

APPENDIX A PRECEDENTS

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Hennepin County, MN

Three Rivers is one of the nine implementing agencies in the Twin Cities metro area. The district's parks and greenways span throughout Hennepin County, MN, and into neighboring counties. Their mission is to "promote environmental stewardship through recreation and education in a natural resources-based system." They are leaders in the field, particularly in visitor services.

Three Rivers provides free programs, fee assistance for fee programs, signature events, summer camps, equipment rental, and more. Three Rivers bases their use of fees on whether services and amenities are basic services or whether they go beyond basic. Many programs are free, however some programs are expensive, such as Breakfast at Gale Woods Farm and Kayaking Essentials. There are programs for families and youth, concerts and play performances, fitness classes, and art programs. Each of the parks has dedicated staff on site to assist park visitors. Three Rivers also engages with community through community festivals, teen volunteer opportunities, and offering interpreter services.

STAFF

Currently, Three Rivers has 400 full time staff members, including visitor services staff for all facilities and maintenance and outdoor education

staff for all parks. Staff presence depends on the park; some parks have no staff and are served by a nearby park (in clusters). Natural Resources staff serve district-wide and are not stationed in specific parks. There are also seasonal/temporary staff and 90+ maintenance staff throughout the district.

FUNDING SOURCES

Their funding sources include:

1. Met Council Grants
2. General Obligation Bonds
3. Revenue Bonds
4. General Obligation Revenue Bonds
5. Federal, State, Local, and Private Grants and Donations
6. A Park District Fund for Land Acquisition

Revenue for the District comes 80-85% from property taxes from suburban Hennepin County. Grants and state funds, as well as some revenue from campgrounds and cross country skiing, encompass the rest of the revenue stream.

THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- Dakota County can look into developing a Park Ambassadors program like Three Rivers has been using to increase equitable access to outdoor recreation.



COST RECOVERY MODEL

There are no fees for programs or services which benefit the community, such as park access, biking and hiking, visitor centers, play areas, picnic areas, swimming, and events. Fees cover partial cost for swim ponds, outdoor education programming, cross-country skiing, archery, horse trails, and camping. Fees cover the majority of the cost for tubing, equipment rental, and recreation lessons. Fees cover the full cost for rental space, concessions, and golf/leagues. Market rate fees apply for enterprise, merchandise, concessions, and space rental.

Three Rivers categorizes their fee structure by which offerings are introductory versus specialized (see below).



Image of Three Rivers staff engaging with the community at 50th & France, in Edina, MN.



Image of a performance at Silverwood Onstage.

Introductory Offerings: Grow & Enhance

- 
Play Areas
- 
Camp
- 
Fish
- 
Nature Education
- 
Picnic Areas
- 
Nature Viewing
- 
Paddle
- 
Sled
- 
Snowshoe
- 
Swim
- 
Hiking Trails
- 
Bike Trails

Introductory includes recreational offerings that are basic, easily accessible and serve as a gateway for new visitors. Very few barriers (skill, cost, location) should exist for people's participation and enjoyment.

Specialized Offerings: Maintain

- 
Horse Trails
- 
Disc Golf
- 
Alpine Sports
- 
Formal Gardens
- 
Golf
- 
Historic Places
- 
Archery
- 
Motorized Boat Launches
- 
Mountain Bike Trails
- 
Dog Off-leash Areas
- 
Nordic Ski Trails
- 
Snowmobile Trails

Specialized includes recreational offerings that may require an additional level of skill, specific equipment, participation fees and generally serve more advanced visitors.

FROGTOWN FARM

St. Paul, MN

Frogtown Farm was founded as a community-led initiative in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, the City of St. Paul, and the Wilder Foundation. 13 acres of land were secured to form a natural area, recreation area, and an urban demonstration farm (5.5 acres). The farm is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Food is distributed via local community groups to about 2,000 residents annually. The non-profit also engages the community with education events and collaborates with Saint Paul Public Schools and local recreation centers. Frogtown Farm hosts arts, culture, and wellness events like film nights, celebrations, and events for young children.

Revenue for the farm comes from foundation grants, private nonprofit grants, individual donations, and corporate contributions. Volunteers contribute with regular farm operations, supporting events, and on environmental initiatives.

SUPPORTERS

Frogtown Farm supporters include:

- Lakewinds Food Co-op
- University of MN

- MN Department of Agriculture
- Good Food Access Fund
- Elmer L. & Eleanor J. Anderson Foundation
- HRK Foundation
- Capitol Region Watershed District
- Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration
- Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation
- Blue Cross Blue Shield Minnesota
- Compeer Financial
- Saint Paul Garden Club
- UNFI Foundation

Revenue for the District comes 80-85% from property taxes from suburban Hennepin County. Grants and state funds, as well as some revenue from campgrounds and cross country skiing, encompass the rest of the revenue stream.

THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- What scale of food production does Parks want to incorporate into the system?
- Does Dakota County Parks want to collaborate with Indigenous leaders to incorporate foraging



Image of farm employees with canned vegetables.



Image of community members volunteering at the farm.

FOREST PRESERVE OF DUPAGE COUNTY

DuPage County, IL

Forest Preserve of DuPage County stewards 26,000 acres of land to preserve the flora, fauna, and scenic beauty of these natural areas. The Preserve works with landowners to protect acres through conservation easements. Preserve lands contain 175 miles of trails and 60 forest preserves, with 5.5 annual visitors.

The Forest Preserve District restores habitat in prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. They use prescription burns, selective clearing, and have a native plant nursery. The Forest Preserve District is working to recover the Blanding's turtle and Hine's emerald dragonfly. At the Urban Stream Research Center, the Forest Preserve District works to augment native freshwater mussels. The Forest Preserve District also manages 1,100 acres of aquatic habitats such as lakes, streams, and rivers.

The Forest Preserve implements master plan projects that are part of their 2019 Master Plan, such as capital and habitat restoration projects. Completed projects include solar studies, creek restoration, trails, and channel stabilization. Currently the Preserve is restoring savanna, oak, woods, and grove.

In addition to conservation projects, the Preserve provides outdoor recreation opportunities like

dog areas, picnicking, boating, hiking trails, camping, fishing, golf, archery, and winter activities like cross-country skiing and snow tubing. There are also day camps and group programs.

Opportunities for the public to support the Preserve include volunteering, donating as a Friend of the Forest Preserve, or donating as a Community Partner (for organizations and corporations). Volunteer programs include restoration workdays, assisting at the Equestrian Center, assisting staff at the Nature Education Center, assisting at Kline Creek Farm, assisting with natural resources, and a volunteer ranger program.

FUNDING SOURCES

The Forest Preserve District is funded by a property tax, grants, donations, and user fees. 67% of funding comes from taxes, with fees providing for 10%, 9% from investments, 6% intergovernmental funding, and 8% other funding sources.

THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- What is needed for Dakota County to expand conservation efforts?
- How can Dakota County improve volunteer stewardship?

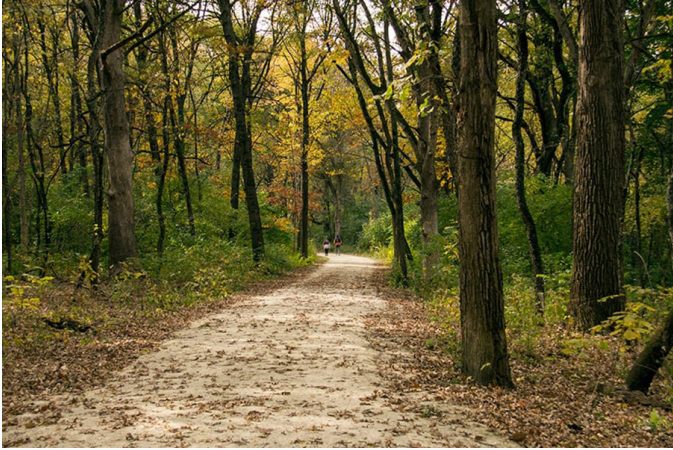


Image of Blackwell in Warrenville, IL.



Image of eastern Tiger Swallowtail at East Branch.



GATHERING PLACE

Tulsa, OK

Voted Best City Park 2024 by USA TODAY, Gathering Place is a 100-acre park home to five acres of imaginative playgrounds, a skate park, water features, urban gardens, and more. The George Kaiser Family Foundation sought to create a welcoming natural space along the Arkansas River and contributed the largest donation to a city park in history. The park was designed by landscape architects Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates and Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects. Crossland Construction Company completed the construction in 2018.

Attractions include: an adventure playground, boathouse, splash pad, water features, amphitheater, sports courts, biking trail, Slide Vale, Swing Hill, Wetland Gardens, Sky Garden, Willow Beach, Pine Valley, and nature trails. Other unique experiences include wellness opportunities, commissioned art pieces, and dining facilities. The park also offers cultural performances, events, and festivals.

Sustainability practices were integrated into the park, including sustainable water management, automated LED lighting, and a land bridge over Riverside Drive for guests and animals. The park has over 400 species of plants, many of which are native. There are also sixteen acres of prairie on site that attract pollinators.

Free educational programming is provided at the park, including story time and STEAM-based activities. One of the highlight educational programs is Explore & Imagine, sponsored by AEP and the Public Service Company of Oklahoma. A noteworthy event in this series is Tiny Tulsa, where the boathouse is transformed into an inclusive play area for young children. It features a mini farmer's market, construction truck, post office, medical office, art studio, library, and park. The park also partnered with KultureCity to provide features that assist guests with sensory needs, such as sensory bags, a quiet space, and staff training.

FUNDING SOURCES

Gathering Place was created in large part by a private gift of \$350 million from the George Kaiser Family Foundation. Dozens of families and businesses have also donated to the park, totaling \$465 million in donations.

THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- Can Dakota County partner with local corporations to fund creative and engaging interpretive / cultural programming?



Image of charlie's Water Mountain feature at Gathering Place.



Image of father and daughter at Tiny Tulsa event.



Image of Glocal Gatherings event and commissioned mural at Gathering Place

ROSE KENNEDY GREENWAY

Boston, MA

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway was birthed after the elevated Central Artery highway relocated to underground. The Greenway was created as a joint effort by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Boston, and civic and community organizations. The park, which opened in 2008, connects neighborhoods together and the city to its waterfront. Though only 1.5 miles long, its location in the heart of downtown Boston brings nature into the city and provides a place for people to gather outdoors. The Greenway Conservancy is the non-profit that manages the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

The most notable aspect of the Greenway is their cultivation of public art. The Conservancy's Public Art Program brings contemporary art to the public through free, temporary exhibitions. The program gives artists opportunities to exhibit work. Currently there are five pieces being exhibited along the Greenway. Additionally, the ARTbeat Series offers free public programming like live music, festivals, a farmer's market, and opening celebrations for art pieces.

In addition to the art and art events, the Greenway is made vibrant by fitness classes, food trucks,

fountains/water features/splash pads, and beer gardens.

FUNDING SOURCES

- Most of the park's budget comes from private sources.
- Some of their revenue comes from the City, BID (Business Improvement District) funds, and from MassDOT.

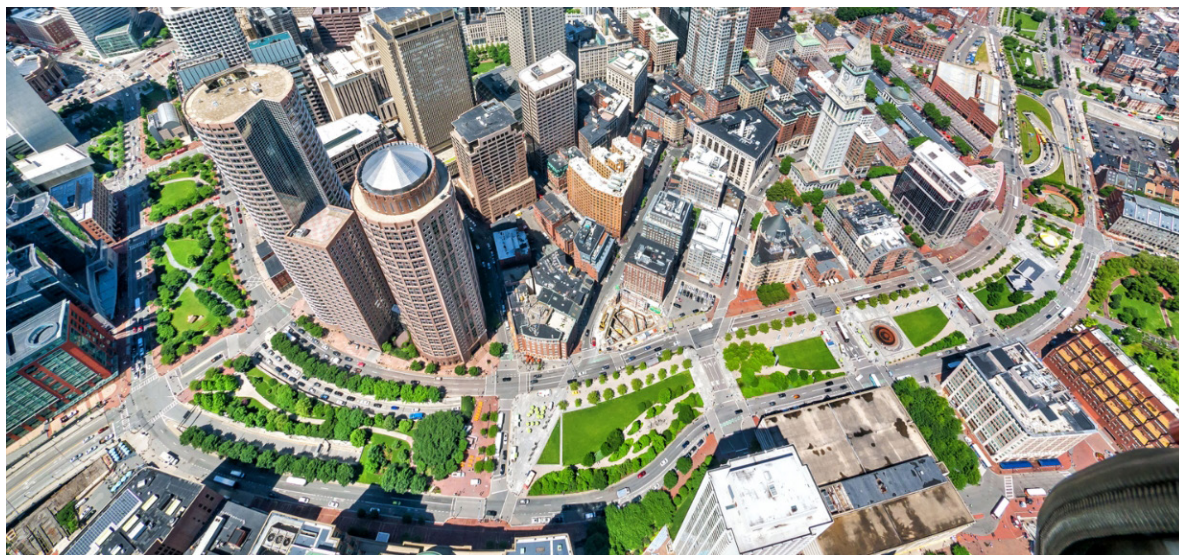
THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- Learn more about the Conservancy's process for commissioning artists.



*Image of Tuh'maġatipi ("Beehive" in Dakota) by Erin Genia.
Close up of "Beehive."*

*Image of Year of the Dragon project by Ponnapa Prakkamakul.
Musical element on Year of the Dragon.*



SCIOTO AUDUBON METRO PARK

Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks,
Columbus, OH

Once a blighted brownfield, Scioto Audubon is now an oasis for wildlife and birds in the city of Columbus. The park encompasses 119 acres and is located along the banks of the Scioto River. The City of Columbus, Ohio Audubon, and Columbus Metro Parks worked in partnership to create the park.

The signature activities of the park are rock climbing and an obstacle course. Other activities available include biking, hiking, boating, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, picnicking, sledding, and a nature center.

The Scioto Fest is a two-day festival annually which brings food, drinks, and local music to the park. A climbing competition is part of the festival, which is free and all ages, with prizes awarded. Free camping is also allowed on site during the event. There will be 32 vendors at the event in 2024, including businesses offering counseling services, photography, art, and doggy treats. Parks staff will be teaching kayaking and climbing workshops at the event as well.

FUNDING SOURCES

- Scioto Fest is sponsored in 2024 by Land Grant

Brewing, Nocterra Brewing Co., and Friends of Metro Parks.

THINGS WE CAN FOLLOW UP ON:

- How can signature events be introduced in Dakota County Parks in ways that preserve conservation efforts?
- How can Parks work with vendors to generate revenue?



Image of Climbing walls at Scioto Audubon.
Image of Park visitor scaling the climbing walls.

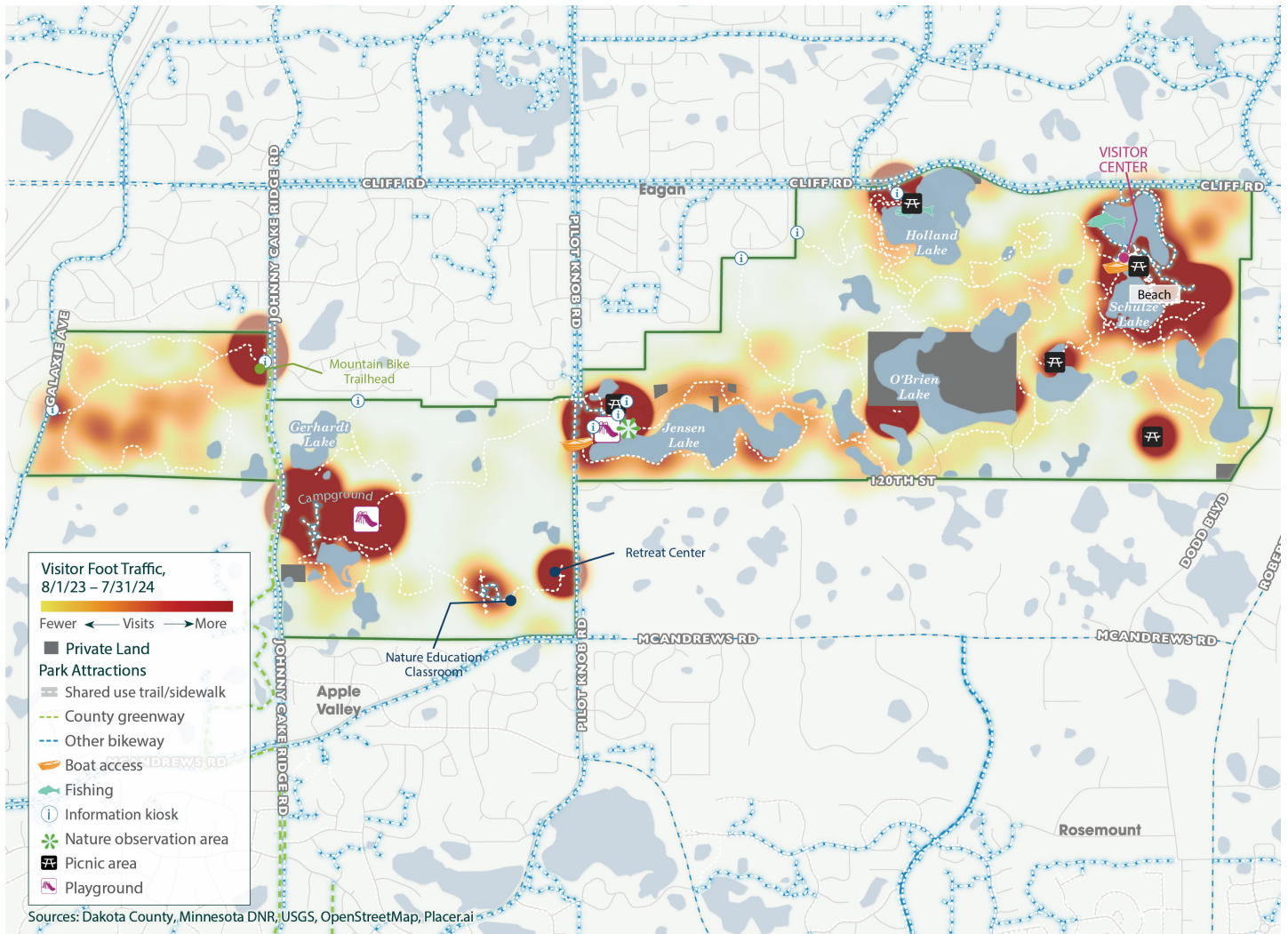
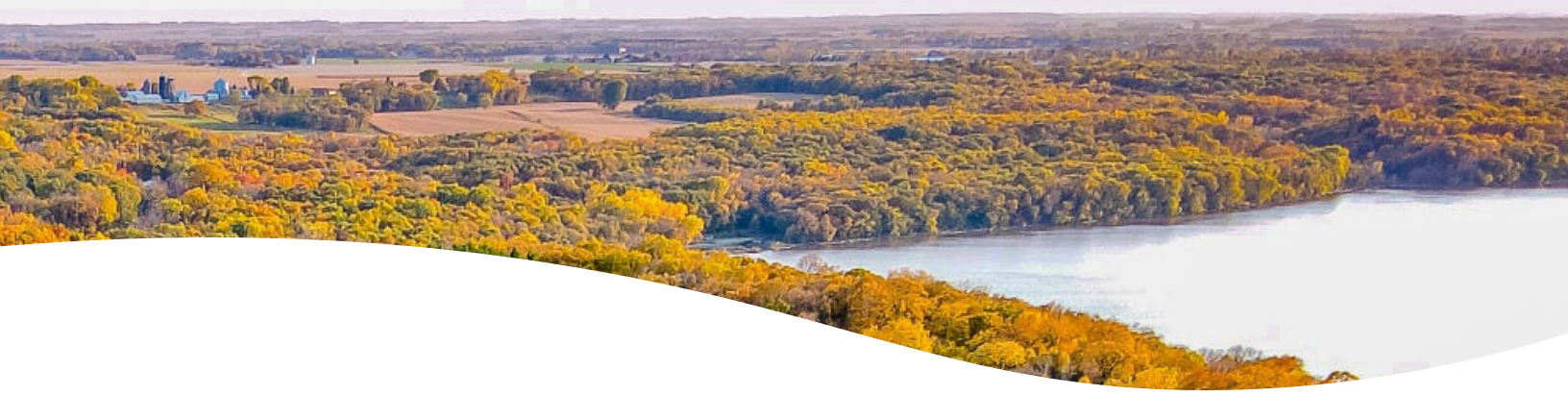
Image of water tower at the park.
Image of park visitor exercising on the log run at the obstacle course.



APPENDIX A ANALYSIS

USE AND VISITORSHIP

- Visitor patterns demonstrate that the vast majority of time spent by visitors is in relatively concentrated areas. In addition to singular park destinations (picnic areas, playgrounds, campgrounds, etc), shared use trails, bikeways and open space areas within each park see significant foot traffic as well.
- Visitor dwell times of 1.4+ hours, including at Thompson with the densest nearby competition, suggest amenities and programs are meeting needs and wants.
- Thompson and Lebanon Hills draw the most visitors who live in close proximity to the parks. Byllesby and Miesville draw from a broader geography, while Whitetail Woods, Spring Lake Park and Dakota Woods fall somewhere in between.
- Annual visits to regional trails in Dakota County increased 85% from 2018-2023, suggesting increasing leveraging of network effects.
- Program registration data suggests travel trends of participants by individual facility. The Schaar's Bluff Trailhead, Rock Island Swing Bridge, many individual sites within Lebanon Hills, and others appear to be regional destinations for those looking to participate in County park programs. Overall, 12%-16% of registrants are from the respective park's ZIP code; the balance are traveling longer distances.



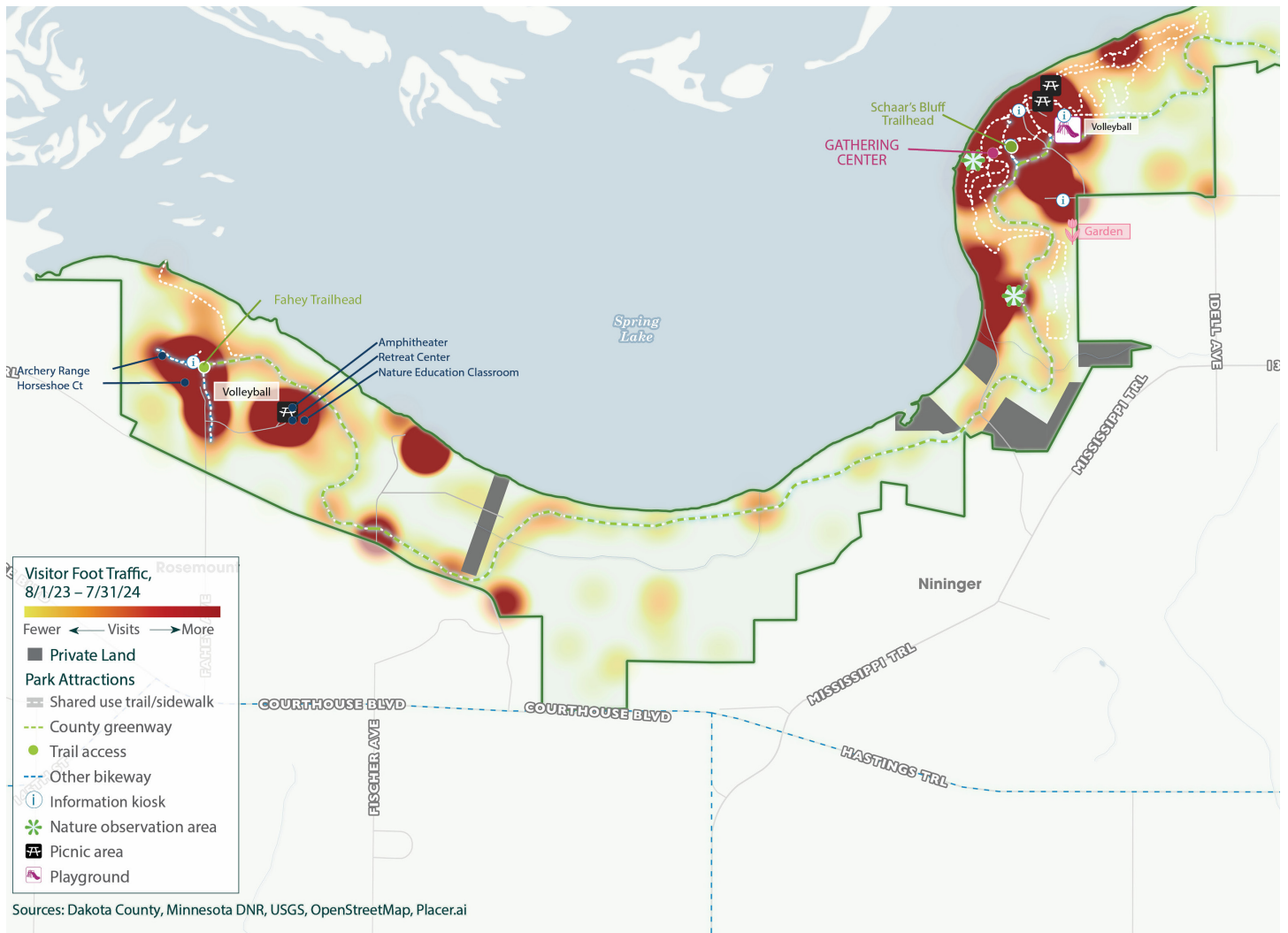
Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship continued



