in city parks along greenways and local trails and trail loops connecting to greenways</li> </ul>	expansion	H, L
Update the Visitor Services Plan every 5 years	continuation	A, B, D, E, F, G, J, L
Implement the Visitor Services Plan	continuation	A, B, D, E, F, G, J, L
Develop a Capital Replacement Program	new	A, C
Develop a staffing model that addresses the shift from seasonal to year-round services	new	A, C, N
Evaluate benefits of organizational structural changes from operational consolidation to the creation of a Special Park District that would improve system service delivery	new	A, B, N
Develop a strategy to evaluate and add operations staff along with system growth and development	new	N
<b>Park and Greenway Development</b>		
Deliver the 5-year CIP and complete current projects	continuation	C, D, H, I, J, K
Develop phase two ADA transition plan for parks and greenways to improve universal access to services/amenities and key programs beyond minimum ADA requirements	new	C, D
Continue to update park long-range and greenway plans every 10 years	continuation	D, F, H, I, O

## NEXT STEPS

Next Steps	Status (continuation, expansion, new)	Goals Supported
Develop long-range plans for County Park Conservation Areas	new	H, I
Implement park long-range plans	continuation	C, D, F
Continue to implement the acceleration of the 2030 Greenway Vision	continuation	F, H, L
Continue to incorporate self-guided interpretive features in parks and greenways	continuation	A, K
Incorporate new park search areas and greenway corridors into the Metropolitan Council Regional Parks Policy Plan	new	A, H
Prepare land acquisition plan for new parks	new	H, L
Study options for bringing Thompson County Park into the Regional Park System	new	H, L
Prepare long-range plans for greenway search corridors	expansion	A, H, L
Prepare interpretive plans for each park and greenway	continuation	E, K
Conduct Traditional Cultural Places surveys, develop plans for Indigenous sites within the park system	expansion	G, L
Prepare Public Art Framework	new	D, K, O
<b>Partnership</b>		
Partner with health-related organizations to integrate education, safety, and wellness to park environments	new	F, L
Work with outreach partners to engage the public, host targeted programs, and build relationships with under-represented groups	expansion	L
Partner with environmental stewardship organizations (e.g., watershed organizations) to restore and enhance natural areas	continuation	E, F, H, J, L, M
Invest in municipal and other agency partnerships to implement new parks and greenways	continuation	H, L
Partner with cities and private landowners to restore land in greenways and conservation focus areas	continuation	A, I, L
Partner with Indigenous communities and organizations to establish consultation protocols and collaborative processes	new	G, L

## NEXT STEPS

Next Steps	Status (continuation, expansion, new)	Goals Supported
<b>Funding</b>		
Develop a sustainable funding plan to establish, build, and operate parks, greenways, and natural systems	new	M
Partner with a trusted philanthropic organization and/or seek legislative change to allow the County to establish a non-profit philanthropic organization	new	M
Continue to pursue grant funding for capital projects and operations	continuation	M
Continue to pursue public / private / corporate partnerships in support of enhanced programming and capital projects	continuation	M
Evaluate benefits of creating a special parks district	new	M
Explore options for a park referendum	new	M
Increase revenue-generating programs and facilities	expansion	M

## TRACKING PROGRESS AND PLAN UPDATES

To bring the 2050 vision to life, progress should be periodically evaluated. In addition, new trends, challenges, or opportunities will compel plan updates and amendments. Periodic evaluation of plan progress and undertaking plan updates when needed reflect commitment to keeping Dakota County’s parks, greenways, and natural systems relevant and healthy for generations to come.

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Visit [www.co.dakota.mn.us](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us) to find out more  
about Dakota County Parks