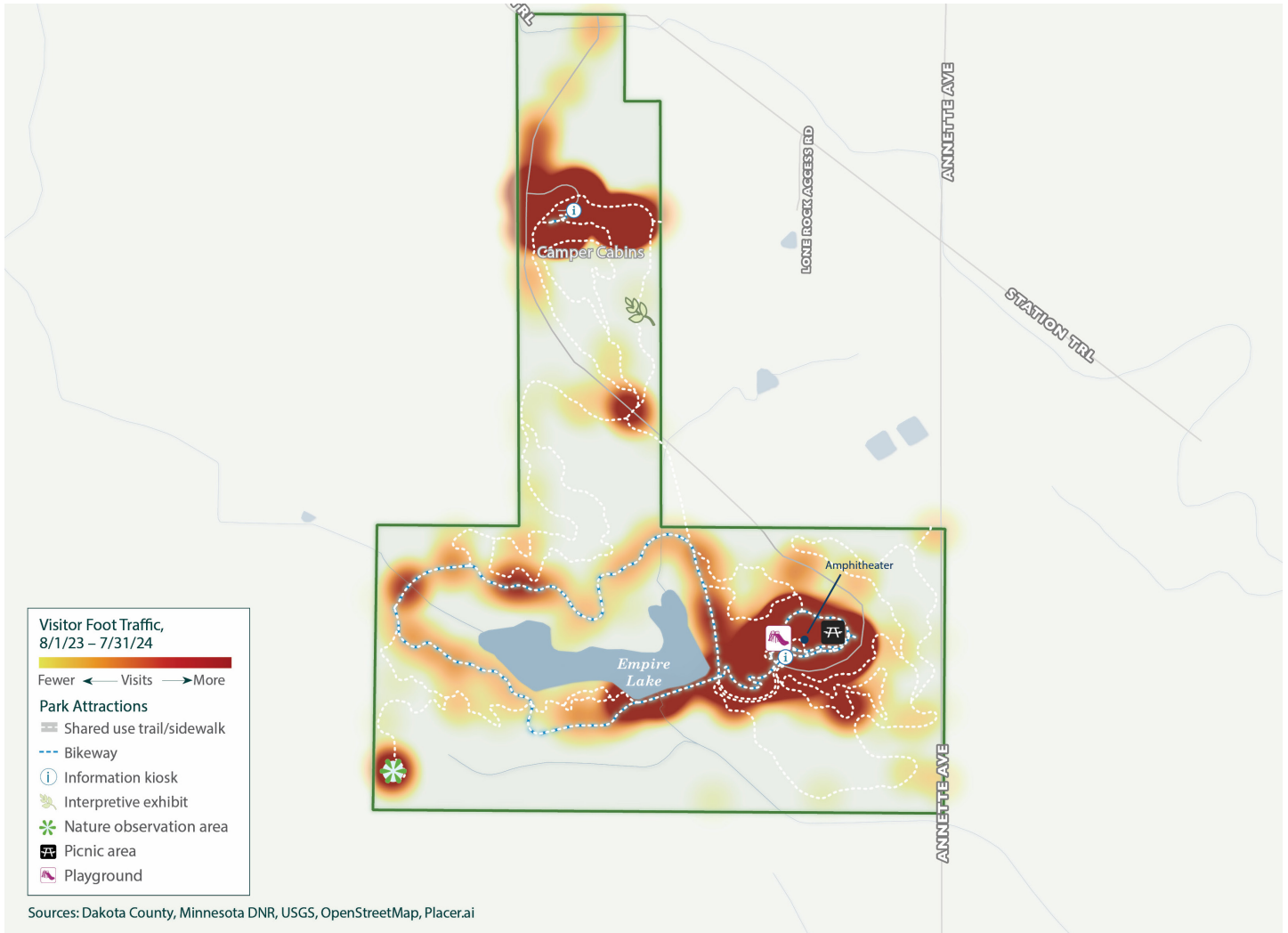
Thompson County Park Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship continued



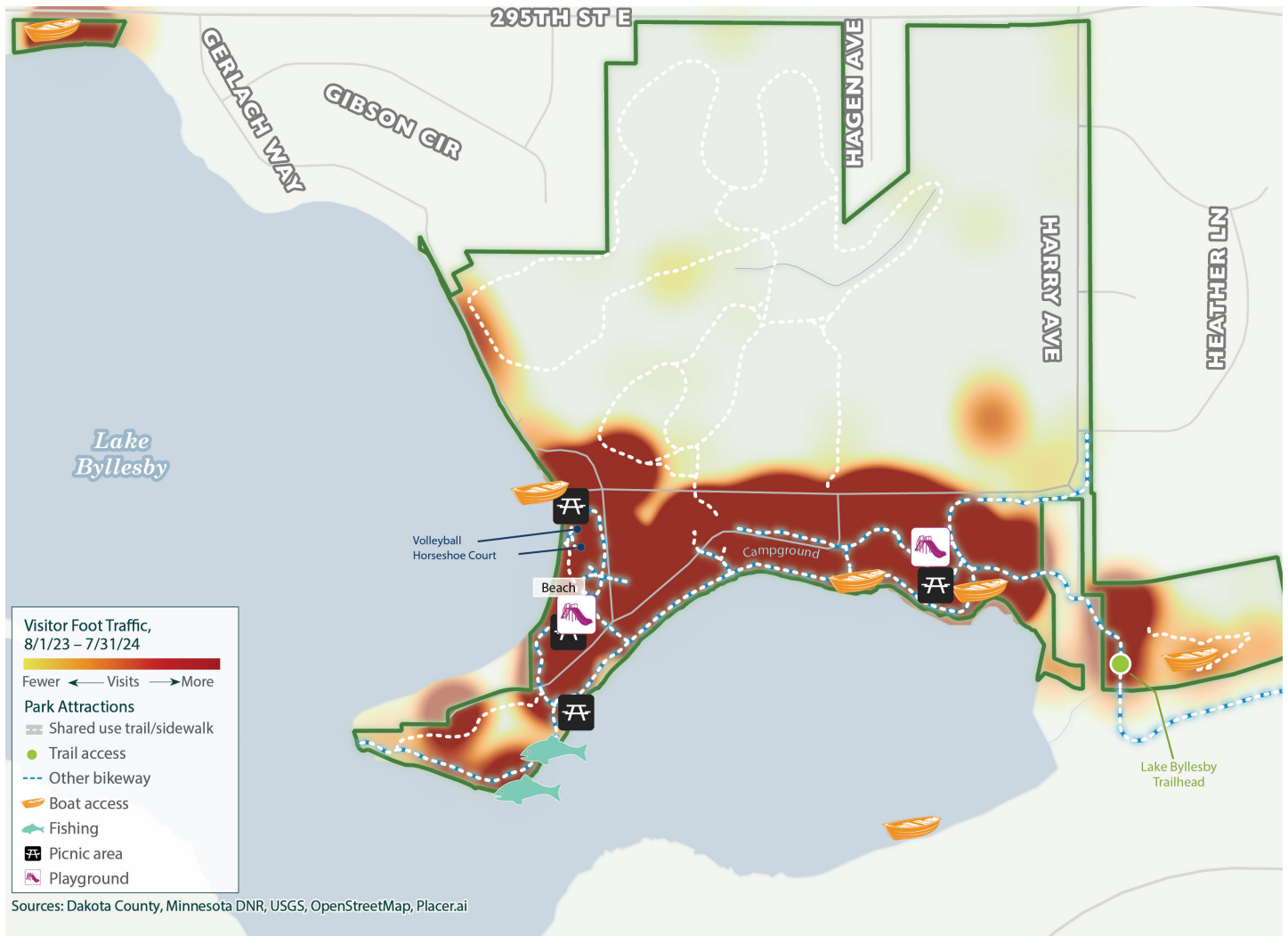
Spring Lake Park Reserve Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship *continued*



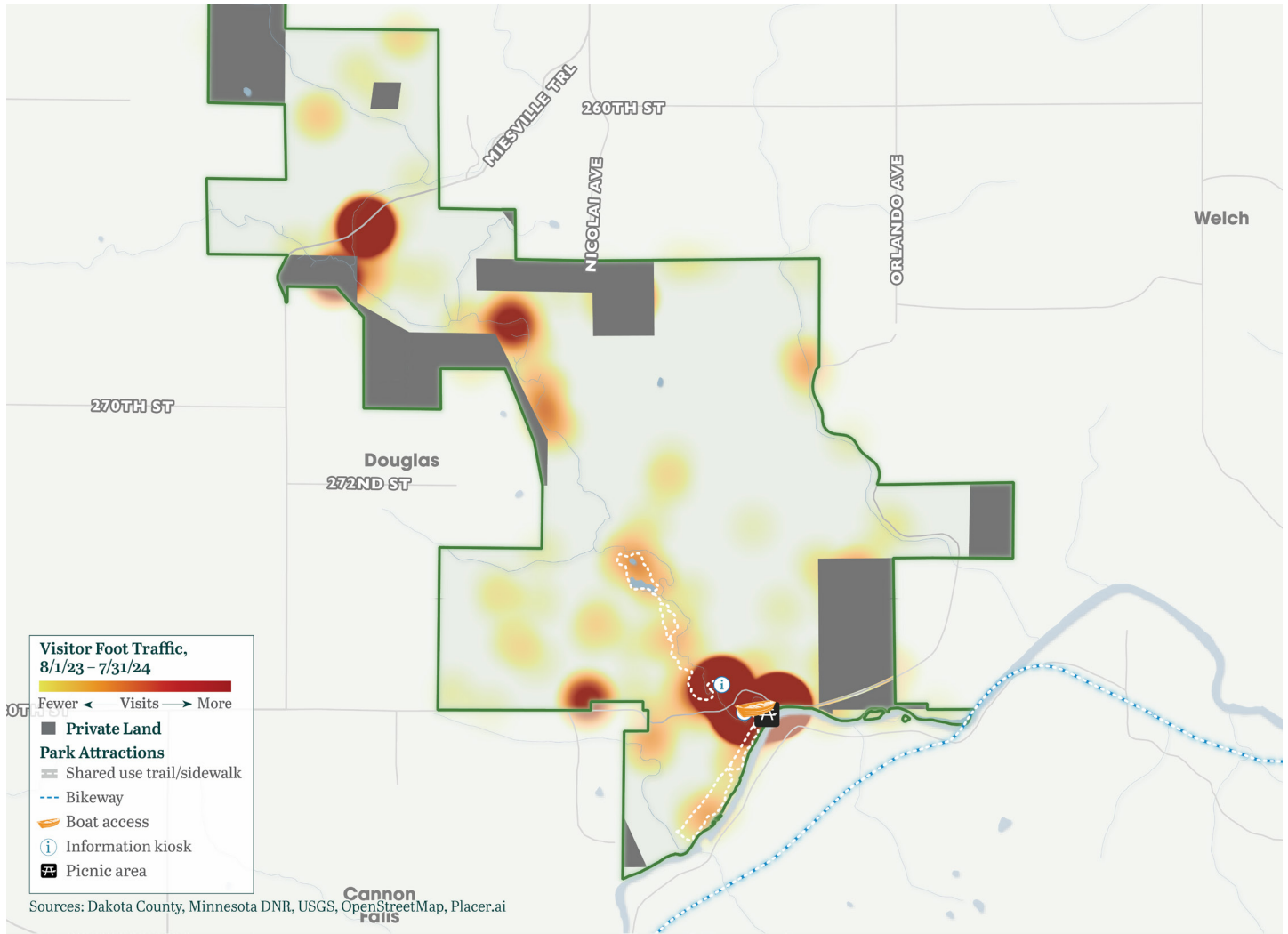
Whitetail Woods Regional Park Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship continued



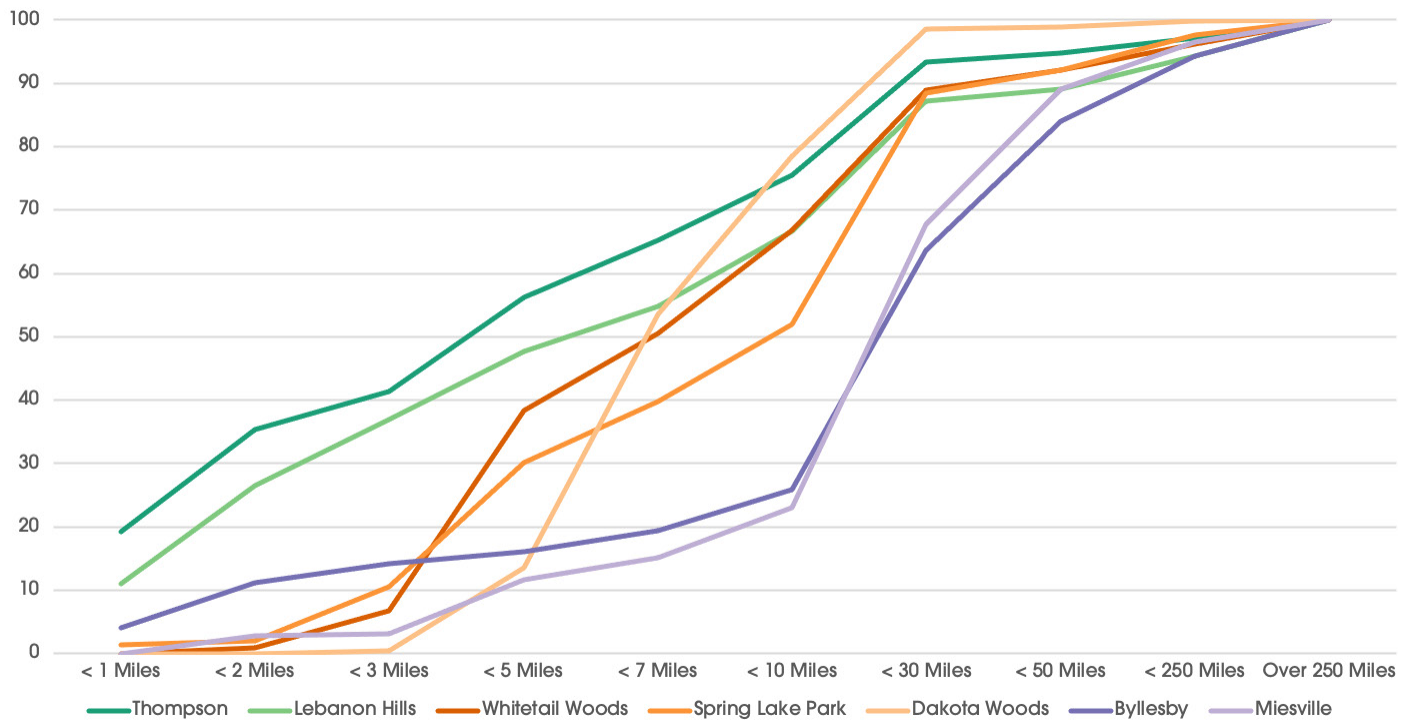
Lake Byllesby Regional Park Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship *continued*



Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Visitor Hot Spots

Use and Visitorship continued



How Far Park Visitors Travel from Home (Cumulative Percentage by Park), 2023–2024

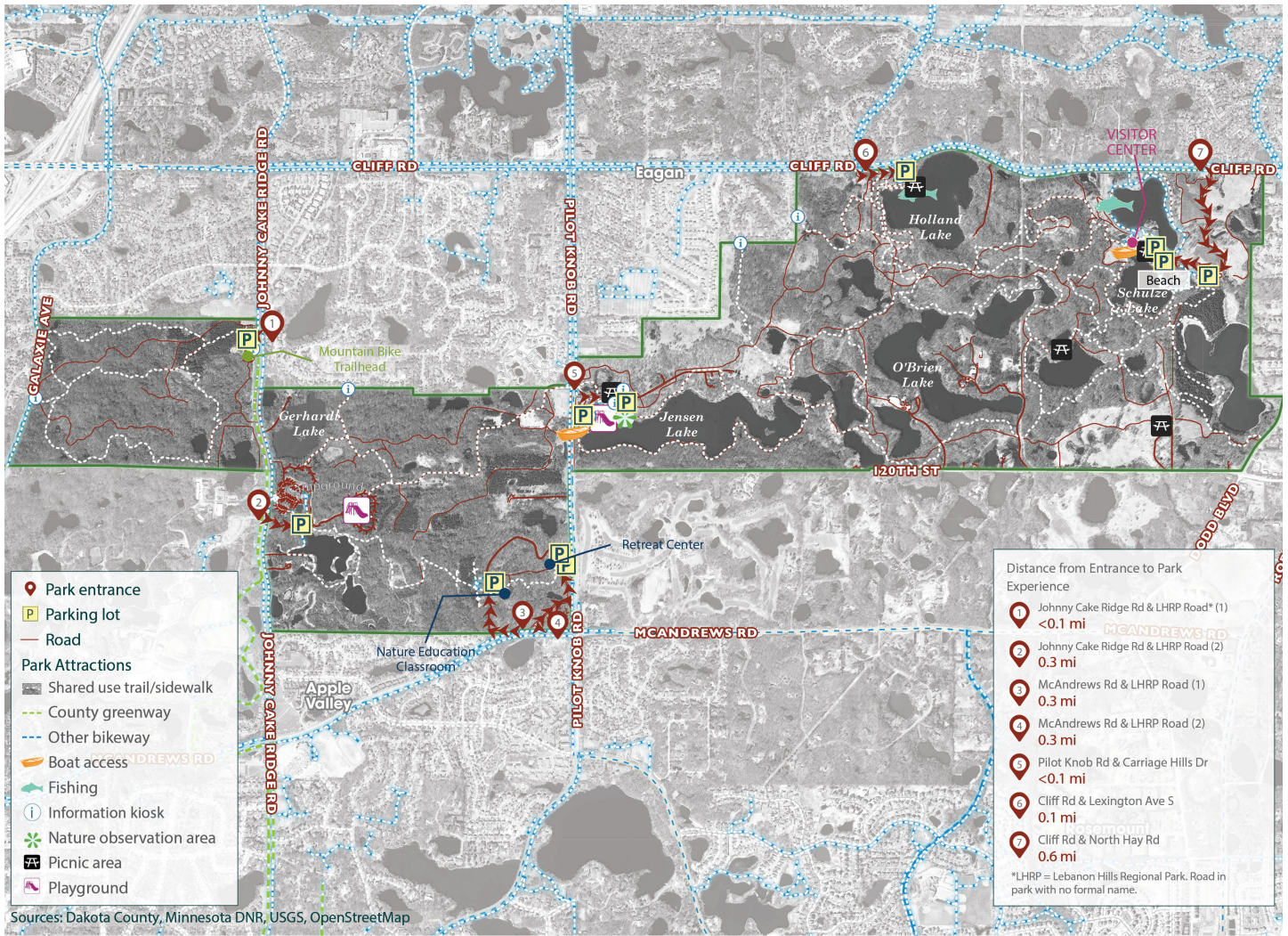
ACCESS

- The distance a visitor must travel from a park entrance to experience the park's offerings varies park to park; as a result, visitors may not see amenities from outside of park spaces. While many attractions are concentrated adjacent to car parking areas, areas further into park interiors that may be accessible only on foot or bike may offer more natural and open space.
- Park assets are more concentrated in areas with vast majority of current and projected population, and planned sewer infrastructure.

- Access to acreage of county/regional and city park spaces is significant across areas of the county that include residential use (NW of Eureka/Hastings line) and on the southern periphery.
- Some specific areas have higher relative population density and lower relative access to park acreage

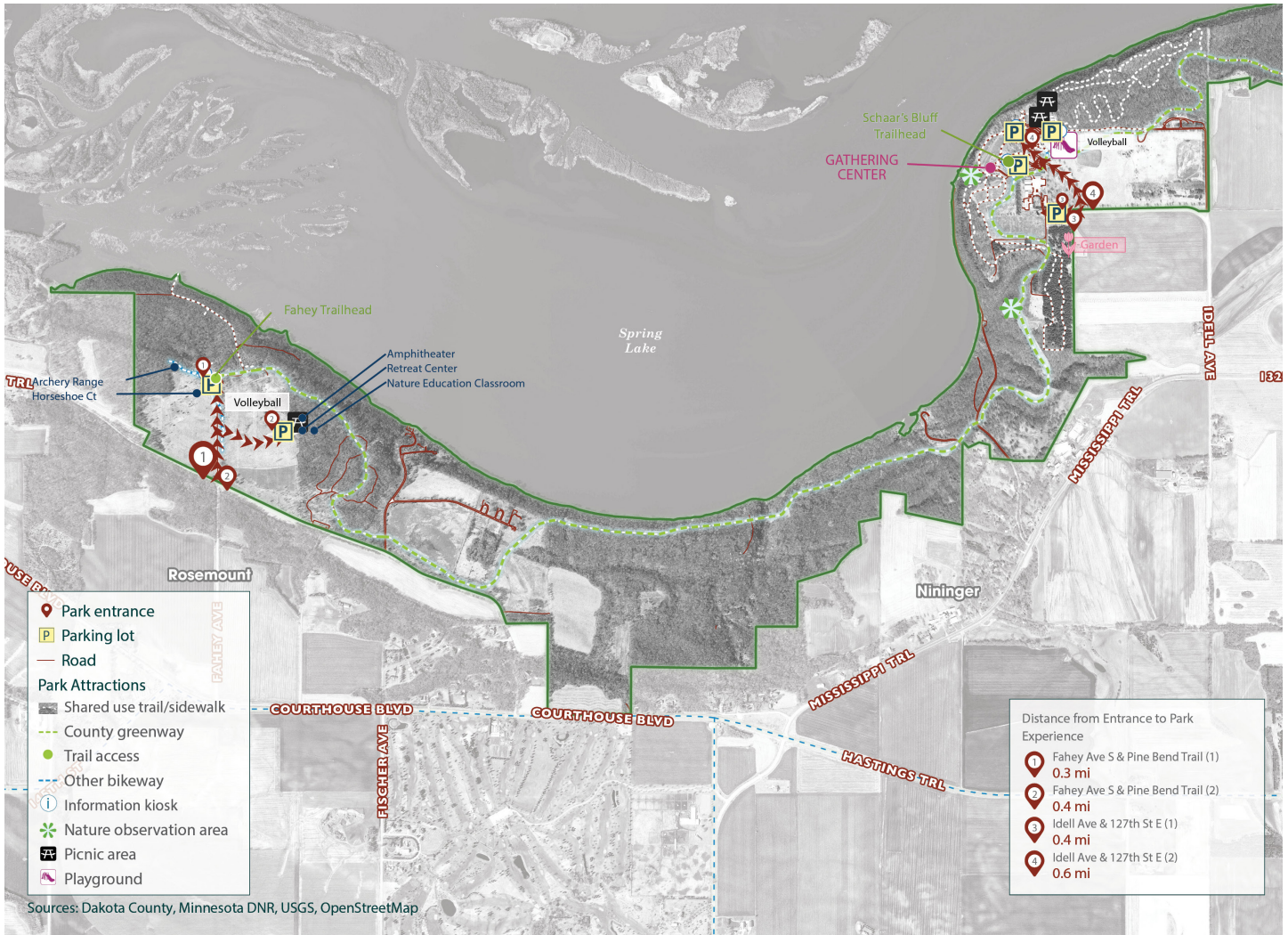


Thompson County Park Access Points + Attractions



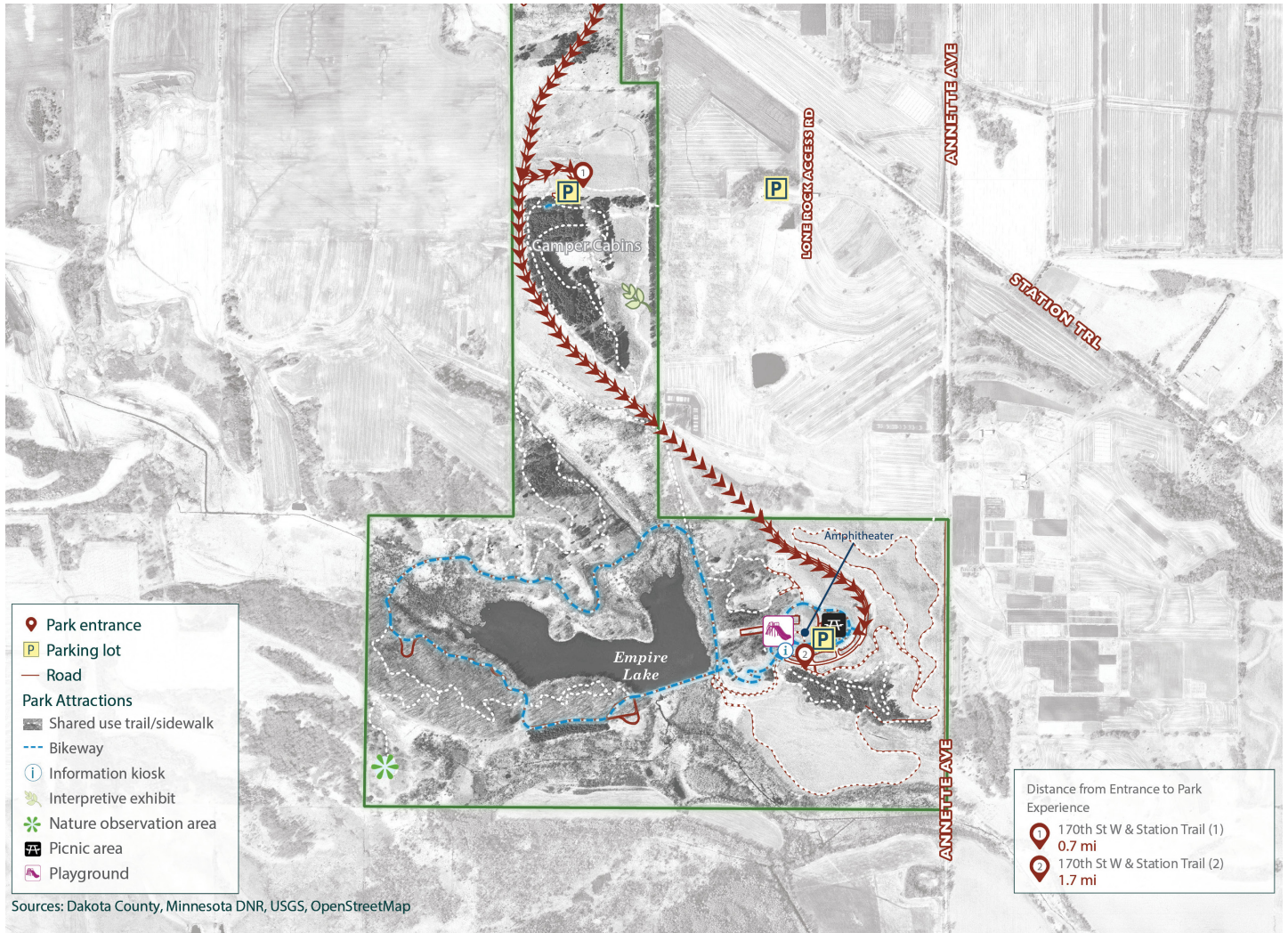
Lebanon Hills Regional Park Access Points + Attractions

Access continued



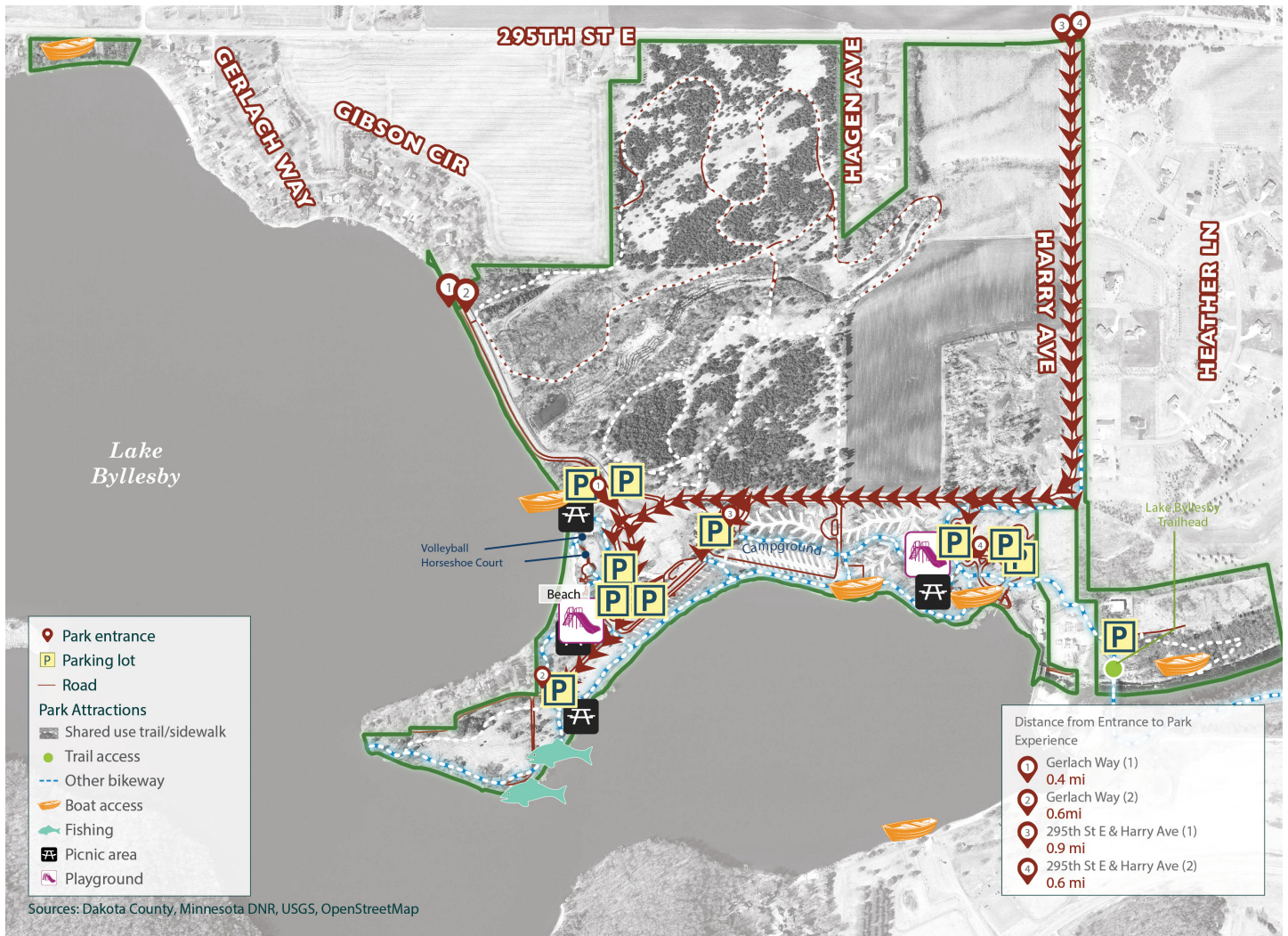
Spring Lake Park Preserve Access Points + Attractions

Access continued



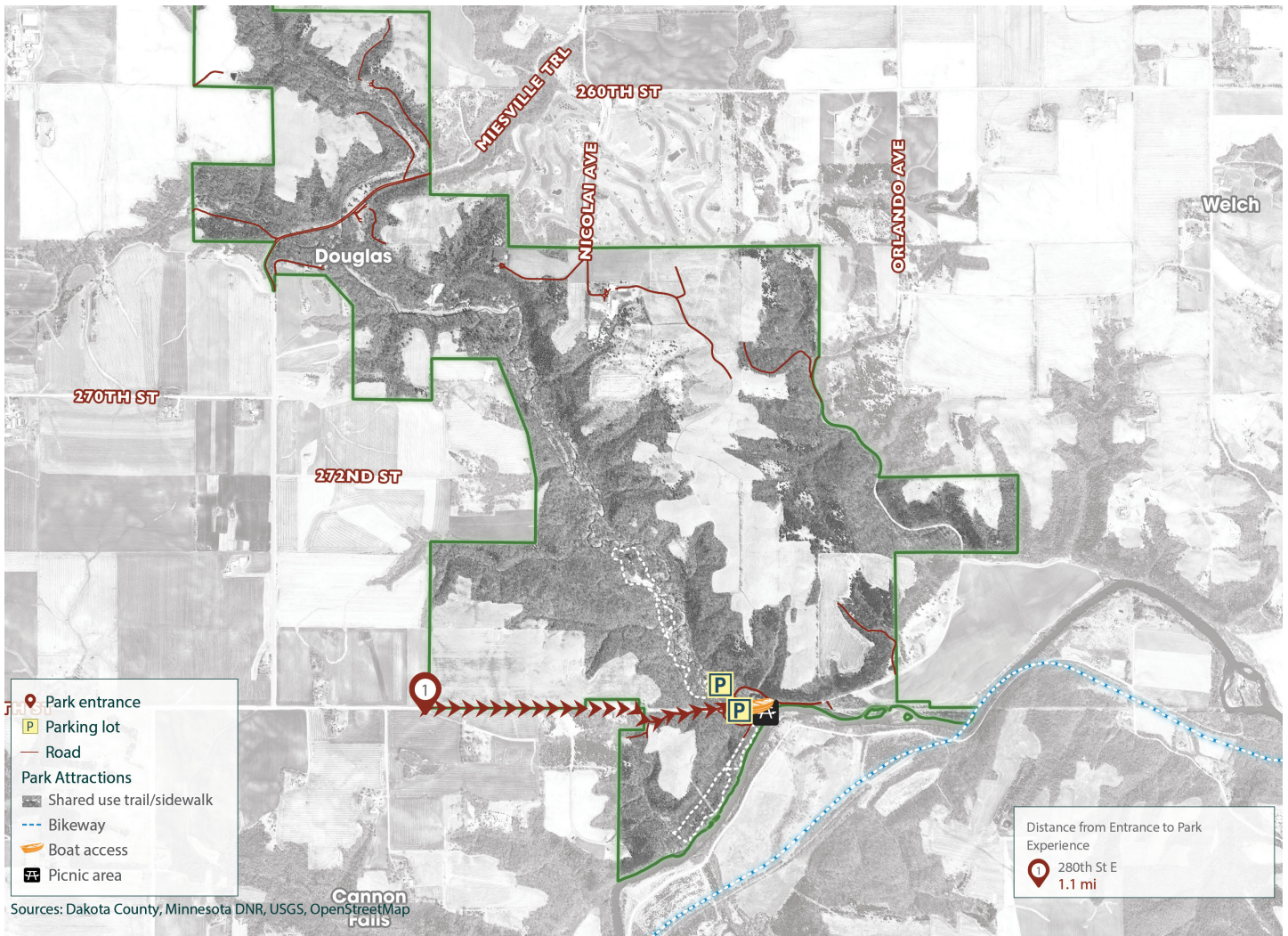
Whitetail Woods Regional Park Access Points + Attractions

Access continued



Lake Byllesby Regional Park Access Points + Attractions

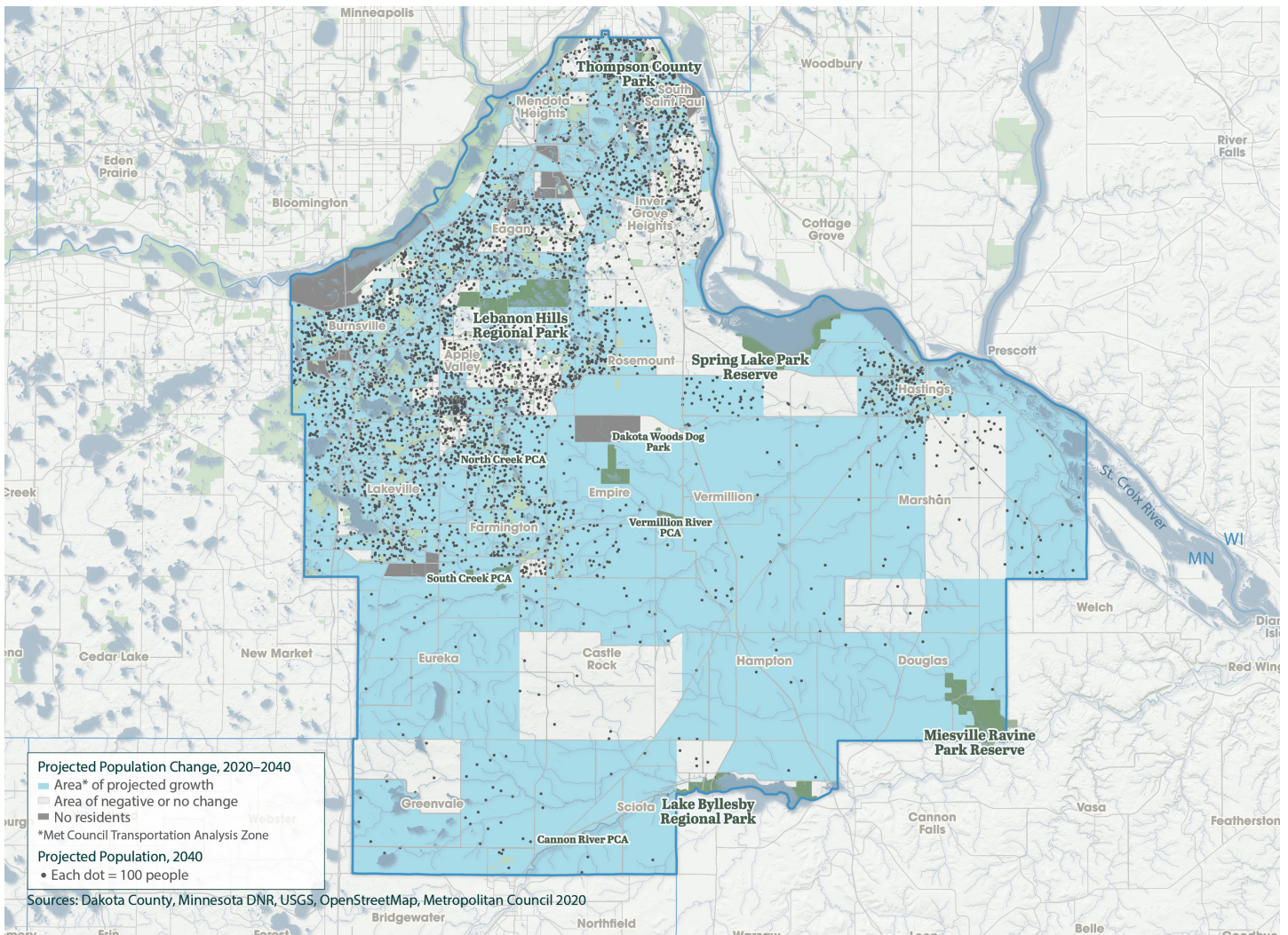
Access continued



Miesville Ravine Park Preserve Access Points + Attractions

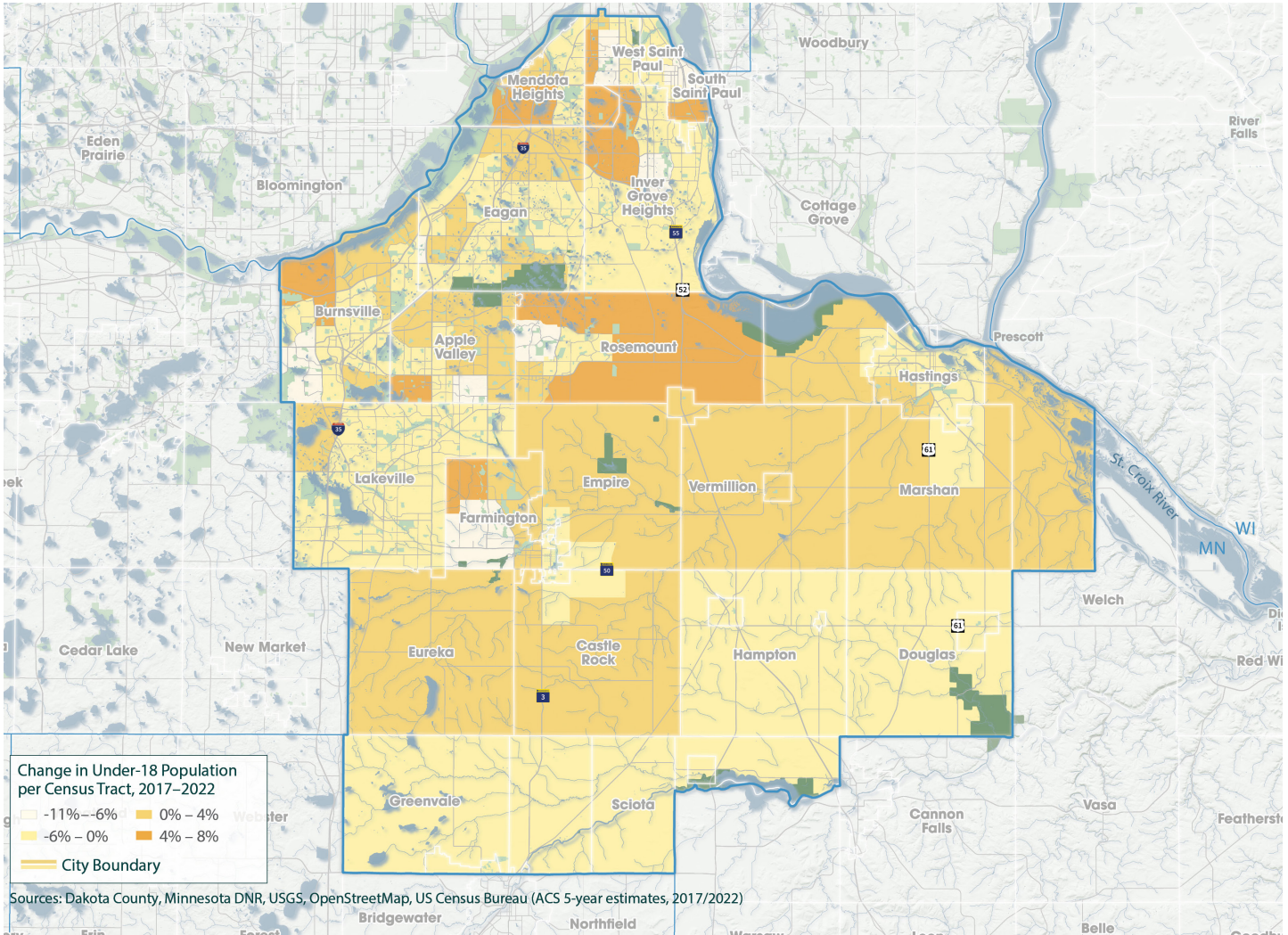
EQUITY

- Population growth to 2040 is projected to reinforce the difference in density between the NW and SE halves of Dakota County, including in areas that have already experienced increases in youth and senior populations, and those that currently have larger average household sizes.
- Program registrations appear distributed across areas of the county with higher and lower median household incomes.
- Home locations of the top 70% of park visitors are concentrated in areas with the highest proportions of renters, as well as those with the highest proportion of housing cost-burdened households.



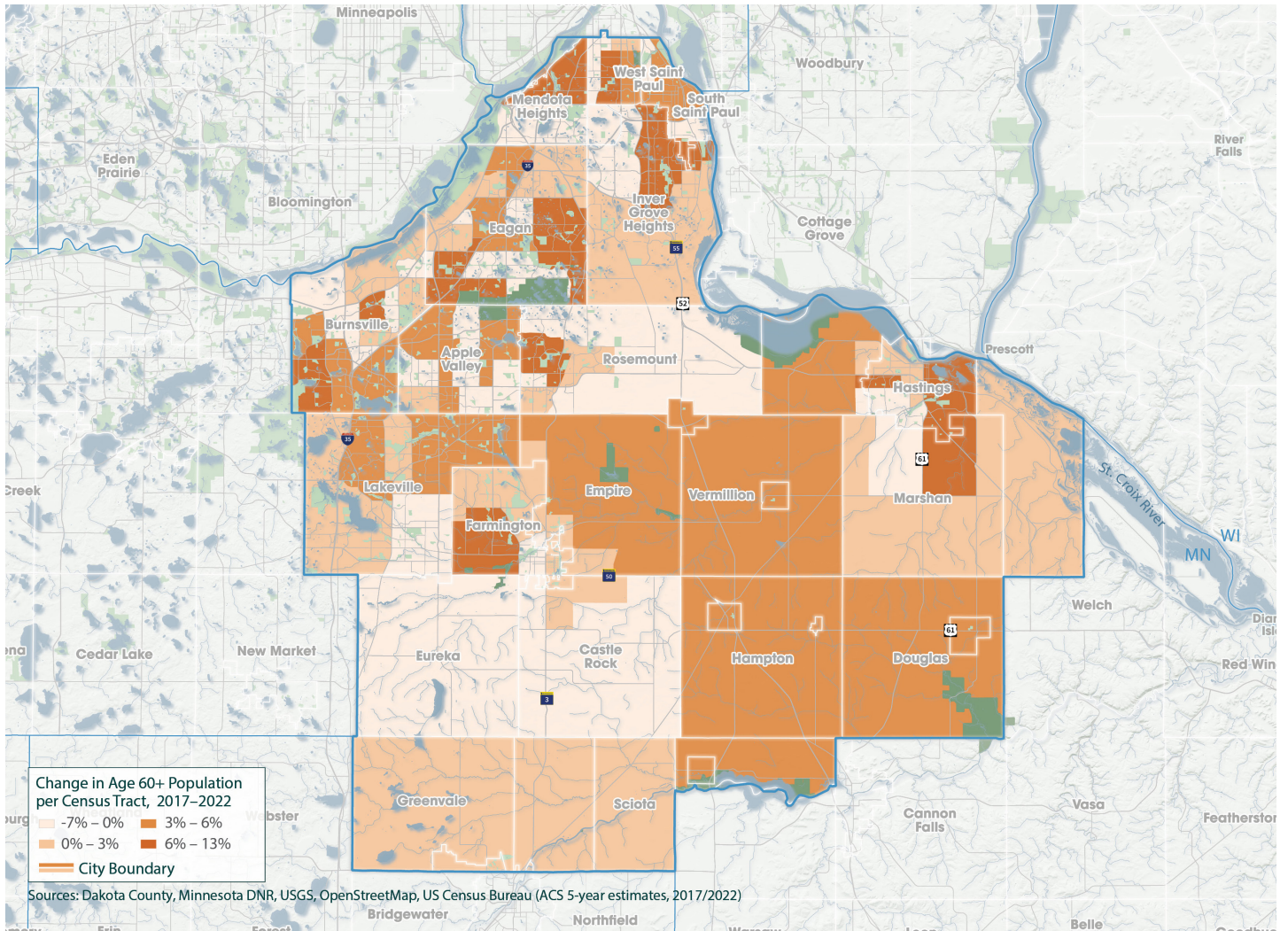
Areas of Projected Population Growth

Equity continued



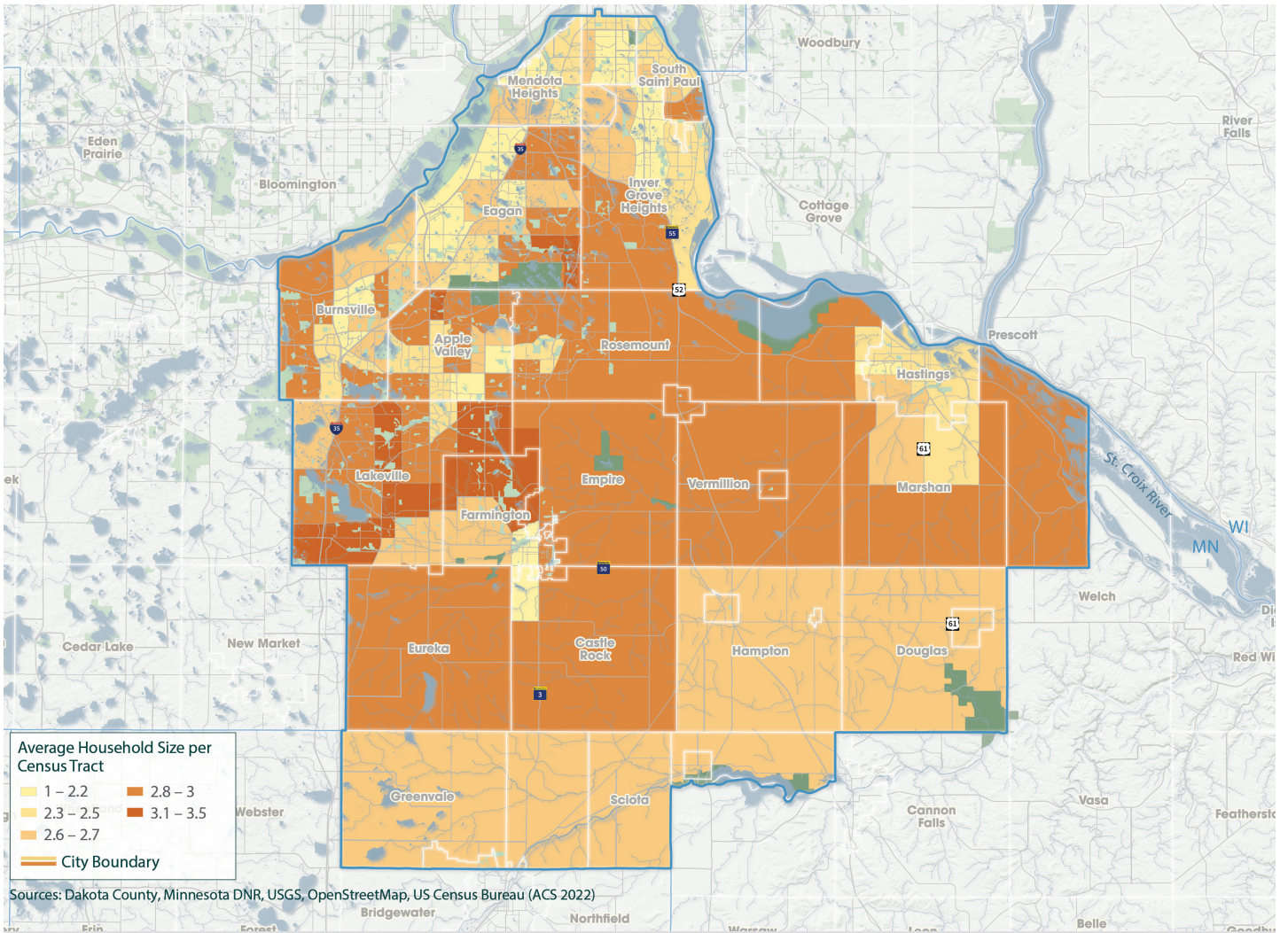
Change in Under-18 Population, 2017–2022

Equity continued



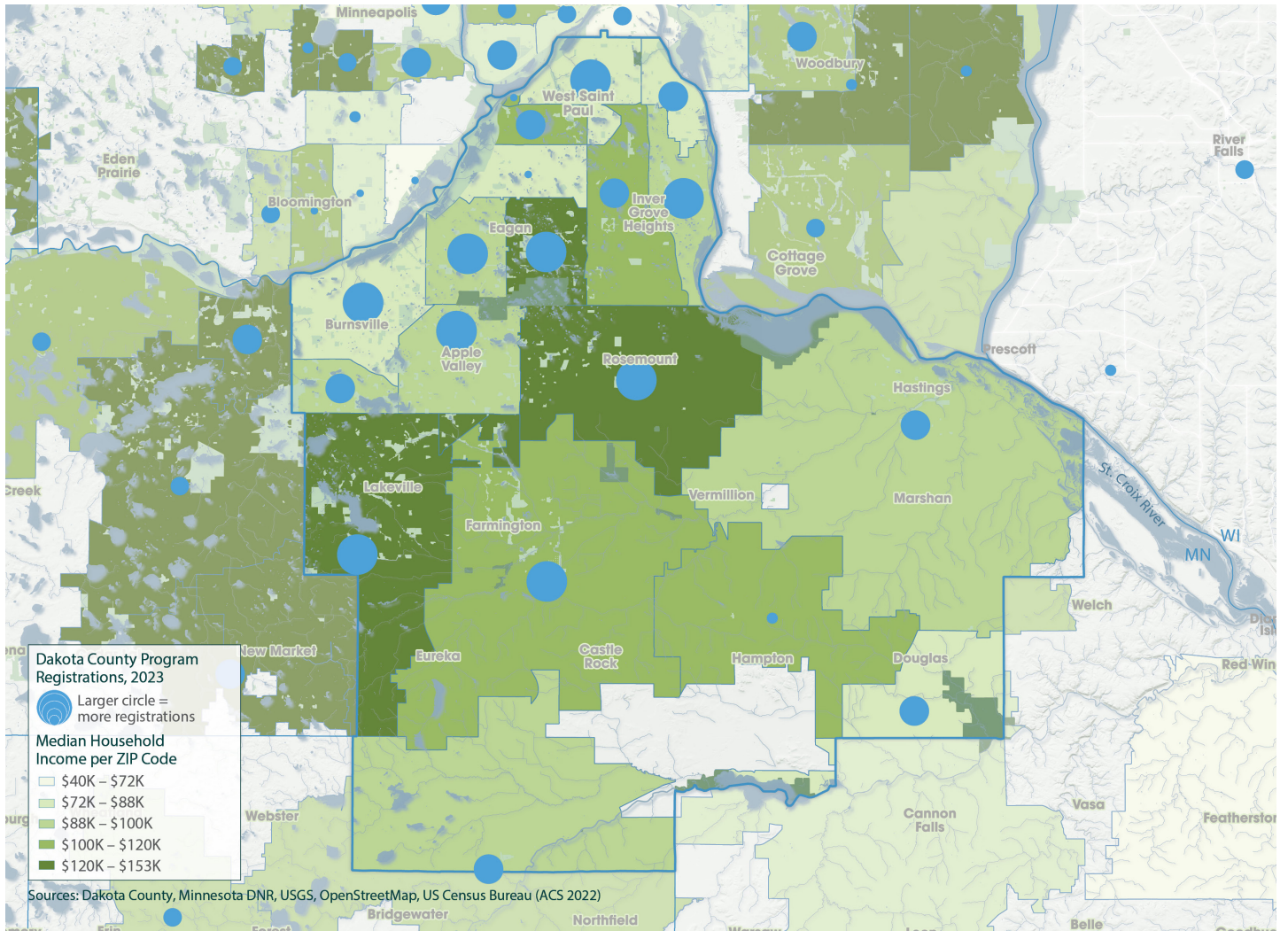
Change in Age 60+ Population, 2017–2022

Equity continued



Average Household Size

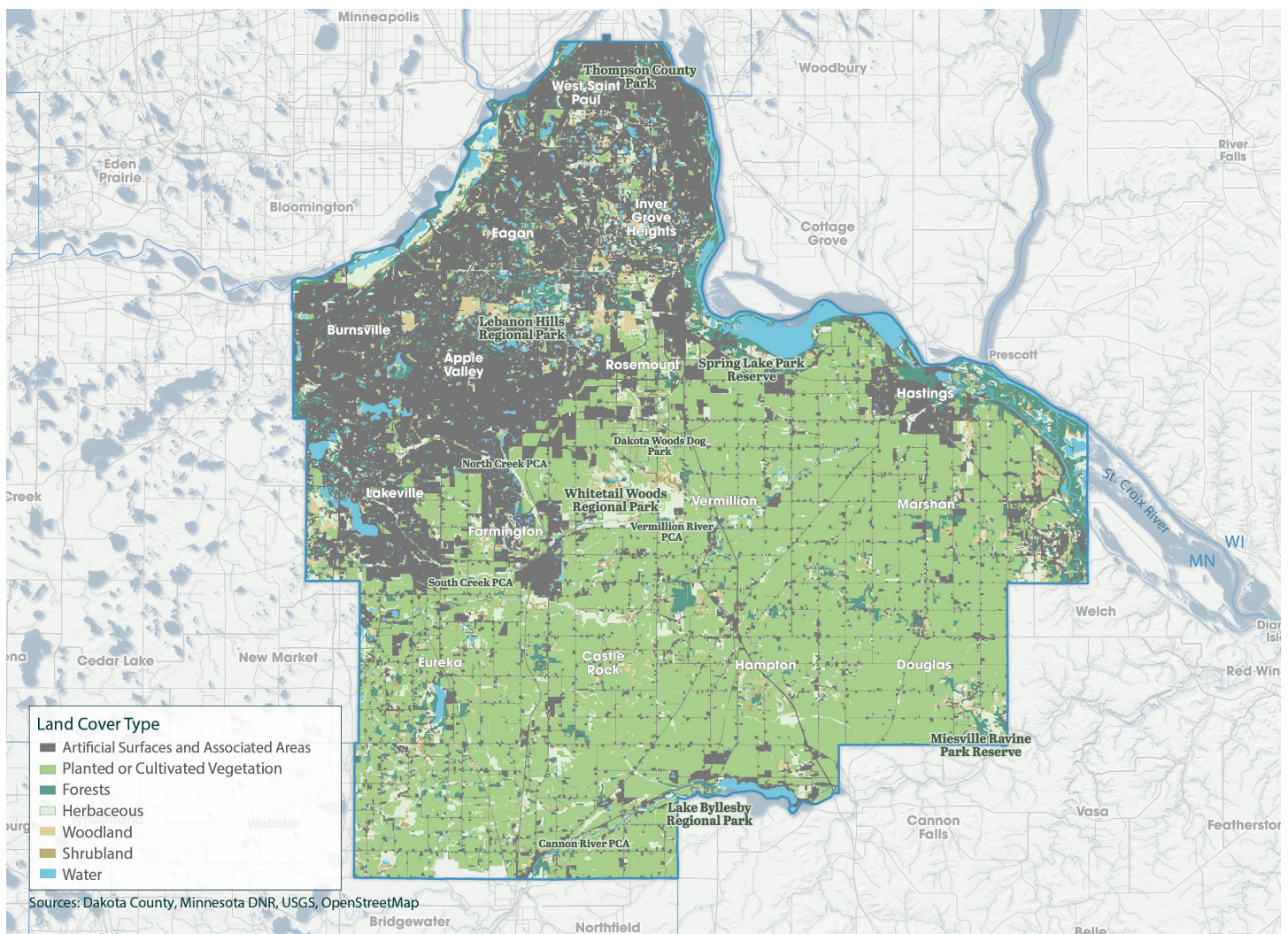
Equity continued



Median Household Income + County Park Program Registrant Home Locations

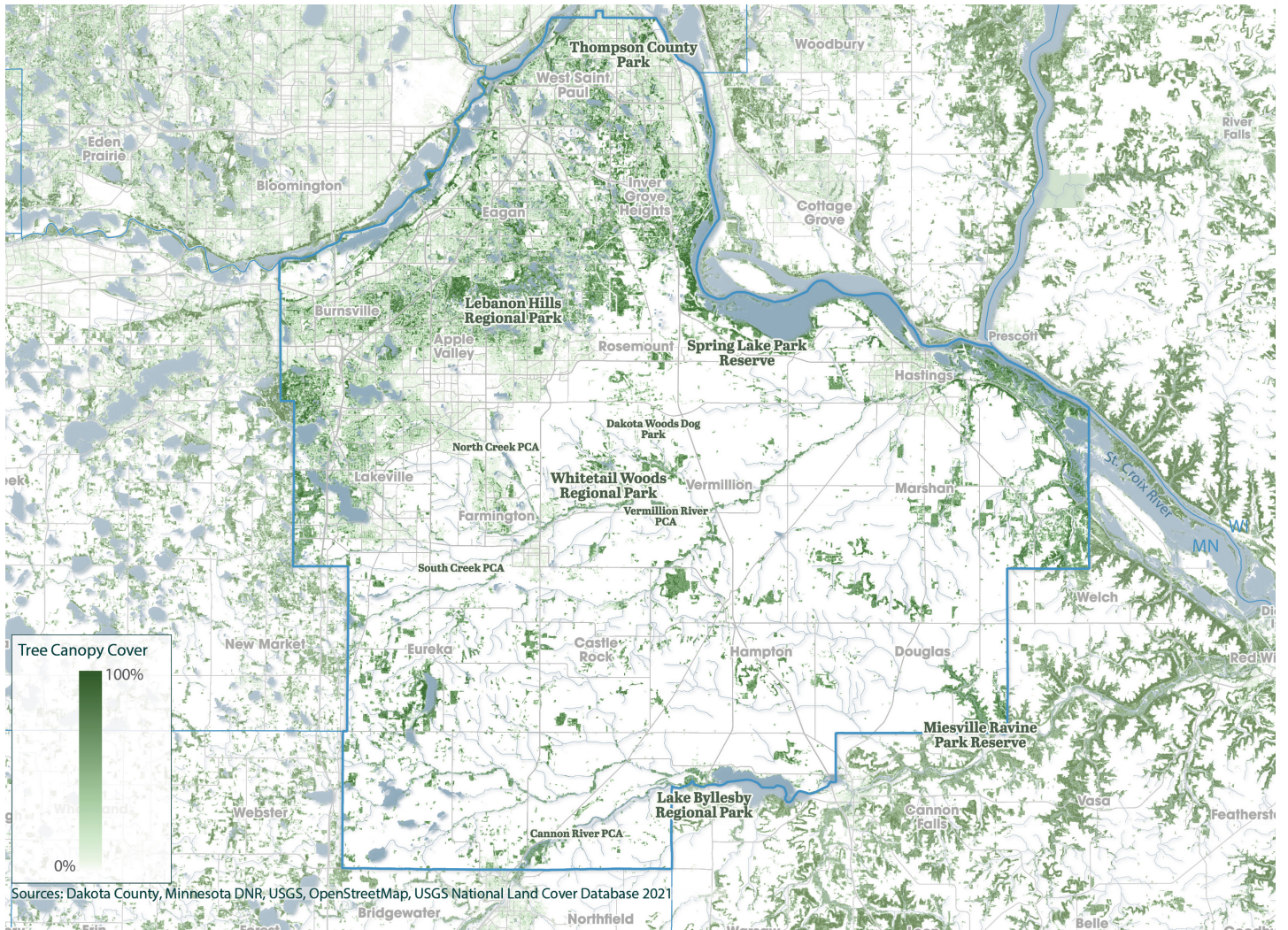
LAND STEWARDSHIP

- Countywide land cover corresponds to residential land use patterns, and reflects the county's important rural productivity
- Tree canopy is densest in the residential areas of the county, which is where it adds the most value to mitigate heat island effects and reduce flood risk.
- Southern Dakota County does not have as comprehensive tree canopy coverage as other parts, but the land is mostly agricultural.



Land Cover

Land Stewardship *continued*

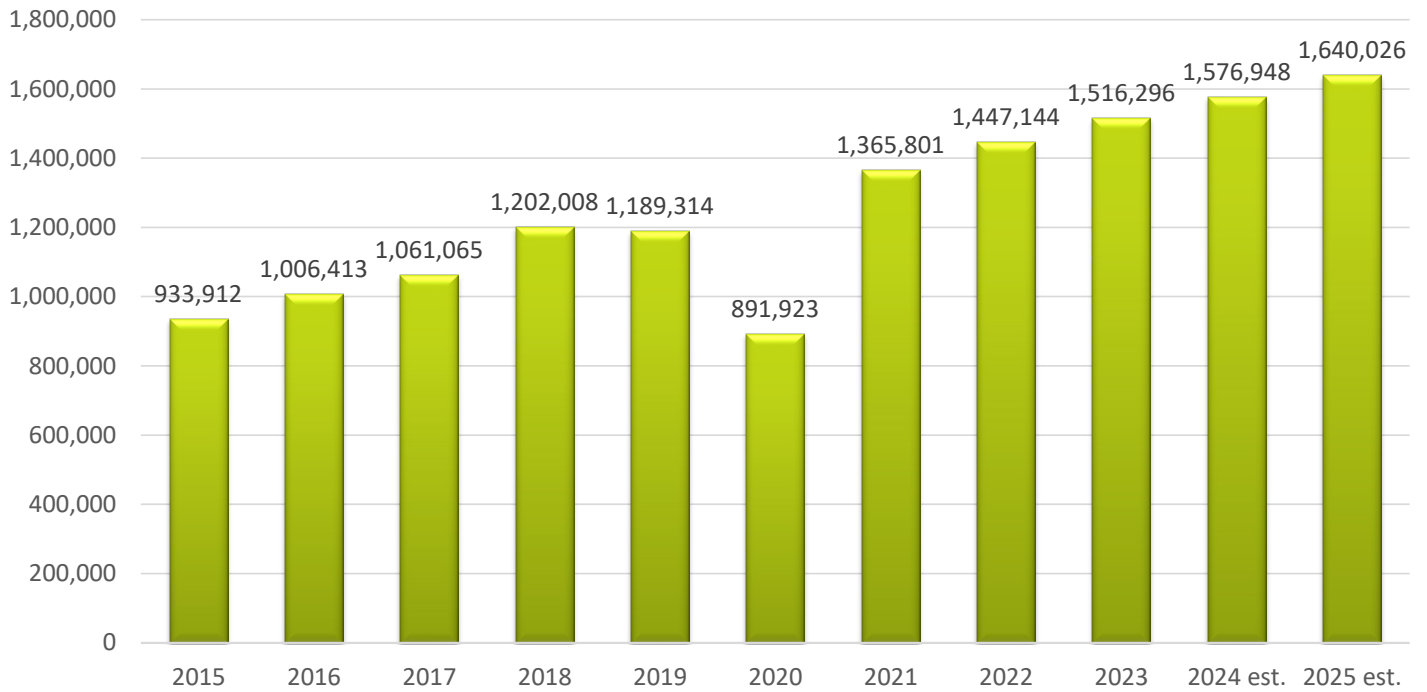


Tree Canopy

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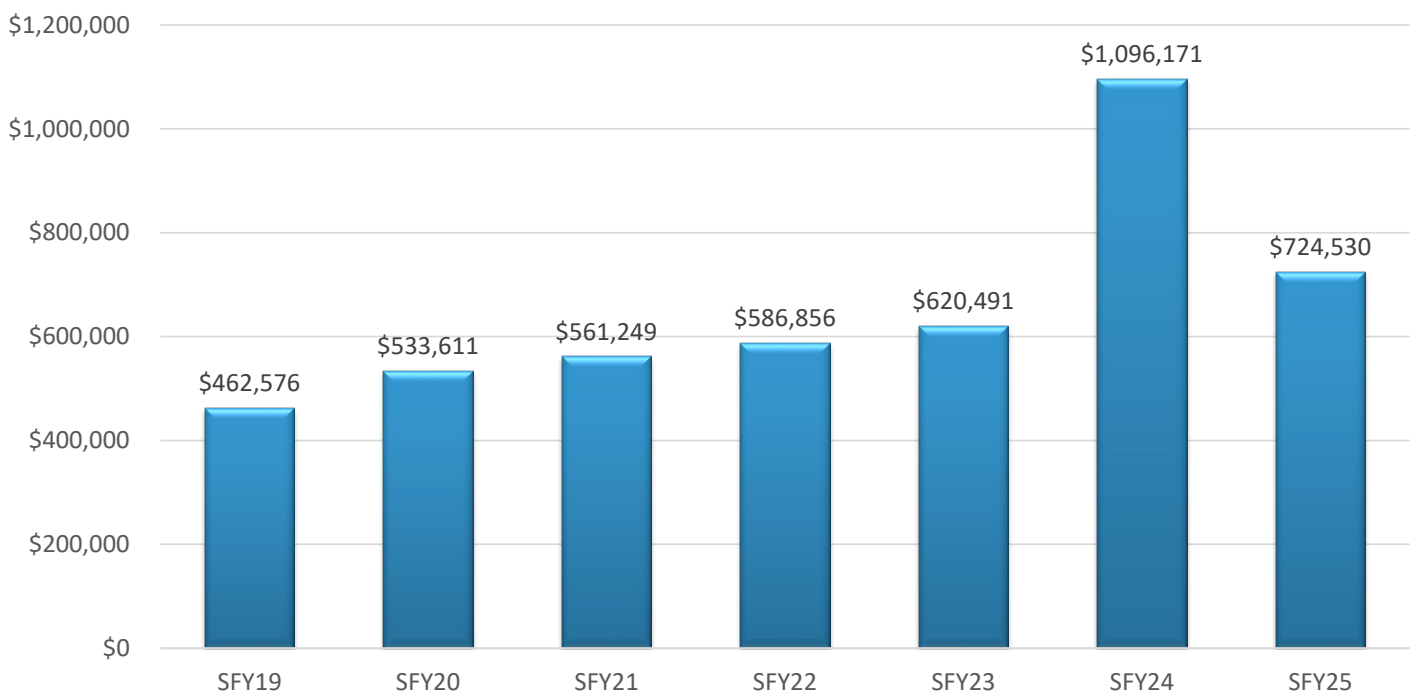
Dakota County Fee-Based Revenues

Total Fee-Based Revenue (Actuals)



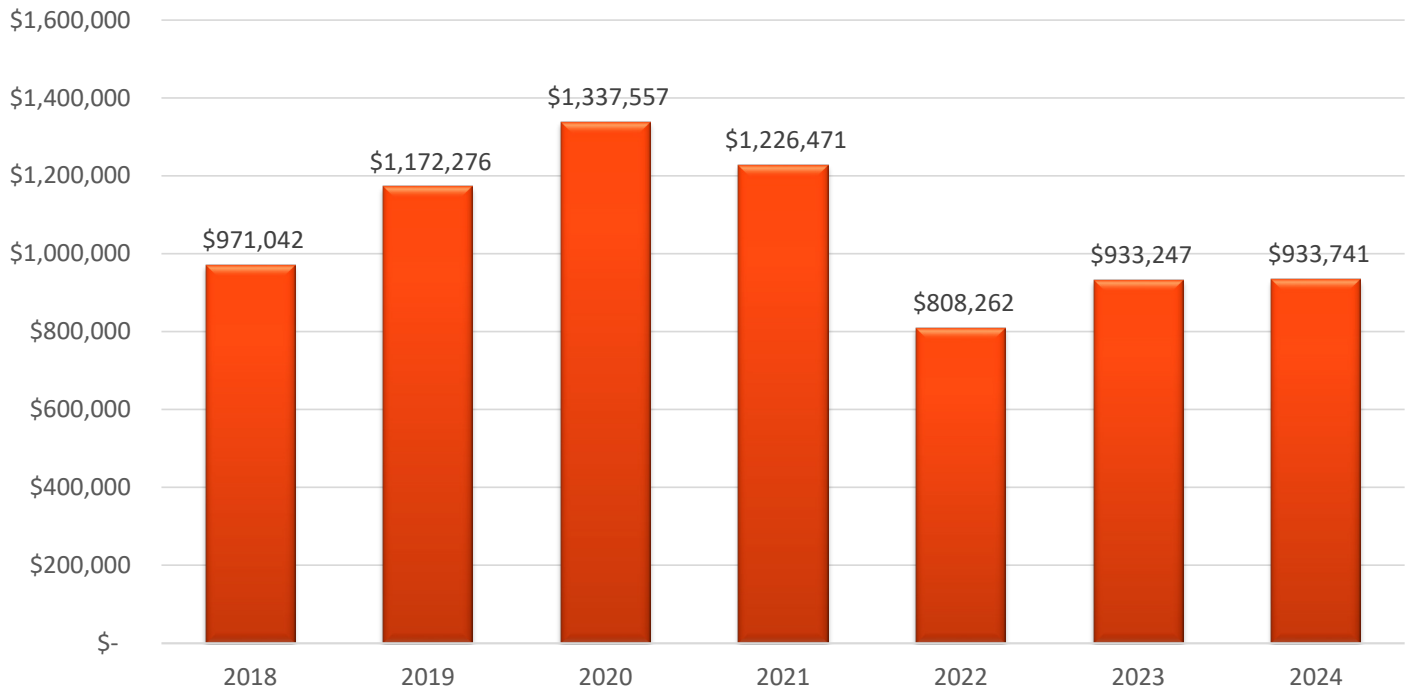
Regional O&M Funding to Dakota County (funded by Met Council)

O & M Funding



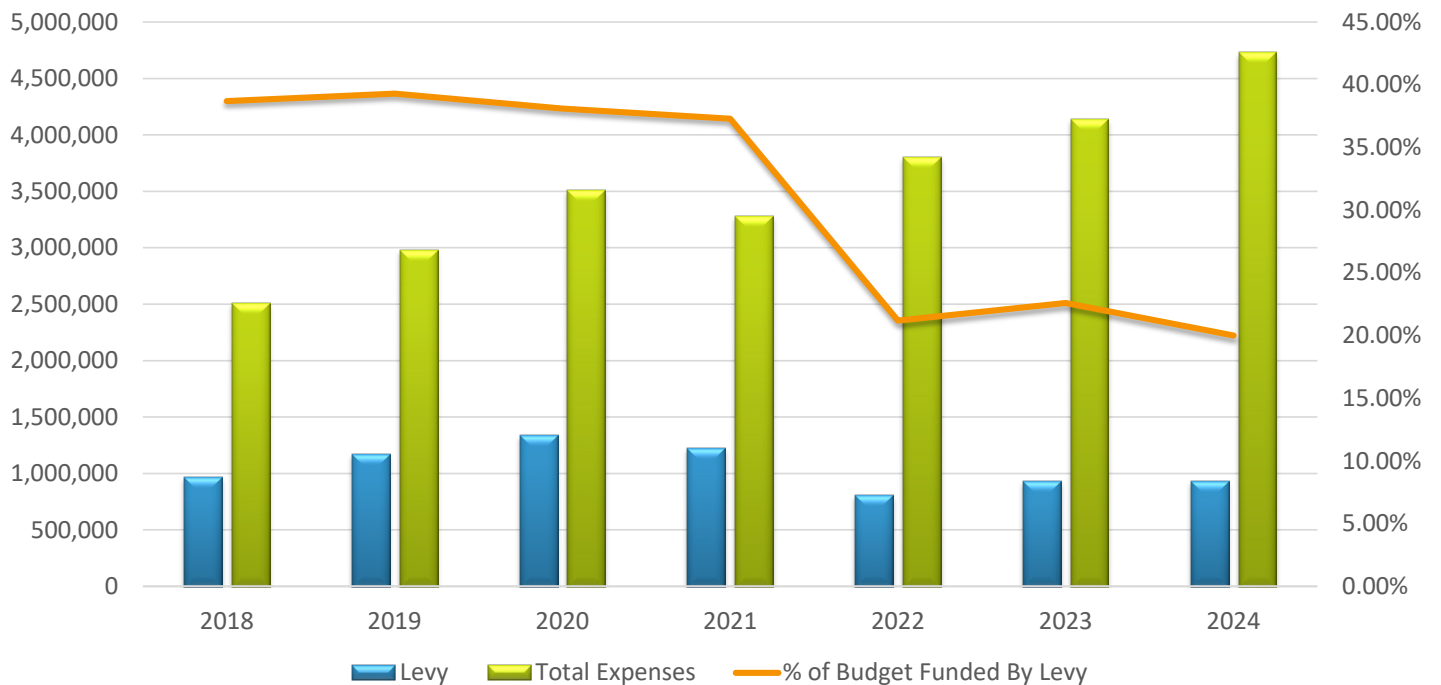
Levy Contribution to Operating Budget

Total Levy Contribution to Parks Operating Budget



Levy Contribution Compared to Expenses

Levy Contribution to Parks Operating Expenses



APPENDIX A SYSTEMS SNAPSHOT





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KEY FINDINGS

- Dakota County is lacking in its share of the Metro area's regional park visitation.
- Dakota County Parks and Greenways are under-represented by youth, people of color, lower-income individuals, and women.

Dakota County
Parks would need
3,288,977 more visitors
to meet its regional suburban
share of visitation
in 2022.

2021 Visitor Snap Shot



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	✓	✓				

Data from 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DP05.

AGENCY COMPARISON

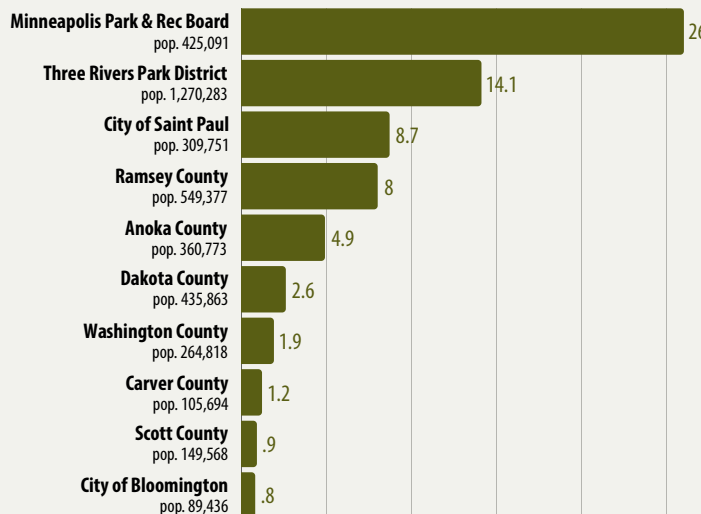


Figure 1.1 2022 Visits by Park Agency, in Millions*

Despite being the third most populous area of the ten implementing agencies, Dakota County is 6th in visitation.

*Does not include Thompson County Park

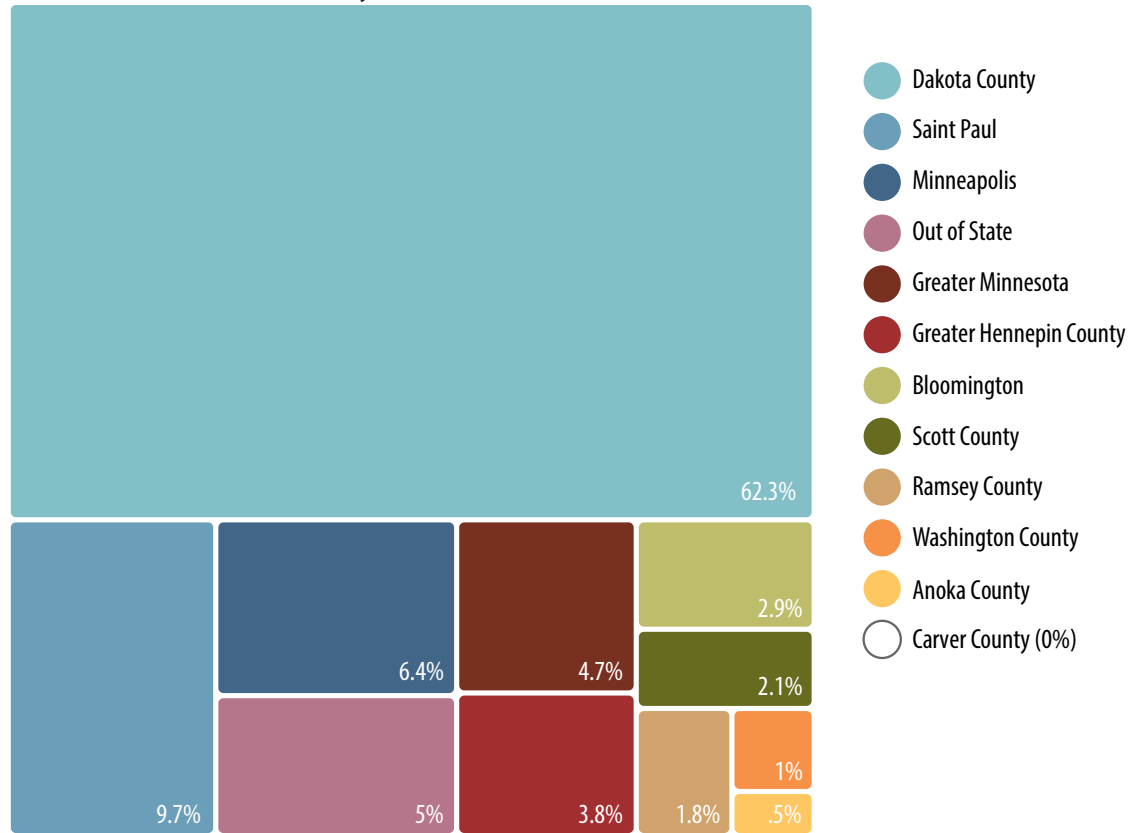
Data Source: 2021 Met Council Annual Use Estimates, July 2023.



KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of visitors to Dakota County parks live in Dakota County.
- Of the agencies that Dakota County residents visit besides Dakota County Parks, Scott County, Saint Paul, and Washington County Parks are visited most by residents.
- Park export rate is no longer the issue it was, at 37.7% in 2021 versus 68% in 2008.
- Favorite activities to do in Dakota County Parks: 1st: Hike/walk, 2nd: Biking, 3rd: Mountain Biking, 4th: Dog walk/dog park, and 5th: Running.

Where do Dakota County Park visitors live?



What park districts are Dakota County residents visiting?

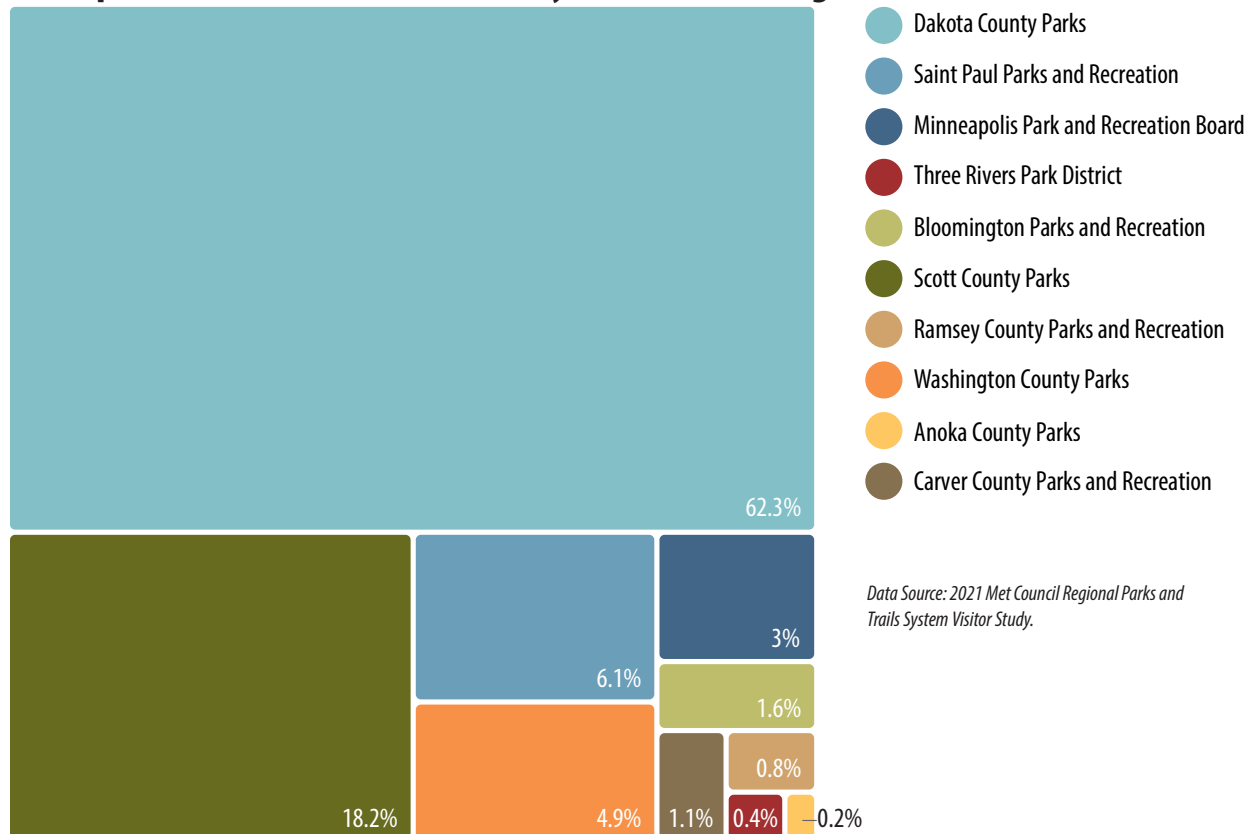


Figure 1.2 Percentage of visitation local to agencies.

Agency	Percentage of local visitors
Anoka County	70.4%
Three Rivers Park District	66.5%
Scott County	64.9%
Minneapolis Park & Rec. Board	63%
Ramsey County	63%
Bloomington	62.4%
Dakota County	62.3%
Washington County	62.1%
Saint Paul	54.7%
Carver County	47.9%

Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.

Figure 1.3 10-Minute Drive-Time to Dakota County Parks Map

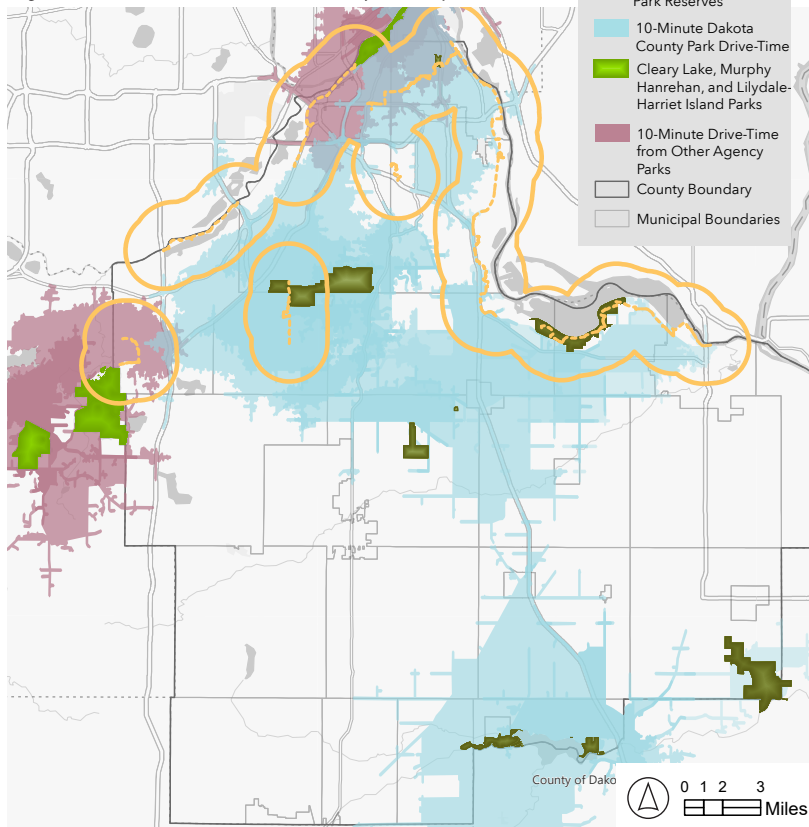
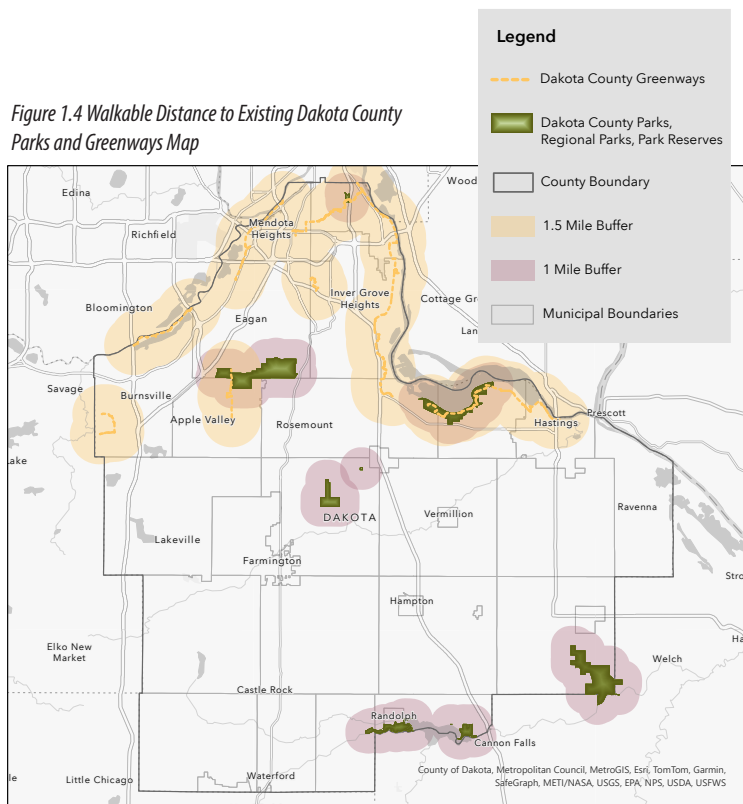
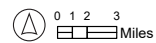


Figure 1.4 Walkable Distance to Existing Dakota County Parks and Greenways Map



Parks accessible by transit: Thompson County Park
 Transit serves Mississippi River Greenway, River to River Greenway,
 Minnesota River Greenway, and North Creek Greenway





KEY FINDINGS

- The county is committed to promoting inclusivity and diversity with its staff, programming, and planning processes.
- Dakota County Parks has made focused outreach efforts to reach target populations, including Spanish-speakers, partnership with community leaders who represent Latinx, Black, Indigenous and Communities of Color, and hiring multilingual staff.
- Dakota County Parks utilized a Met Council Equity Grant to fund equitable community engagement for Creating Equitable Spaces Along the Mississippi River Greenway, including a bilingual survey in Spanish.
- The County hired an Indigenous Liaison in 2023.
- Parks compensates people for their time when working with community members on programming/partnerships.



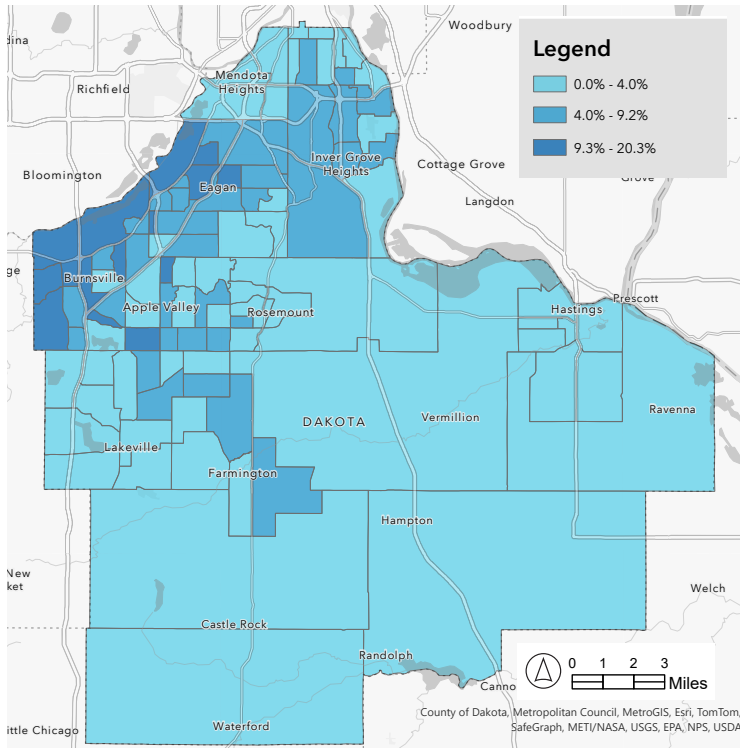
Pt. 1
Dakota County Parks
Current Equity Work

Specific outreach programs that have been created to address equity in the outdoors include: partnership with Caminatas Domingueras, District 196 Diversity in Skiing Program, Nature Walks with Latino Families series, Fiesta en la Nieve, Somali Girls Leadership Group Day in the Park, and the Community Liaison Program.



People of Color in Dakota County visited County Parks at a rate of 33 % of their expected representation and visited County Greenways at a rate of 28.4% of their expected representation.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of Residents Who Speak English Less Than "Very Well," 2021, Map



Data Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021, Table DP02.

30% of Dakota County adults whose income is below 200% of the poverty line have been in a situation where they have felt they are not accepted because of their race, ethnicity, religion, or immigration status.

Data Source: Dakota County Adult Health Survey, 2023.



Pt. 2
Race & Cultural Equity

Findings from the Met Council Report (2014):
"Regional Park Use among Select Communities of Color"

Preferred Outdoor Activities (from Focus Groups):

- Asian Immigrant/Asian American focus groups identified their top three preferred activities as walking, fishing, and rest or relaxation.
- African Immigrant focus groups most frequently noted playground use, walking, and being with family.
- Hispanic participants most frequently noted celebrations and parties, followed by picnicking and/or barbecuing, and spending time with family.
- African American participants identified picnicking and/or barbecuing as the most frequent preferred activity, followed by biking and basketball.
- Walking, playground use and swimming or going to the lake were the top three most frequently noted preferred activities among diverse composition focus groups.

Pt. 2
Health Equity



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY + OBESITY

28% of Dakota County adults whose income is below 200% of the poverty line do not engage in any leisure-time physical activity.

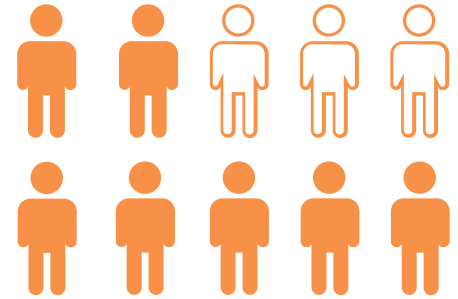
- Only 31% of adults below 200% of the poverty line met “Healthy People Physical Activity Guidelines,” i.e. moderate exercise 30 or more minutes, 5 or more days per week; vigorous exercise 20 or more minutes, 5 or more days per week; or both; during an average week.
- Only 46% of all Dakota County adults surveyed met these standards.



32% of all Dakota County adults surveyed walked or biked to get to and from places in 2023.

- Walking and biking was low for those with lower and higher incomes (33% with incomes below 200% of the poverty line walked or biked and 31% at or above 200% of the poverty line walked or biked).

Data Source: Dakota County Public Health, Dakota County Adult Health Survey, 2023.



71% of Dakota County students were physically active for at least 60 minutes, three or more days a week in 2022. On average, 18% of students were physically active for at least 60 minutes every day. However, this is a decrease from 2016, when about 20% of students engaged in 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

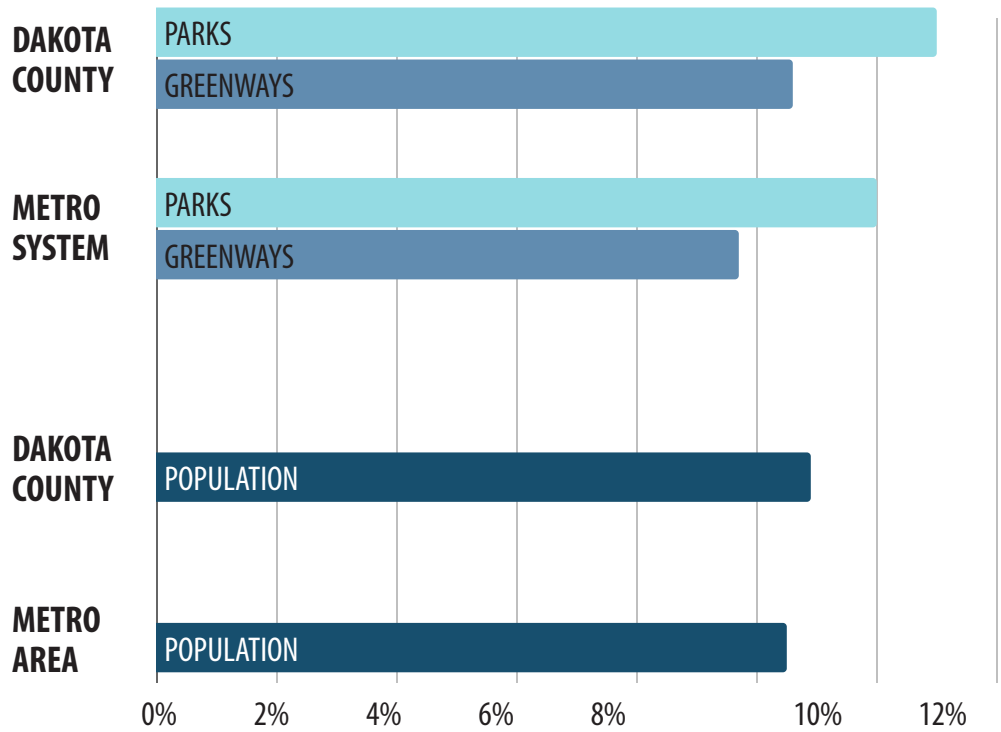
Pt. 4
ADA Accessibility



KEY FINDINGS

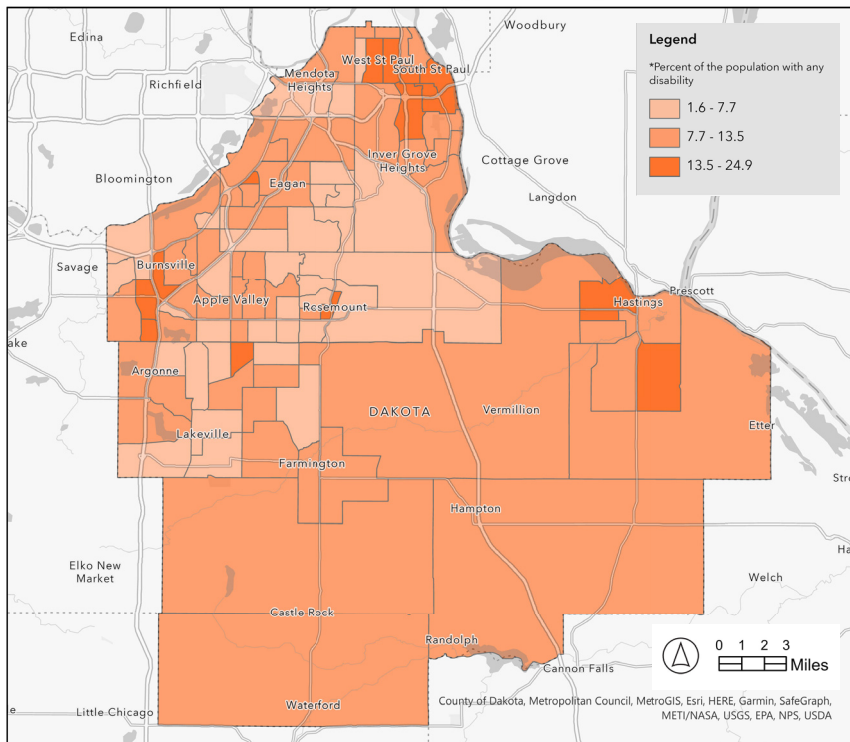
- 10.9% of Dakota County residents have a disability.
- Most prevalent disabilities: Cognitive difficulty (5%), independent living difficulty (4.9%), and ambulatory difficulty (4.5%).
- 18.2% of those 65-74 years of age have a disability; 38.2% of those 75+ have a disability.
- About 12% of groups visiting a Dakota County Park surveyed by Met Council had a resident with a disability.
- Dakota County meets state standards for accessibility for new facilities.
- Dakota County has added accessible trails in the last 10 years.

Figure 4.1 Percentage of Residents with a Disability visiting Dakota County Parks and Greenways, Metro Regional Parks and Greenways, in Dakota County, and in the Metro Area, 2021 & 2022



Data Sources: 2021 Met Council Regional Park and Trail System Visitor Study and US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2022, Table DP02.

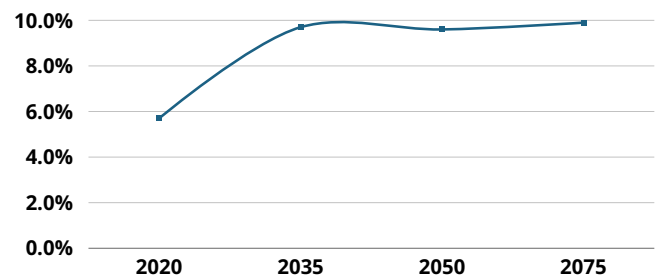
Figure 4.2 Percentage of the Population with Any Disability in Dakota County, 2021, Map



Data Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2022, Table DP02.

The number of visitors with disabilities in Dakota County is similar to the number in the Regional System, and both are similar to the region's proportion. Dakota County Parks have a slightly higher visitation of residents with disabilities.

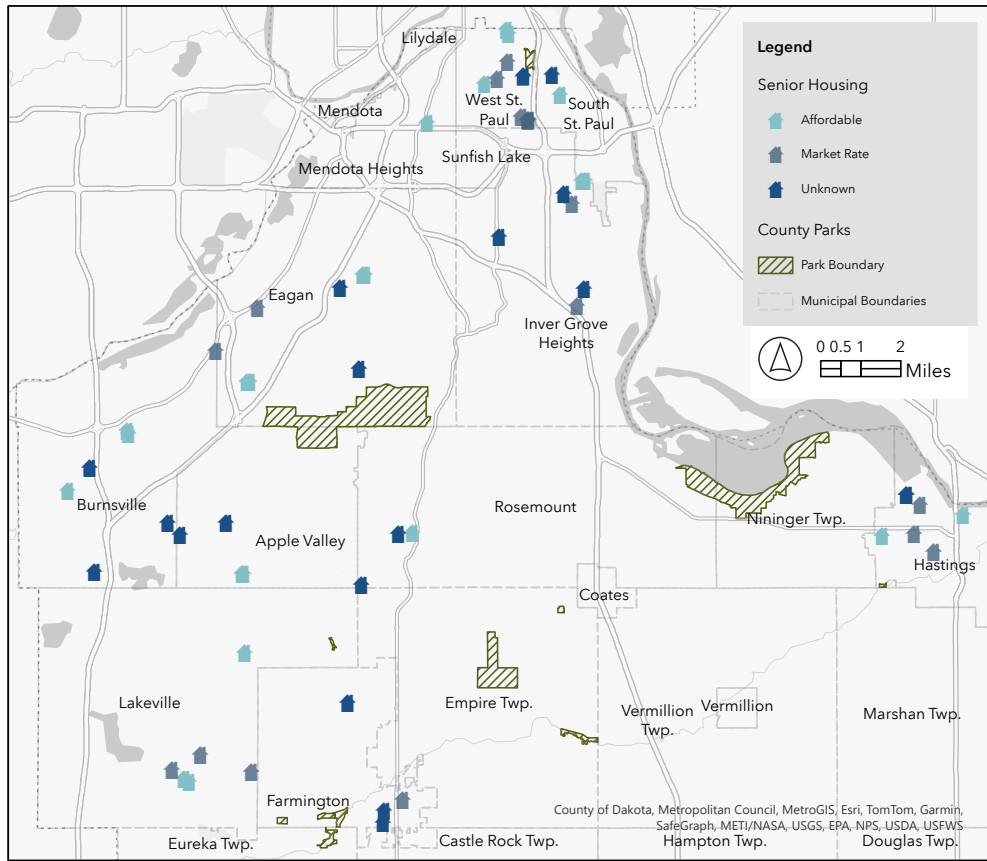
Figure 4.3 Percentage of Dakota County Residents age 75+ in 2020, 2035, 2050, & 2075.



Data Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center, Long-Term Population Projections for Minnesota, 2020.

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

Figure 4.4 Senior Housing in Dakota County, 2022



Data Source: Dakota County GIS, 2022.

Dakota County Parks and Greenways In Proximity to Elderly & Disabled Populations

Residents with an ambulatory difficulty	River to River Greenway (7.2% of people within 1 mi.)
	Spring Lake Park Reserve (4.7% of people within 3 mi.)
Residents with any other disability	River to River Greenway (6.3% of people within 1 mi.)
	Whitetail Woods Regional Park (5.3% of people within 3 mi.)
Residents Age 65+	Big Rivers Regional Trail (27.5% of people within 1 mi.)
	Spring Lake Park Reserve (17.4% of people within 3 mi.)

Data Source: Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Equity Tool, ACS 2019.

Pt. 5 Youth

Dakota County Parks with Play Areas:

- Thompson County Park*
- Lebanon Hills Regional Park
- Spring Lake Park Reserve
- Whitetail Woods Regional Park
- Lake Byllesby Regional Park*

*Play areas with inclusive elements

City-Owned Nature Play Areas in Dakota County:

- Patrick Eagan Park (Eagan)
- Terrace Oaks East (Burnsville)
 - Schwarz Pond Park (Rosemount)

KEY FINDINGS

Feedback from *Dakota County Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan* on youth and parks:

- Every community engagement group (except the American Indian group) discussed visiting the parks for spending time with their families and children.
- Participants with children expressed concern for safety of children with dogs and litter in parks.
- Several family representatives noted that more families would be able to participate in programming if childcare were to be provided.

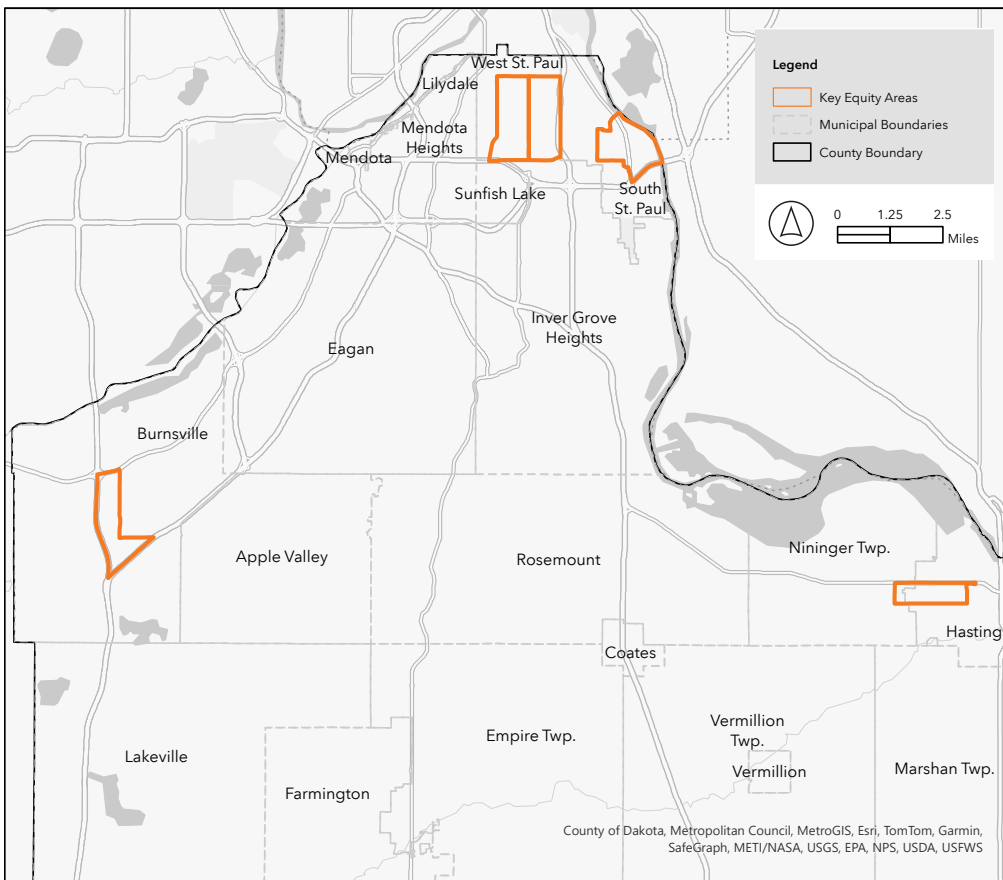
Dakota County Parks and Greenways In Proximity to Children and Youth

Residents under age 15	North Creek Greenway (26% of people within 1 mi.)
	Whitetail Woods Regional Park (22% of people within 3 mi.)
Residents age 15-24	Vermillion Highlands Greenway (15.8% of people within 1 mi.)
	Miesville Ravine Park Reserve (13% of people within 3 mi.)

Data Source: Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Equity Tool, ACS 2019.

*Excludes Thompson County Park

Figure 6.1 Key Equity Areas in Dakota County



Data Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021, Tables DP02, DP05; Met Council's Equity Considerations Dataset.

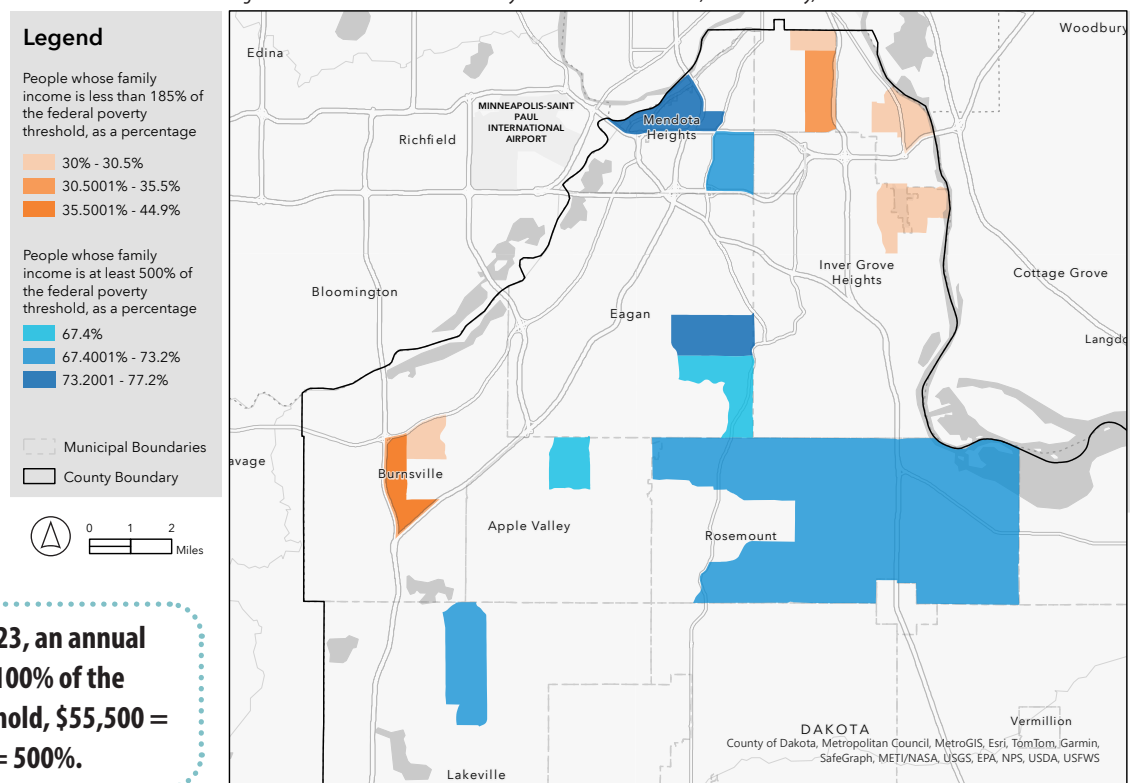
**Pt. 6
Income Inequality**

Key Equity Areas are Census tracts that are high in two or more of the following categories:

- Proportion of the population with no vehicle
- Proportion of residents who speak English less than "very well"
- Number of people of color
- Proportion of residents with any disability
- People whose family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold

These Key Equity Area tracts are in West St. Paul, South St. Paul, Hastings, and Burnsville.

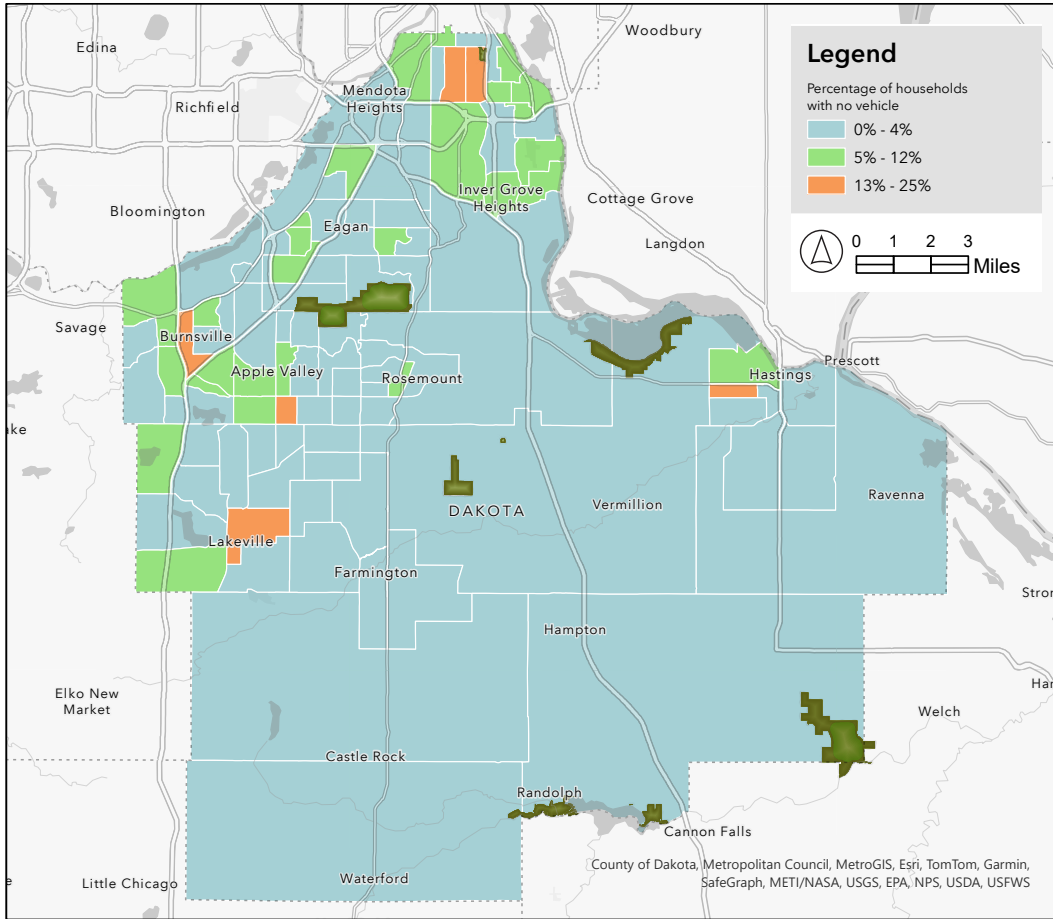
Figure 6.2 Areas of Concentrated Poverty & Concentrated Affluence, Dakota County, 2021



For a family of 4 in 2023, an annual income of \$30,000 = 100% of the federal poverty threshold, \$55,500 = 185%, and \$150,000 = 500%.

Data Source: Metropolitan Council, Equity Considerations for Place-Based Advocacy and Decisions in the Twin Cities Region, 2021.

Figure 6.3 Proportion of Households with No Vehicle, Dakota County, 2021



Residents without vehicle access would have a difficult time reaching some of Dakota County's parks.

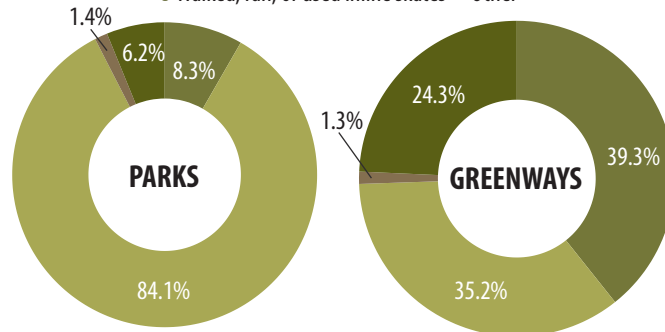
Data Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021, Table DP04.

TRAVEL MODE

Figure 6.4 Travel Mode to Dakota County Parks & Greenways

- Bicycle
- Car or other vehicle
- Walked, ran, or used inline skates
- Other

Most Dakota County Park visitors arrive by car or other vehicle and most Dakota County Greenway visitors walk or bike to the trails.



Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.



Dakota County Parks Facilities

Parks and County Park Conservation Areas

- 7 parks, 6,280 acres
- 7 County Park Conservation Areas, 204 acres



Buildings

- 34 operated buildings
- Square footage of operated buildings: 79,586 sf



Campgrounds

- Lebanon Hills (93 sites)
- Lake Byllesby (83 sites)
- Whitetail Woods (5 cabins)



Youth Camp

- YMCA Day Camp Spring Lake at Spring Lake Park Reserve
 - Held at Camp Spring Lake Retreat Center
 - Archery games, outdoor education, arts, canoeing, swimming



Bathrooms

- 17 permanent and semi-permanent restrooms
- 2 facilities with restrooms available free of use to public, not included above



Play Areas

- 6 play areas
 - 5 for ages 5-12
 - 1 for ages 2-5
 - 1 inclusive play structure
 - 2 nature play areas



Other Facilities

- 1 community garden
- 1 dog park

Figure 7.2 Drivers for Growth: Accessible Lake Loops/Lakeside Trails

Parks	2008	2023	Notes
Lebanon Hills	0	1	McDonough Lake
Spring Lake	0	1	Spring Lake
Lake Byllesby	0	1	Lake Byllesby
Miesville Ravine	0	0	
Thompson	0	1	Thompson Lake
Whitetail Woods	NA	1	Empire Lake
Greenways	2008	2023	
Mississippi River Greenway	0	2**	Lake Rebecca and Spring Lake
Minnesota River Greenway	0	1	Black Dog Lake
River to River Greenway	0	2	Marthaler Lake, Thompson Oaks Lake
Vermillion River Greenway	NA	0	
Rosemount Greenway	NA	1	Horseshoe Lake
Vermillion Highlands Greenway	NA	0	
Lake Marion Greenway	NA	2	Lake Marion, Sunset Lake
North Creek Greenway	0	2	Cobblestone Lake, East Lake
Total	0	14	

Units in italics are new since 2008

** Spring Lake is along both the Mississippi River Greenway and is in Spring Lake Park Reserve

Figure 7.3 Signature Facilities at Dakota County Parks

Dakota County Parks	Signature Facilities
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	Staffed Visitor Center Swimming Beach Trail recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain bike trails • Equestrian trails • Hiking trails • Cross-country skiing trails
Spring Lake Park Reserve	Mississippi River views and access Bison Indoor event space rental
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	Lake recreation Camping
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Camper cabins Events Largest lake loop Sledding hill Nature play area
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	Trout fishing Cannon River access
Thompson County Park	Accessible Playground Community gathering Indoor event space rental

CURRENT PARK OFFERINGS

Figure 7.1 Current Dakota County Park Offerings

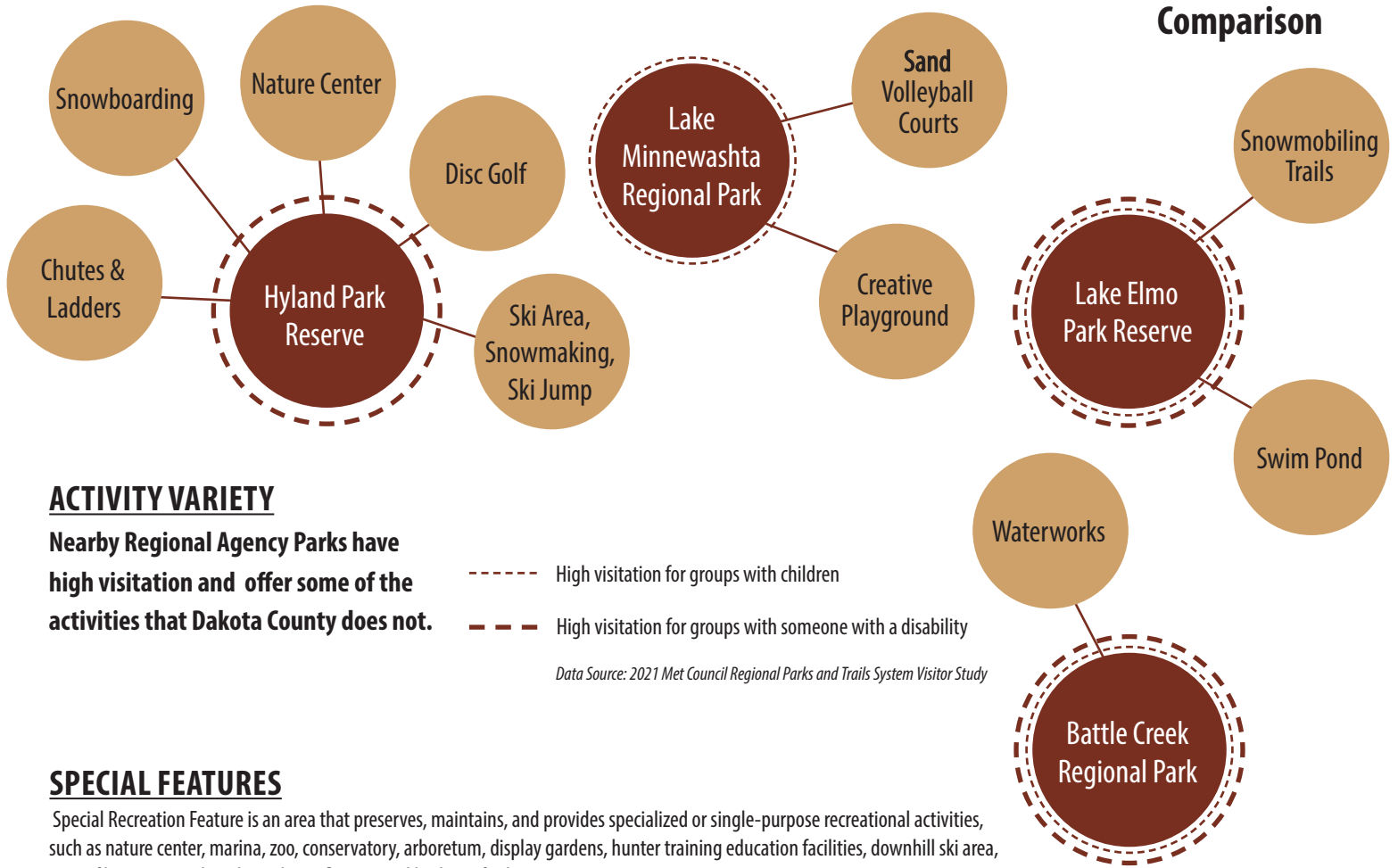
Parks	Picnicking	Fire Ring	Ice Fishing	Visitor Center	Hiking	Snow-shoeing	Dog On-Leash	Biking	Fishing	Geocaching	Dog Sled Trails	Play Areas	Sledding Hill	Cross-Country Skiing
Dakota Woods Dog Park														
Lake Byllesby Regional Park														
Lebanon Hills Regional Park														
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve														
Spring Lake Park Reserve														
Thompson County Park														
Whitetail Woods Regional Park														

Parks	Ice Skating	Kicksledding	Skate skiing	Mountain Biking	Equestrian Trails	Camp-grounds	Nature Education	Archery	Gardening	Swimming	Paddling	Camper Cabins	ADA-Accessible Trail
Dakota Woods Dog Park													
Lake Byllesby Regional Park													
Lebanon Hills Regional Park													
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve													
Spring Lake Park Reserve													
Thompson County Park													
Whitetail Woods Regional Park					*								

*Equestrian trails in Whitetail Woods available through a partnership with MnDNR at Vermillion Highlands

Dakota County Parks provides lower-cost, nature-based activities.

Recreation Comparison



ACTIVITY VARIETY

Nearby Regional Agency Parks have high visitation and offer some of the activities that Dakota County does not.

- High visitation for groups with children
- . - . - High visitation for groups with someone with a disability

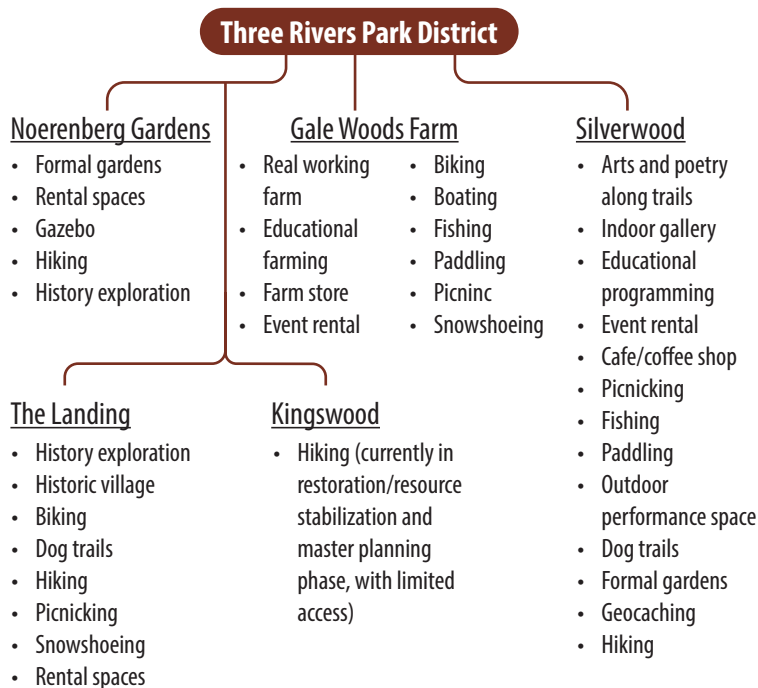
Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study

SPECIAL FEATURES

Special Recreation Feature is an area that preserves, maintains, and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, hunter training education facilities, downhill ski area, sites of historic or archaeological significance, and bridging facilities.

- Metropolitan Council 2040 Parks Policy Plan

What parks have special features in the Regional Park System?



St. Paul Parks & Rec.

Como Zoo & Conservatory

- Zoo
- Como Town rides
- Conservatory gardens
- Special events

Park	2021 Visitation
Como Zoo	1,377,672
Silverwood	394,121
Square Lake	138,317
Gale Woods Farm	130,495
Noerenberg Gardens	98,061
The Landing	33,028
Kingswood	21,879

Washington County Parks

Square Lake

- Canoeing/kayaking
- Fishing
- Grills
- Hiking
- Boat launch
- Swimming beach
- Designated as a "Special Recreation Feature" because of outstanding water quality
- Used by scuba divers

Dakota County would have 1 Special Feature to match its share of the Regional Park System.

NRPA PARK METRICS - AGENCY COMPARISON



Operating Expenditures

- In 2023 we spent about half as much as Minneapolis Park and Rec. Board and about \$20,000 less than Three Rivers Park District.



Personnel

- We have less full-time employees than all of the agencies shown
- Non-full-time employees: we have 27, MPRB has 1,323, and Three Rivers has 75
- MPRB has about twice as many people in programming



Volunteers

- Three Rivers has less volunteers but more volunteer hours
- Minneapolis has more volunteers and ten times as many volunteer hours



Activities / Programming

- Of 18 popular activities, MRPB offers all activities listed, Dakota County offers 5/18 activities, and Three Rivers offers 13/18.
- Most other agencies offer After School Programs, Dakota County does not.
- Most other agencies offer Teen Specific Programs, Senior Specific Programs, and Programs for People with Disabilities.

Activities	Dakota County	MPRB	Three Rivers
Health and wellness education	X	X	X
Safety training		X	X
Fitness enhancement classes	X	X	X
Team sports		X	
Individual sports		X	X
Running/cycling races		X	X
Racquet sports		X	
Martial arts		X	
Aquatics		X	
Golf		X	X
Social recreation events	X	X	X
Cultural crafts		X	X
Performing arts		X	X
Visual arts		X	X
Natural and cultural history activities	X	X	X
Themed special events	X	X	X
Trips and tours		X	X
eSports/eGaming		X	

NATURE CENTERS

Which Metro agencies offer Nature Centers?

0 Nature Centers	1 Nature Center	3 Nature Centers
Dakota County Parks	Minneapolis Park and Rec. Board	Three Rivers Park District
Carver County Parks	Anoka County Parks	
Scott County Parks	Ramsey County Parks	
St. Paul Parks & Rec.		
Washington County Parks		

What we're not doing that other Metro agencies are:

- Concessions (food and alcohol)
- Social spaces
- Event stage/performance space
- Nature center
- Waterpark
- Athletic facilities
- Lighted areas to use at night
- Bridging Facilities
- Special Feature
- Indoor gathering area or picnic shelter for 200+ people
- Snowmaking
- Ski area
- Art center

Other Nature Center Organizations in the Metro Area:

- Dodge Nature Center** (non-profit located in West St. Paul, with additional properties in Mendota Heights, West St. Paul, and Cottage Grove)
- Carpenter Nature Center** (non-profit located in Hastings, MN, and Hudson, WI)
- Wood Lake Nature Center** (City of Richfield)
- Harriet Alexander Nature Center** (City of Fridley)
- Springbrook Nature Center** (City of Fridley)
- Westwood Hills Nature Center** (City of St. Louis Park)

Greenways Vision



KEY FINDINGS

- The greenway system has developed from vision to an established feature of the of Dakota County's recreation and transportation system
- The foundation for the greenway system has been established
- Master plans have been completed for 11 greenway corridors
- 48 greenway miles currently exist
- Infrastructure development can be facilitated by formalizing the greenway collaborative cost share

The 2030 greenway vision is for a multi functional open space corridor that provides multiple community benefits in the areas of water quality, habitat, recreation, and non-motorized transportation. Objectives include:

- Enhancing and interpreting habitat
- Connecting wildlife corridors
- Filtering and storing stormwater
- Creating a safe, amenity-rich trail network that meets needs of multiple users in all seasons
- Creating an inviting, connected, memorable and nature based recreation system

The greenway collaborative is a framework in which cities, the County and other partners collaborate to plan, build, operate, and fund greenways.

There have been over 20 active Greenway Collaborative Projects with our city partners ranging from trailheads, trail gaps, natural area restoration, water quality and trail reconstruction

Economic Impact

In addition to the recreation, transportation, habitat and water quality benefits outlined in the 2030 vision, greenways have positive economic impact for communities.

- **Property Values:** Over the last 20 years, multiple studies across the U.S.A have documented that homes near greenways, on average, sell faster and at higher value.

Source: Bicycle Paths: Safety Concerns and Property Values, Los Angeles County, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (August 20, 2007)

- **Health Care Savings:** For every \$1 in investment in trails for physical activity lead to \$2.94 in direct medical benefit.

Source: A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Physical Activity Using Bike/Pedestrian Trails, Wang, G., et al., (2004)

- **Sepnding:** A 2009 study estimated that people walking, running and biking on Twin Cities metro trails spent around \$4.75 million dollars annually (approximately \$7 million in 2024 dollars when adjusted for inflation). People spend more when visiting tourism destination trails.

Source: Economic Impact of Recreational Trail Use in Different Regions of Minnesota (2009)

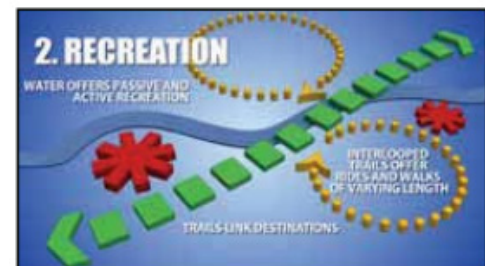
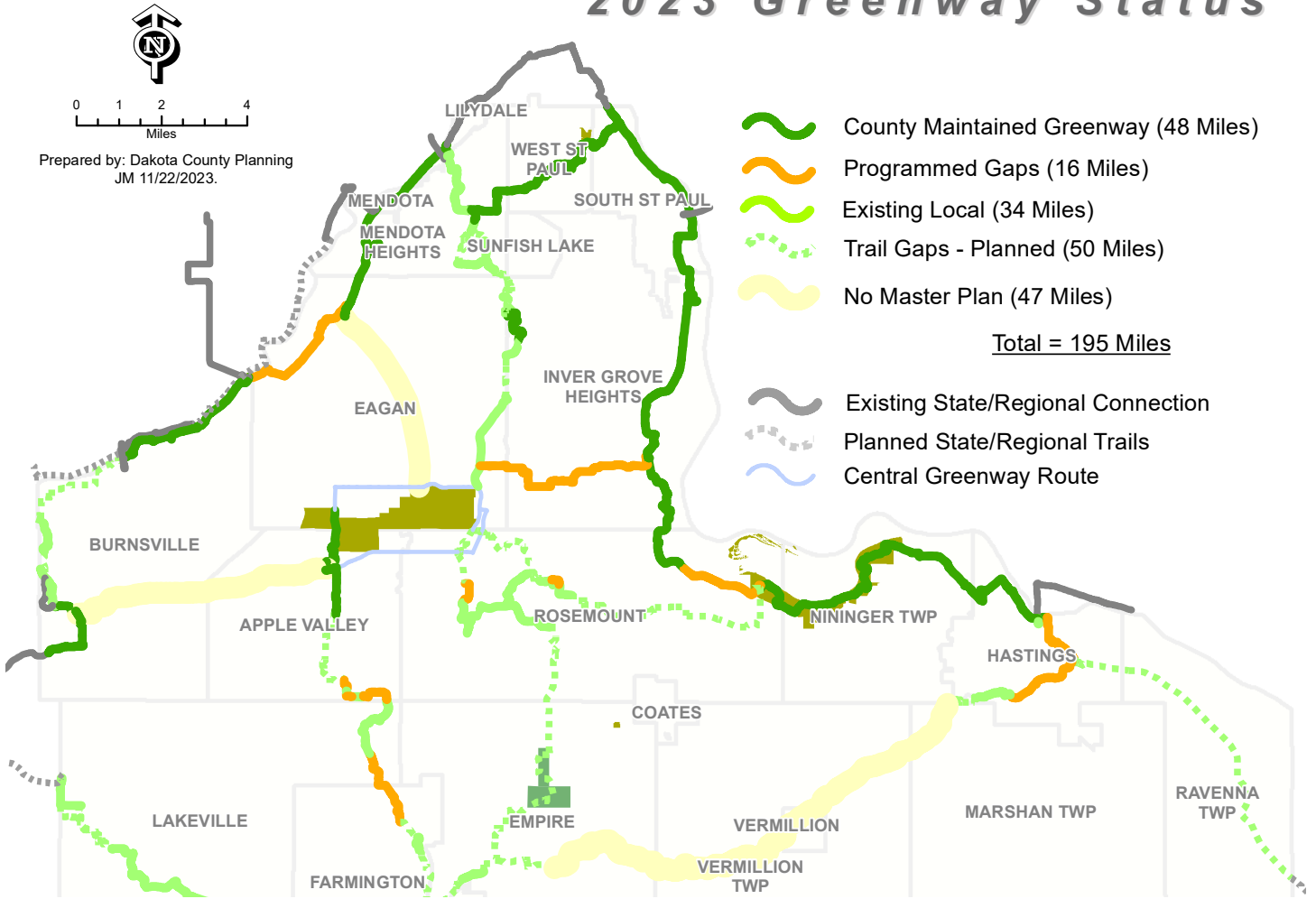


Figure 2.1 Greenway Status, 2023

Dakota County 2023 Greenway Status



The five most popular activities on regional trails are:

1. Biking (54%)
2. Hiking/walking (41%)
3. Dog walking/dog park (16%)
4. Jogging/running (16%)
5. Observing nature (15%)

Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study

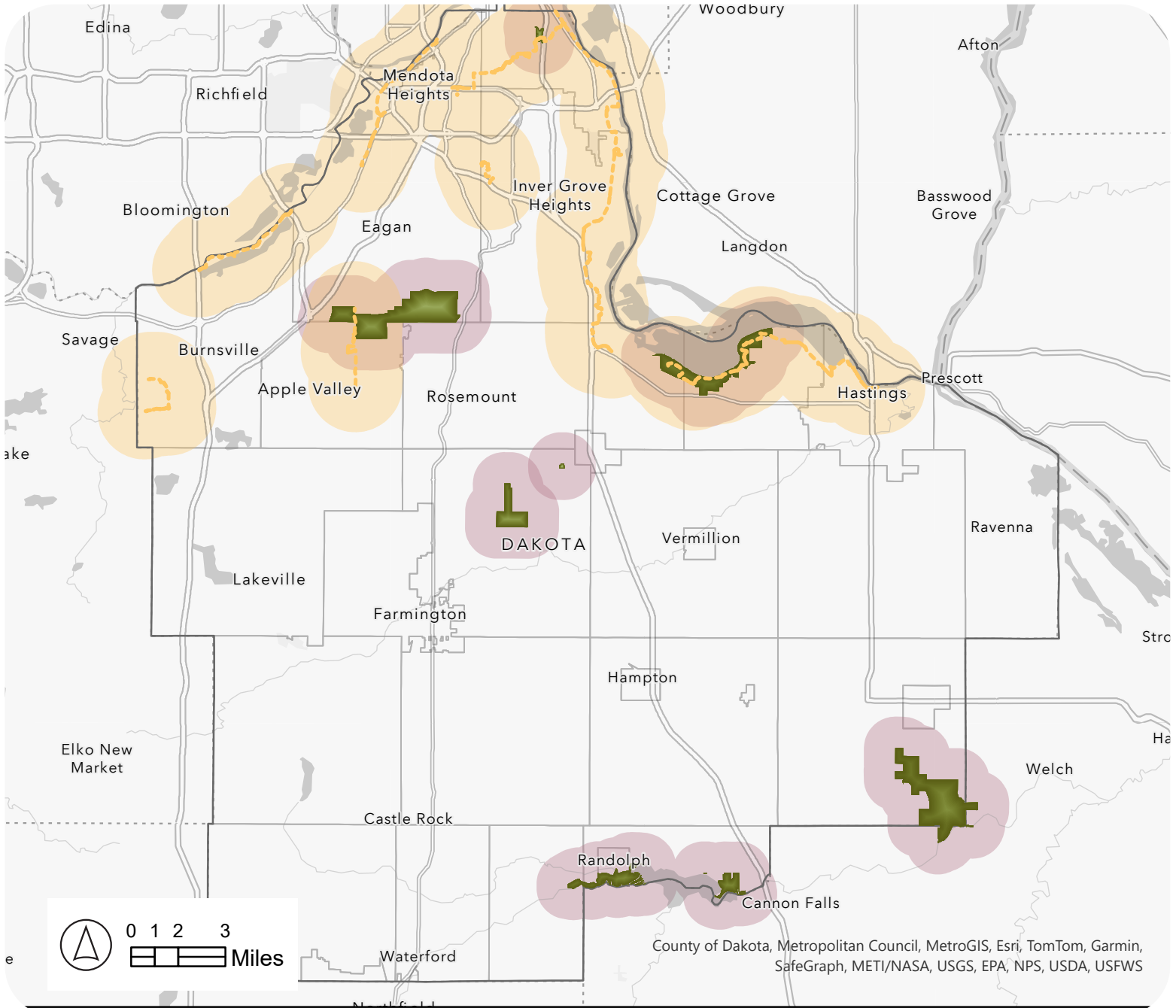
Nearly 80 percent of the land needed for greenways is already in public ownership.

Figure 2.2 Existing and Future Greenway Connectivity

Dakota County Greenways	School Connections	Park Connections	Grade Separated Crossings
River to River Greenway	4	9	7
Minnesota River Greenway	0	6	2
Mississippi River Greenway	3	13	3
North Creek Greenway	10	16	10
Lake Marion Greenway	8	20	3
Veterans Memorial Greenway	2	5	3
Rosemount Greenway	4	9	5
Mendota-Lebanon Greenway	4	9	6
Vermillion Highlands Greenway	2	12	4
Vermillion Hastings Greenway	1	5	3
Total	38	104	46

EXISTING WALKING ACCESS

Figure 3.1 Walkable Distance to Existing Dakota County Parks and Greenways Map

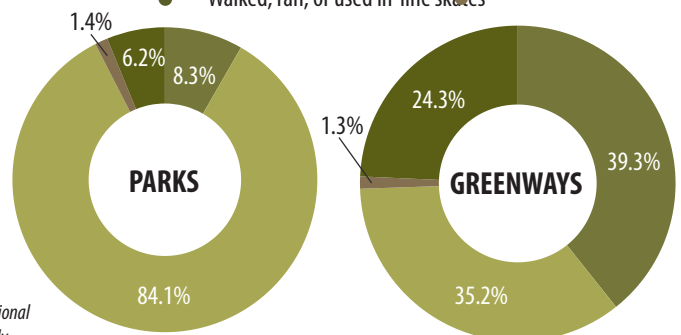


Parks accessible by transit: Thompson County Park
 Transit serves Mississippi River Greenway, River to River Greenway, Minnesota River Greenway, and North Creek Greenway

TRAVEL MODE

Figure 6.4 Travel Mode to Dakota County Parks & Greenways

● Bicycle ● Car or other vehicle
 ● Walked, ran, or used in-line skates



KEY FINDINGS

- Many residents do not currently have a park or greenway within walking distance of their home
- Existing greenways are more accessible via transit than existing parks

Most Dakota County Park visitors arrive by car or other vehicle and most Dakota County Greenway visitors walk or bike to the trails.

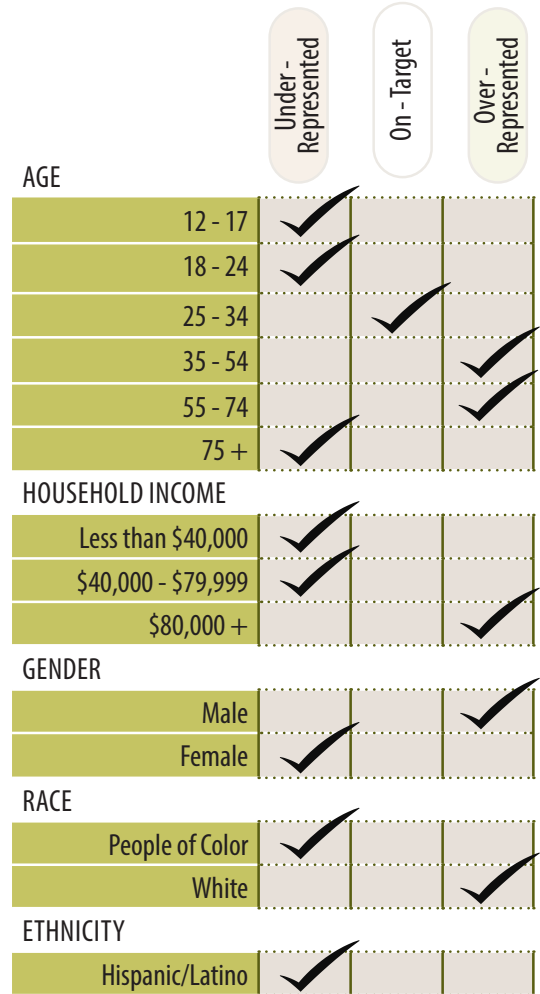
Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.



KEY FINDINGS

- Greenway visitation has grown to nearly 40% of system visits
- Similar to park visitors, people of color, households with lower income, youth, and older adults are under-represented in greenway visits when compared to the demographics of Dakota County's population
- There is a gap in the percentage of men vs women visiting greenways
- Trails continue to be one of the most popular and requested facilities
- The spacing and distance of Dakota County's greenway network tends to favor longer millage bicycle trips over shorter walking loops
- As greenway use increases, comments about conflicts between

2021 Visitor Snap Shot Greenways



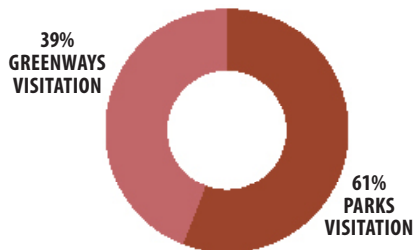
Data from 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DP05.

Figure 4.1 Dakota County Greenway Visits, 2022

Dakota County Greenways	2022 Visits
Big Rivers Regional Trail	154,079
Lake Marion Greenway	105,113
Minnesota River Greenway	121,468
Mississippi River Greenway	359,759
North Creek Greenway	81,098
River to River Greenway	309,055
Total	1,130,527

Data Source: Met Council Annual Use Estimates, 2022

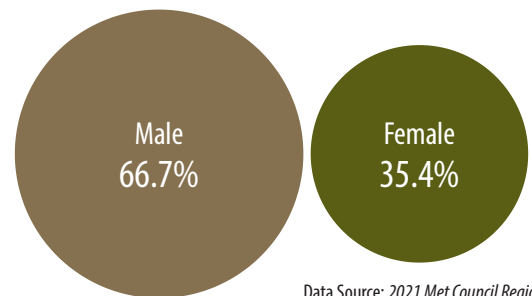
Figure 1.2 Parks and Greenways Visitation, 2022



Data Source: Met Council Annual Use Estimates, 2022, including Thompson County Park

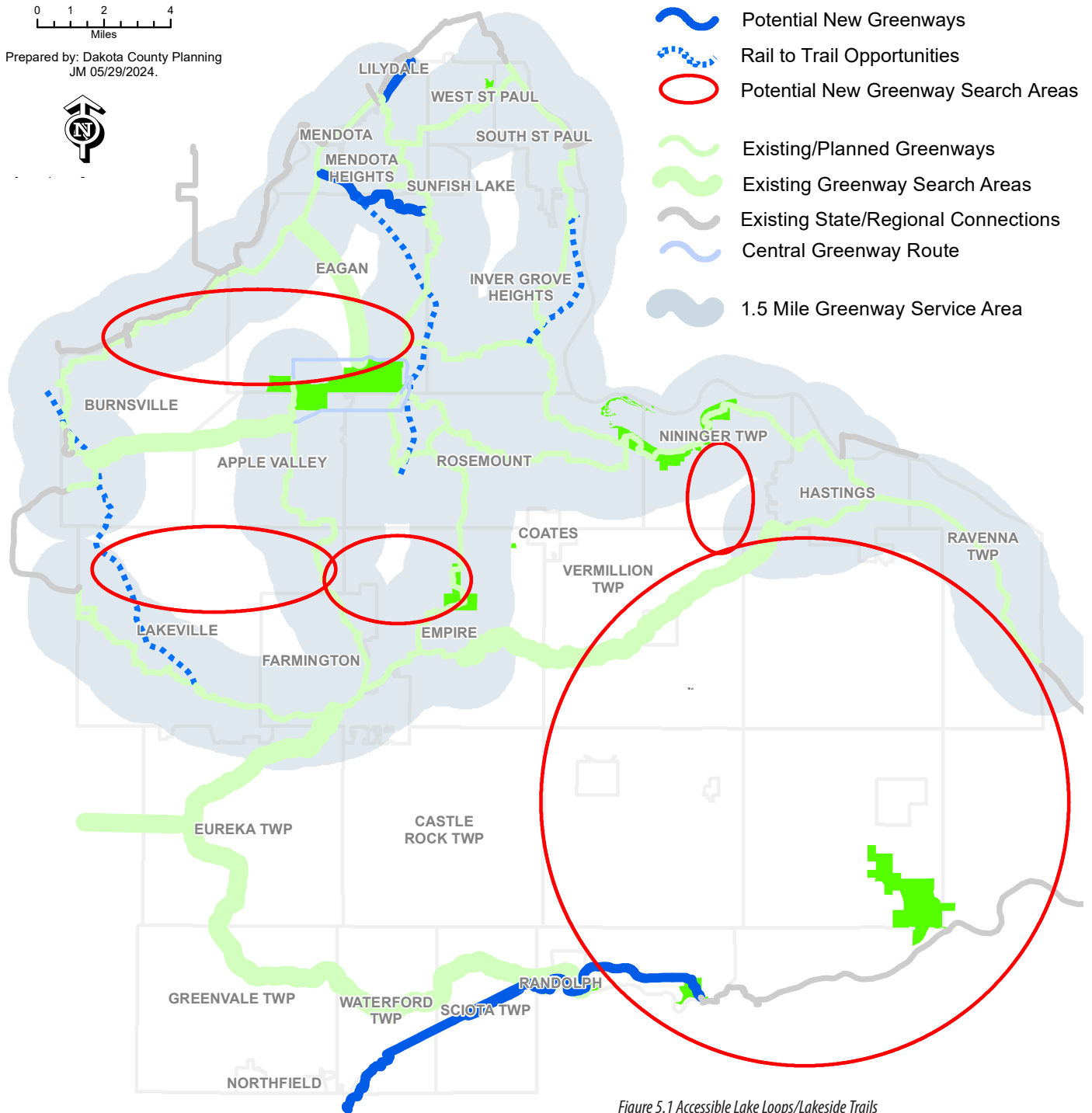


GENDER GREENWAYS



Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study; US Census ACS 2022, Table DP05.

Figure 5.1 Potential New Greenway Opportunities



The 2030 Greenway Vision includes nested loop trails in varying lengths around lakes utilizing the greenway network as a spine. There is opportunity to increase the number of nested loops in the system.

Figure 5.1 Accessible Lake Loops/Lakeside Trails

Greenways	2008	2023	
Mississippi River Greenway	0	2**	Lake Rebecca and Spring Lake
Minnesota River Greenway	0	1	Black Dog Lake
River to River Greenway	0	2	Marthaler Lake, Thompson Oaks Lake
Vermillion River Greenway	NA	0	
Rosemount Greenway	NA	1	Horseshoe Lake
Vermillion Highlands Greenway	NA	0	
Lake Marion Greenway	NA	2	Lake Marion, Sunset Lake
North Creek Greenway	0	2	Cobblestone Lake, East Lake
Total	0	14	

Units in italics are new since 2008



KEY FINDINGS

- Greenways are being established but in many cases habitat and water quality elements still need to be layered in
- Greenway natural resources management plans (NRMP) provide the natural resource management framework. By the end of 2024, NRMPs will be completed for over half of all planned greenways
- Greenways are wildlife corridors in the urban/suburban areas of the County

GREENWAY HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Greenway Natural Resources Management Plans (NRMP) Completed (4)

River to River Greenway
Lake Marion Greenway
North Creek Greenway
Vermillion River Greenway- Hastings
+

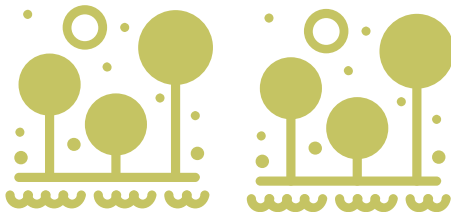
Greenway NRMPs in progress (2)

Veterans Memorial Greenway
Mississippi River Greenway
=6/10 Greenways with NRMPs

Greenway habitat management as of 2022

- Restored - 41 acres
- Active restoration (currently being restored) - 21 acres
- Stabilized - 84 acres

Greenway Collaborative Natural Resource Management, 2022	Acres restored or managed
River to River Greenway Marthaler Park, Garlough Park, Wentworth Library	42
Lake Marion Greenway South Creek Vermillion River Conservation Area	19



RIVER TO RIVER GREENWAY WATER QUALITY PROJECT

The River to River Greenway travels through a residential area completed in 2023 with 400 new housing unit and water quality improvements. The project includes:

- Restoration of a historic creek formerly contained within a storm sewer pipe below the golf course.
- Restoration of wetlands previously filled with construction waste.
- A brand-new stormwater treatment system to treat 25 percent of the City of West St. Paul's stormwater drainage area.

GARLOUGH PARK RESTORATION

Dakota County Parks developed a partnership with Great River Greening, Independent School District 197 and the City of West St. Paul to restore 23 acres of woodland and to convert 5 acres of turfgrass into prairie and pollinator plantings. Cost-share and direction from the River to River Greenway Natural Resource Management Plant guided these efforts. These projects have bridged traditional land boundaries to incentivize natural resource restoration and they have also created ownership from students and surrounding community members who have participated in multiple volunteer planting projects.



Stormwater treatment and boardwalk near Wentworth Library the River to River Greenway



Two Rivers High School students at a volunteer planting event



KEY FINDINGS

- Now that many greenways are in place, there is opportunity to activate them with events and programs. Spaces and support infrastructure (for example, power outlets, restrooms, lighting) for events and programs will be needed.
- There is opportunity to broaden appeal to more people with better access, activities for kids, drinking water, restrooms, and equipment rental.
- Consistent wayfinding is important for visitors to navigate the growing greenway system.
- Interactive interpretive features, interpretive signage, and art are ways to enhance the sense of place.

Figure 7.1 Changes selected by regional trail visitors that would allow them more frequent visits to trails

Would this change help you visit trails more often	Percent saying yes
None of the items are barriers	29%
Better walking or biking access	25%
A trail closer to me	14%
Better access to equipment rental	13%
Park programming and features that are more interesting to me	11%
Lower cost (entrance and rental fees)	10%
More activities for kids	10%
More activities for people my age	9%
Better parking lot facilities	8%
Features for a range of health and physical conditions	6%
Better public transportation to the trail	5%

Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.

Top five visitor suggestions to improve the park/trail on the day of their visit for Dakota County Regional Parks:

1. Nothing/all good
2. More/better signage
3. Drinking/water fountain access
4. More trails; longer/extended trails
5. Construction

Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.

The newly adopted Dakota County Parks Donation Plan will support greenway enhancements

ART, HISTORY, CULTURE AND INTERPRETATION

Greenway Interpretive plans outline a compelling and comprehensive vision for engaging trail visitors in history, nature, and culture.



Dakota ways of seeing interpretive installation on the Minnesota River Greenway

Interpretive Plans have been completed for the Minnesota River Greenway, the Mississippi River Greenway, and the Veterans Memorial Greenway

Garlough Environmental Magnet School students painting the mural at the Charlton Tunnel on the River To River Greenway

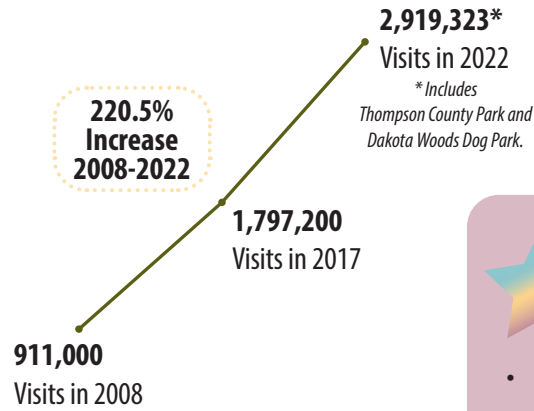


WAYFINDING

According to the 2021 Metropolitan Council Parks and Trails Visitor Study, better signage was the most cited improvement needed for Dakota County parks and trails. Dakota County wayfinding standards and details were formalized in 2023 to provide guidance with specifying, fabricating and installing greenway signage to assure consistent application.



PARK, GREENWAY, AND NATURAL AREAS LAND AND VISITOR INVENTORY



Pt. 1
We've grown a lot

KEY FINDING

- Dakota County Park System has grown substantially in the areas of Greenways and annual visits since 2008.

Table 1.1 Percent Change for Dakota County Population, Parks Acreage, Greenway Trail Miles, Inholdings, and Annual Visits, 2008-2022

	2008	2022	% Change
County Population	391,613	443,905	12%
County Population as a Percentage of Metro Area	12.14%	12.0%	-1.17%
Parks	6	7	17%
Park Acres	4,750	6,280	32%
Park Conservation Areas	0	7	New
Park Conservation Area Acres	0	204	New
Inholdings Left to Acquire - Acres	1,025	569.4	-44.45%
Greenways	3	10	233%
Greenway Trail Miles	14	46	229%
Annual Visits	911,000	2,919,323	220%

Land Conservation Program – Natural Resource Restoration & Management

Dakota County is also protecting **11,620** acres in land conservation.

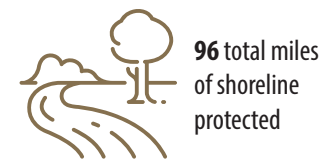
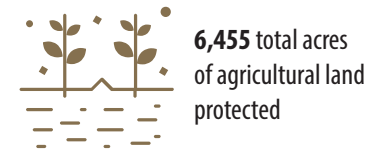
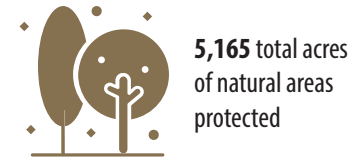


Table 2.1 Ownership Compared to Other Implementing Agencies

Implementing Agencies	Regional Park, County Park, & Park Reserve Acreage	Parks % of Regional Park System	Acres per 1,000 people	Total open regional trail miles	Miles per 1,000 people
Anoka	8,538.4	13.37%	23.67 acres	97.7 miles	.27 miles
Carver	712.3	1.12%	6.74 acres	37.6 miles	.36 miles
Dakota	6,209.67	9.72%	14.25 acres	46 miles	.14 miles
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	3,128.8	4.90%	7.36 acres	51.8 miles	.12 miles
Ramsey	5,442.7	8.52%	9.91 acres	28.4 miles	.05 miles
Scott	4,298.8	6.73%	28.74 acres	12.9 miles	.09 miles
St. Paul	1,956.67	3.06%	6.3 acres	29.5 miles	.10 miles
Three Rivers Park District	23,850.2	37.34%	18.78 acres	190.2 miles	.15 miles
Washington	7,194.6	11.26%	27.17 acres	22.1 miles	.08 miles
Total Average	6,814.68	10.67%	15.84 acres	60.75 miles	.15 miles

Dakota County's park acreage and regional trail miles are close to the regional average.

Pt. 2
We are keeping pace compared to other Metro agencies in acreage

Table 3.1 Dakota County Comparison to Metro System

	Metro Area	Dakota County 2020, Actual	Dakota County 2020, based on 13.9% share	Dakota County Projected 2050 share
Population	3,163,104	439,882 = 13.9%	439,882	529,027 = 13.75%
Park Acres	54,465 acres	6,280 acres	7,571	7,962
Parks	56	7	8	8
Special features	8	0	1	1
Bridging facilities	11 (proposed, Three Rivers)	0	2	2
Regional trails	55	10	8	8
Trail miles	415 miles	46 miles	58	58
Annual visits (2022)	69,000,000	2,919,323	9,591,000	9,487,500
Suburban Population (excluding Minneapolis & St. Paul)	2,427,041	18.1% = 439,882 / 2,427,041	N/A	17.89% = 529,027 / 2,956,778
Suburban annual visits (excluding Minneapolis & St. Paul)	34,300,000	2,919,323	18.1% share = 6,208,300	17.89% share = 7,462,932

Population Data Source: Met Council Regional Forecasts, 2024. Dakota County 2050 share of suburban regional visitation is based on applying the percent increase of the Metro region to suburban annual visitation.

Pt. 3
We are behind in visitors based on our share of the regional population

This is where we would be if we had our share of the regional park system.

Dakota County Parks would need 3,288,977 more visitors to meet its regional suburban share of visitation in 2022.



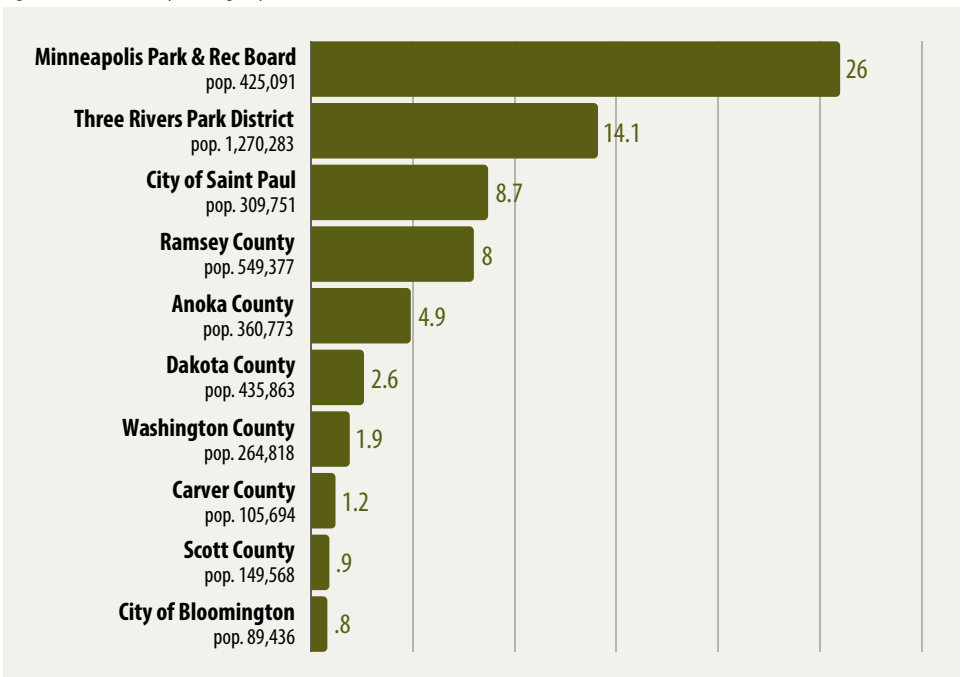
KEY FINDINGS

- Residents are visiting parks at an increasing rate.
- However, Dakota County is still lacking in its share of the Metro area’s regional park visitation.

Despite being the third most populous area of the ten implementing agencies, Dakota County is 6th in visitation.

Figure 3.2 2022 Visits by Park Agency, in Millions

AGENCY COMPARISON



Data Source: 2021 Met Council Annual Use Estimates, July 2023.

Pt. 4

Visitor demographics do not reflect County resident demographics



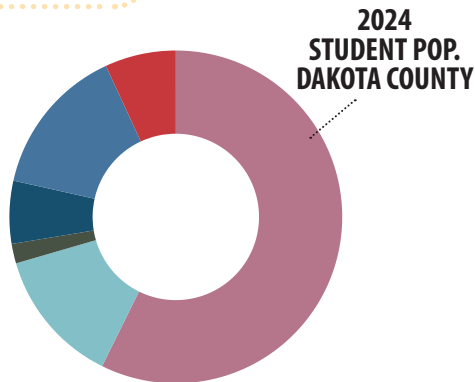
KEY FINDINGS

- Although visitation has increased since 2008, park and greenway users are not representative of the makeup of the county population. Key populations are underrepresented, including people of color, women, youth, the elderly, and low-income individuals.

People of Color in Dakota County visited County Parks at a rate of **33 %** of their expected representation and visited County Greenways at a rate of **28.4%** of their expected representation.

Unless noted, numbers used in this analysis do not include Thompson County Park and Dakota Woods Dog Park.

The current student population in Dakota County shows that future generations will be more diverse.



Data Source: Minnesota Department of Education, 2023-2024 Public School Enrollment.

Table 4.1 2021 Visitor Snap Shot

		Under-Represented		On - Target		Over - Represented	
		PARKS	GREENWAYS				
AGE	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	✓	✓				

Data from 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DP05.

Figure 4.2 Public School Student Population in Dakota County, 2024

Race	
Dakota County Public Schools, 2023-2024	
White	57.3%
Black or African American	13.2%
American Indian & Other Indigenous Peoples	1.9%
Asian	6.1%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Hispanic or Latino	14.6%
Two or more races	6.9%

Race by the Numbers
Dakota County

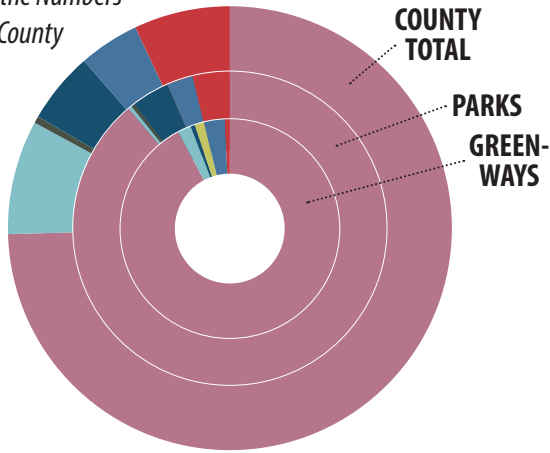


Figure 4.3 Racial Demographics in Dakota County, in Dakota County Parks, and in Greenways Visitation

Race	Dakota County Total Population, 2022	Dakota County Parks Visitation, 2021	Dakota County Greenway Visitation, 2021
White	74.50%	88.86%	92.20%
Black or African American	8.30%	0.37%	2.00%
American Indian & Alaska Native	0.50%	0.37%	0.00%
Asian	5.20%	3.90%	0.60%
Pacific Islander	0.10%	0.00%	1.40%
Some other race	4.40%	2.69%	3.09%
Two or more races	7.00%	3.81%	0.71%

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

Race - Metro Area & Regional System

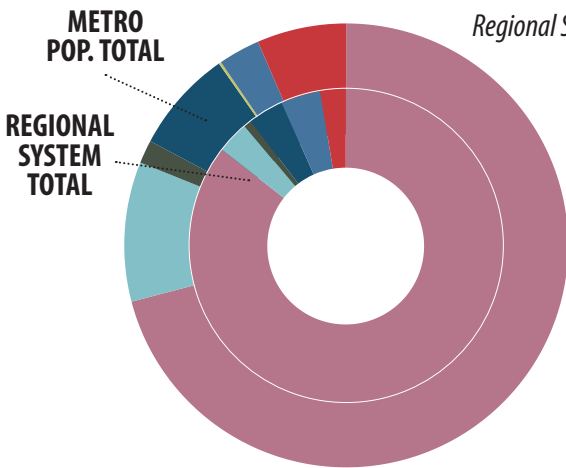


Figure 4.4 Racial Demographics in the Twin Cities Metro Area and for Regional Park System Visitation

Race	Metro Area Population, 2022	Regional System Visitation, 2021
White	79.50%	85.47%
Black or African American	11.40%	3.32%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1.90%	0.80%
Asian	8.40%	3.66%
Pacific Islander	0.20%	0.07%
Some other race	3.40%	4.08%
Two or more races	7.30%	2.60%

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

Dakota County and the Metro region as a whole are both underrepresented by people of color in park and greenway visitation. The gap in Dakota County is considerably more pronounced.



KEY FINDINGS

- Women are underrepresented at parks and greenways in Dakota County. This is a similar trend to the Regional Park System, though for greenways in Dakota County it is especially pronounced.
- Dakota County had the lowest female visitation on regional greenways of all the agencies in the 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.

COUNTY TOTAL

Female
50.3%

Male
49.7%

Figure 4.5 Gender in Dakota County, in Parks, and in Greenways Visitation

GENDER

PARKS

Male
54.3%

Female
44.2%

GREENWAYS

Male
66.7%

Female
35.4%

Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study; US Census ACS 2022, Table DP05.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

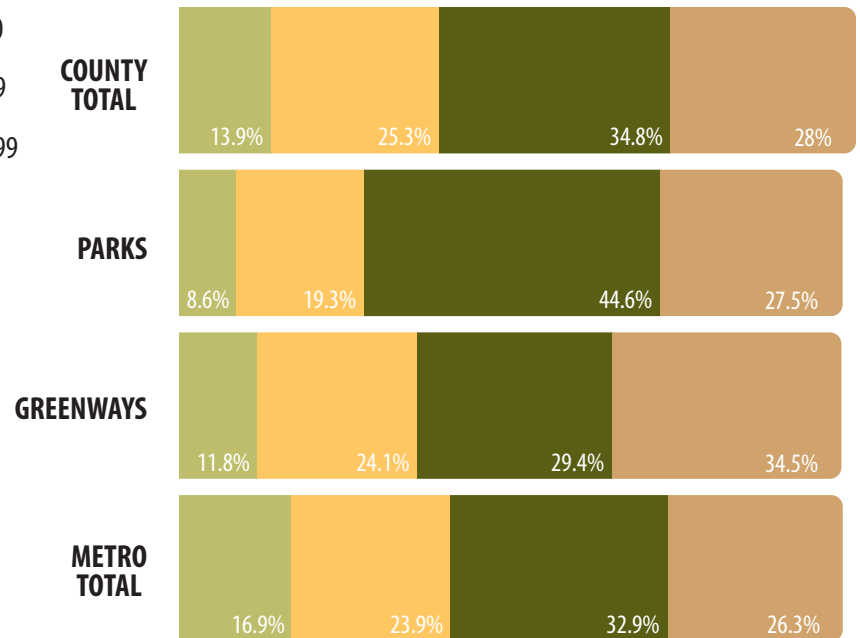
- Less than \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$79,999
- \$80,000 - \$149,999
- \$150,000 +



KEY FINDINGS

- Low- and middle-income households are underrepresented at Dakota County parks and greenways.
- The median income for Dakota County was \$97,501 in 2022. Dakota County has more residents in higher-income ranges compared to the Metro area.

Figure 4.6 Household Income of Dakota County Residents, Dakota County Park and Greenway Visitors, and Twin Cities Metro Residents



Data Source: 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study; US Census ACS 2022, Table S1901.



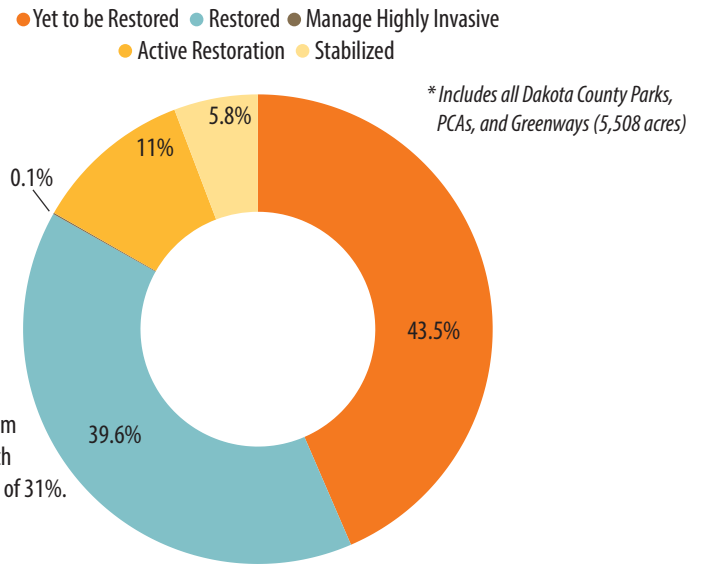
KEY FINDINGS

- Dakota County Parks is seeking to go beyond restoration practices into enhancement, including implementing climate adaptation practices.
- Highly invasive plants were controlled on 324 parkland acres in 2023.
- Dakota County parks was awarded a NACo award for reintroducing bison at Spring Lake Park Reserve.
- 605 volunteers in 2022 helped with native plant production and seed collection, installation of native plants, survey of wildlife, and served as landscape stewards.

Natural Resource Management

RESTORATION - ENTIRE DAKOTA COUNTY SYSTEM*

Figure 1.1 Acres Restored and Managed to Date, 2024



* Includes all Dakota County Parks, PCAs, and Greenways (5,508 acres)

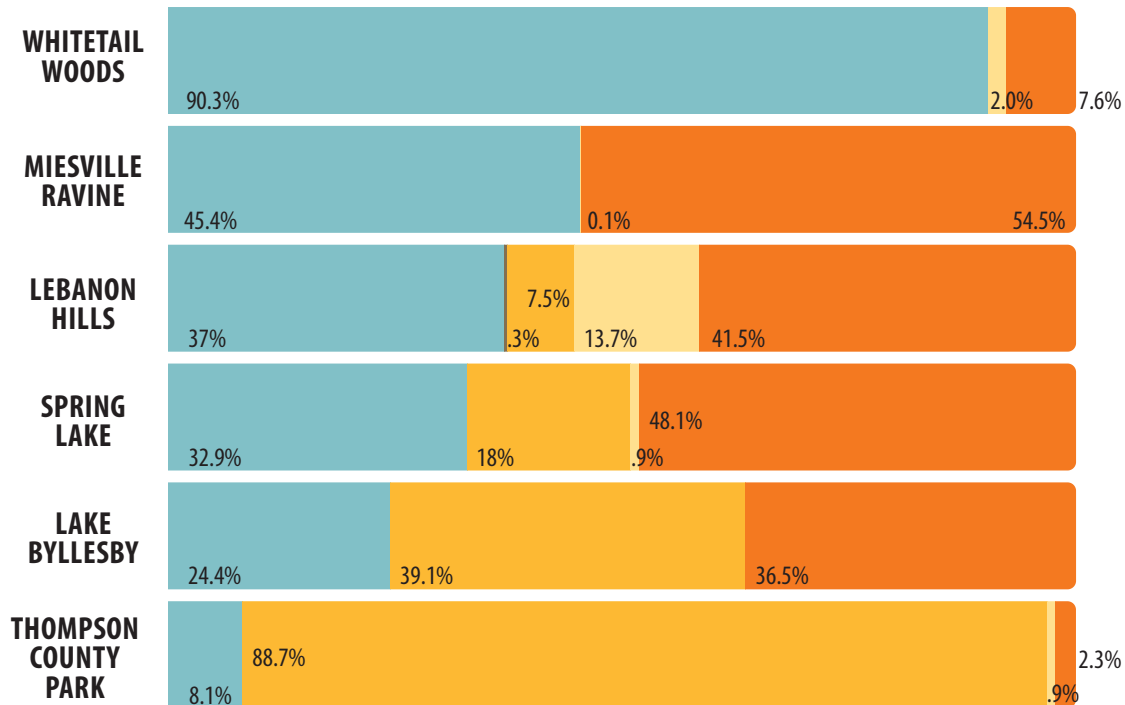
Nearly 40% of the system has been restored, which exceeds the 5-Year goal of 31%.

Four restoration projects for 60 acres have occurred for Greenway habitats.

ACRES RESTORED

- Restored
- Manage Highly Invasive
- Active Restoration
- Stabilized
- Yet to be Restored

Figure 1.2 Restoration Acres for Dakota County Parks, 2024



- 1,434 acres of vegetation were restored from 2017-2023.
- 35 projects improved habitat for species including rare species.
- 4 greenway corridors were developed from 2017-2023.

NATURAL RESOURCES SUCCESS STORIES

Biochar

When Dakota County restores woodlands and forests, we remove a lot of invasive shrubs, like buckthorn and honeysuckle.

In Lake Byllesby Regional Park, we've started a restoration project that removes these invasive shrubs from the floodplain forests and slopes near the Cannon River, just west of MN Hwy 56 and south of the City of Randolph.

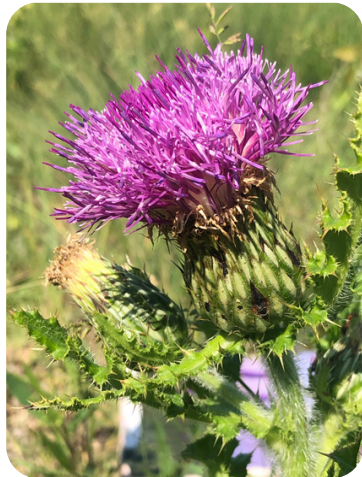
The wood from these shrubs will mostly be mulched by forestry equipment and spread thinly throughout the forest floor, but some of it will be burned. Dakota County is trying a new process for burning piles of wood waste by using biochar kilns. These mobile burn chambers offer a low-tech solution to wood waste by sequestering up to 20% of the woody biomass into a charcoal form that can last for centuries to over a millennium, and this creates a positive feedback loop for establishing native plants and healthy forest soils while doing so.

As an added bonus, burning in biochar kilns creates less air pollution for our neighbors, and it doesn't heat the soil up as much as conventional burn piles, which leave ugly burn scars on the land. We're hoping to continue using innovative ways to make our ecological restoration efforts more sustainable, as we allow ecosystems to function in a way that offers progress towards solutions to face our future changes in climate in a resilient way.



Hill's Thistle

Our seasonal natural resources technicians made an exciting discovery in one of our parks! This spikey plant is Minnesota's least common native thistle, Hill's thistle. It was listed as a Minnesota Special Concern species back in 1984. Thanks to our restoration and surveying efforts, this small population, as well as many other rare plant species throughout the park system, has been found and can now be conserved!



Butterfly Surveys

With the help of two experts, two of our parks have been surveyed for butterflies and moths over the last couple of years. Over 315 species of moths and over 40 species of butterflies were identified - a few uncommon and rare species among them!



Hickory Hairstreak



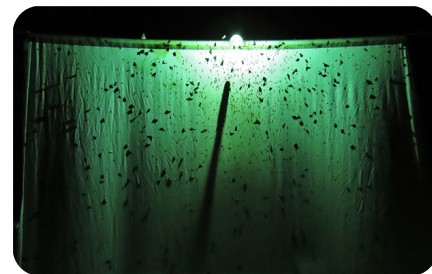
Dion Skipper

Two of the rare butterfly species found at Spring Lake Park Reserve.

WATER QUALITY

Water quality continues to be a concern and Natural Resources works with SWCD to preserve water quality. Natural Resources is working in Lebanon Hills and Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine Park Reserve to improve water quality, in collaboration with other organizations.

In 2023, Natural Resources conducted water quality monitoring in six lakes within parks. Water quality data was collected in the Trout Brook watershed, Chub Lake watershed, and at wells for bison at Spring Lake Park Reserve. Natural Resources also completed a wetland management plan for Whitetail Woods and obtained a state grant for implementation.



Brightly illuminated sheet that attracted many insects on a moonless summer night at Spring Lake Park Reserve - one of multiple survey techniques used!



KEY FINDINGS

- Contemporary park and greenway long-range plans document history of the land within the park boundaries and inventory known cultural sites.
- Dakota County Parks would like to move from a strategy of identification of sites to protection, restoration, and co-management of sites, as appropriate.
- Management plans are needed for cultural sites within park boundaries.



View of Mississippi River above Hastings, ca. 1890 (MNHS) MD2.9 NG h1 (Locator Number) YR1939.5715 (Accession Number)



Cannon River Bluffs before the Lake Byllesby Dam was built, Cannon River Historical Society.

Figure 2.1 Cultural Resources at Dakota County Parks

Dakota County Parks	Cultural Sites
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-settlement dwelling remains and 1 pre-historic artifact • Linkert Family Farmstead • Speculative mercury mine remains
Spring Lake Park Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McCarriel's Mill site: CE 1854 to 1932 • 7 archaeological sites associated with early Indigenous occupation ca. 6000 BCE to CE late 1840s • 1 post-contact archaeological site • Farm buildings from early to mid-20th century
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 previously recorded architecture/history property and portions of 4 others (Byllesby Dam & one extant bridge, two highway bridge ruins, and railroad bridge) • No archaeological sites, though 9 sites located during a water draw down in 1987, with 8 other identified within one mile of the park in 1978 and 2015
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Native American habitation sites identified in 1992-1994, along with 9 early Euro-American farmsteads
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 archaeological sites within the park reserve- lithic scatters • 9 archaeological sites within 1 mile of park reserve • Four areas containing several dozen Traditional Cultural Places • 8 former and existing historical farmsteads (Farm equipment and farm foundation remnants)
Thompson County Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One archaeological site

Traditional Cultural Places

The Minnesota, Mississippi, and Cannon River Valleys have been home to the Dakota for thousands of years.

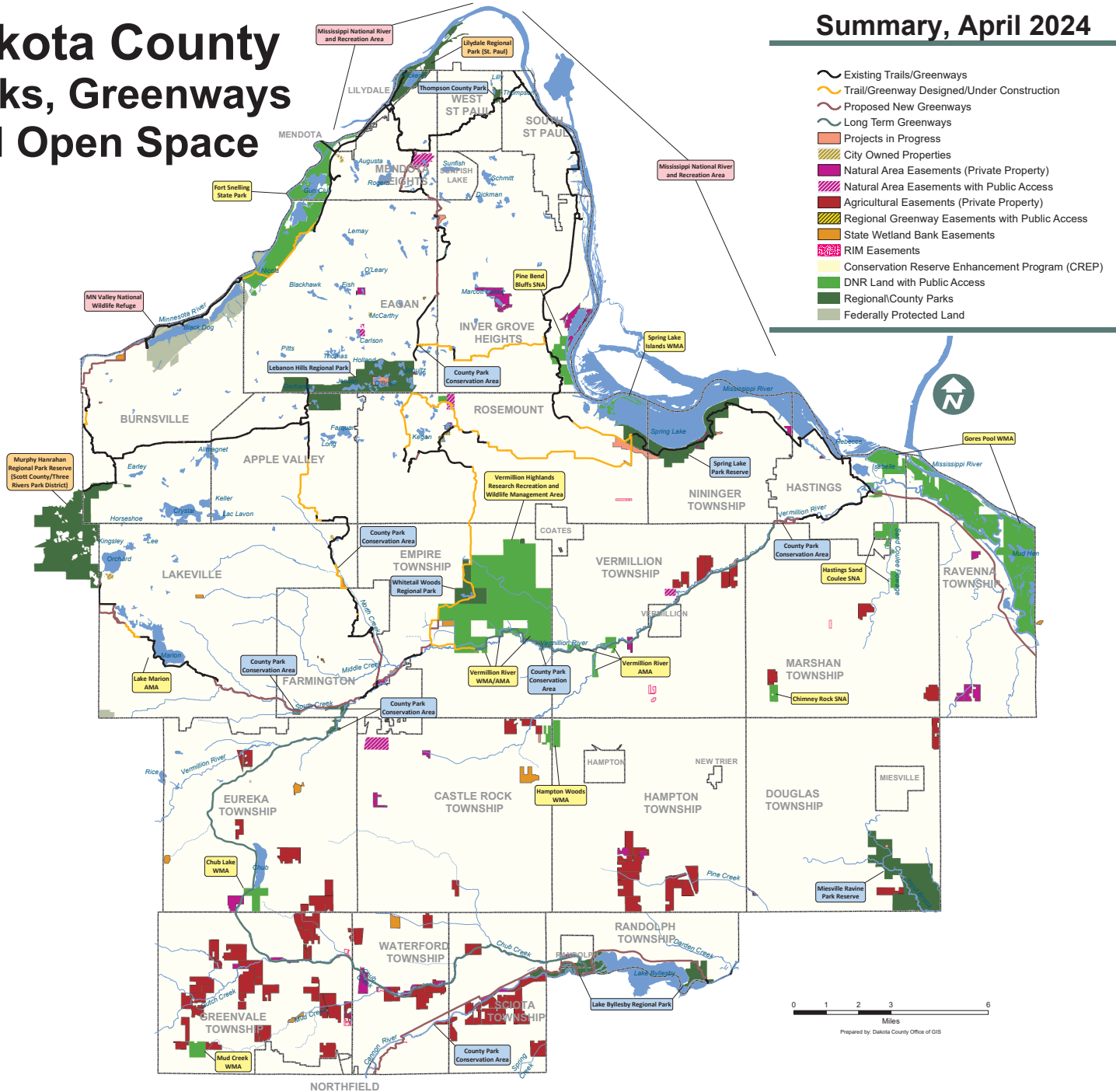
Traditional Cultural Places (TCP) are associated with the cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, lifeways, arts, crafts, or social institutions of a living community and are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community. In addition to the fundamentals of food, water, and shelter there is the spiritual and ceremonial practices that are core aspects of cultural identity. The most significant are related to birth, milestones in life, and burials. Sites chosen for these ceremonies were in use for many generations and are not limited to a specific location with a clear boundary. Instead, an area is identified as significant and over hundreds or even thousands of years families and nations continue to choose to hold their ceremonies at unique locations within the larger culturally significant area.

Traditional Cultural Places (TCP) surveys have been conducted for Miesville Ravine Park Reserve and Spring Lake Park Reserve. Surveys indicated significant areas of TCPS in both parks. There are likely TCPs within the boundaries other parks and greenways, particularly those along the Minnesota, Mississippi, and Cannon Rivers.

Figure 3.1 Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Open Space, 2024

Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Open Space

Summary, April 2024

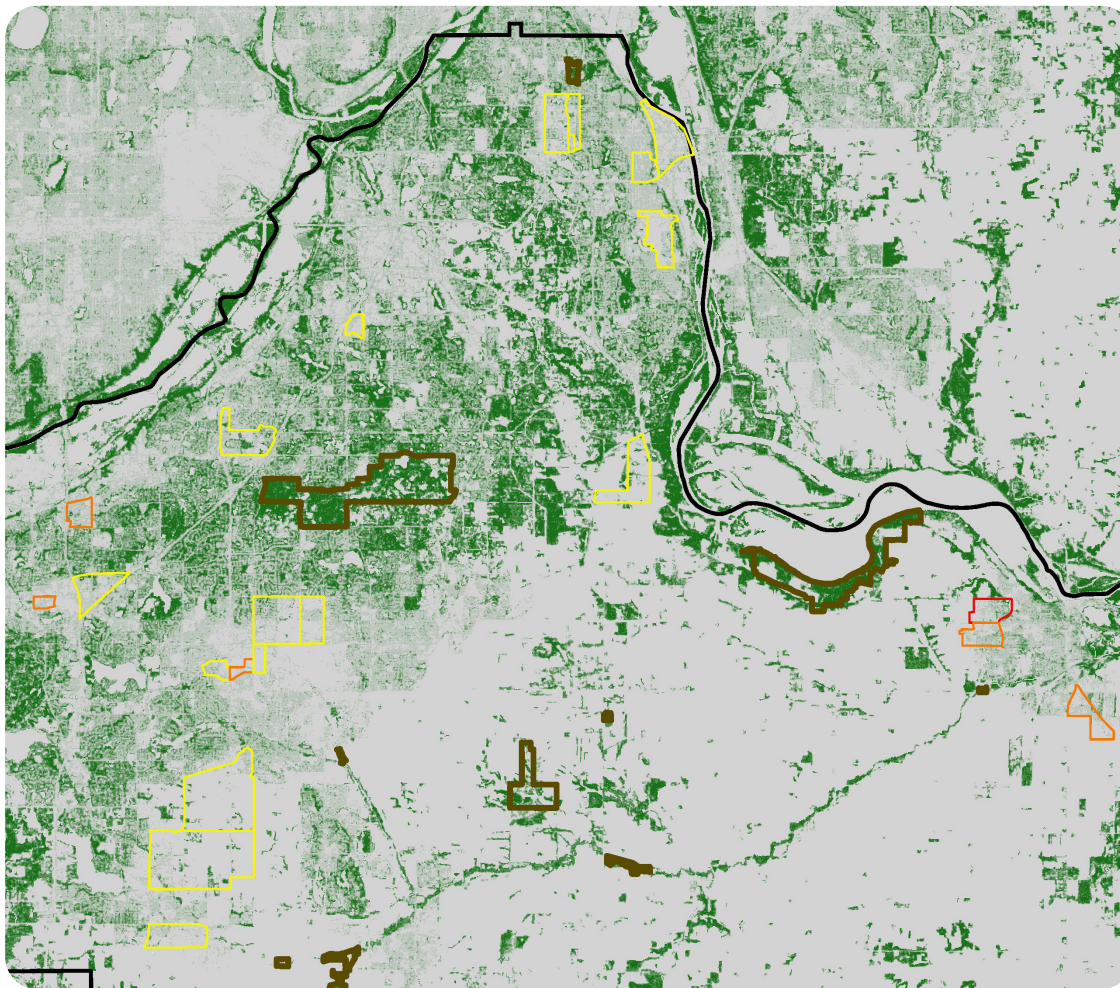


The Land Conservation Plan adopted in 2020 addresses both work on ecological systems outside of park boundaries and green infrastructure.

Conservation Site Type	Acres
Parks/Park Conservation Areas	
Completed - Owned	5,811
Completed - Easement	12
In Progress	270
Conservation Easements	
Completed	9,767
In Progress	80
Greenway Easements	
Completed	46
In Progress	7

Figure 3.2 Conservation Acres Completed and In Progress, 2024

Figure 4.1 Tree Canopy and Tree Equity in Dakota County - Priority Areas



Legend

Tree Equity Score

- 39
- 40 - 69
- 70 - 79
- Dakota County Boundary

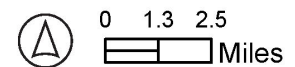
NLCD Tree Canopy CONUS 2021

- 0-1%
- 1-25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- > 75%

Dakota County Parks, Park Reserves, and Park Conservation Areas

Showing block groups with less than 50% tree canopy cover, a high priority index (.25 and above), and a tree equity score less than or equal to 79.

Data Sources:
American Forests Tree Equity Score and National Land Cover Database CONUS 2021.



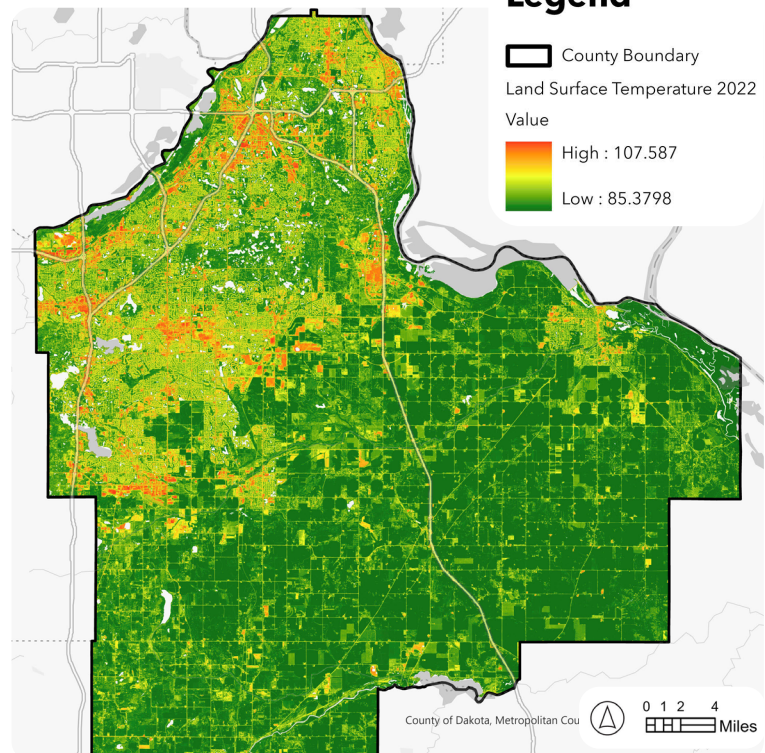
ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) defines resilience as “not just the ability to maintain essential function, identity and structure, but also the capacity for transformation.” The IPCC considers resilience both in terms of **ecosystem recovery** as well as the recovery and adaptation of **human societies** to natural disasters.

Human activities such as exploitation of natural resources, pollution, land use, and anthropogenic climate change are causing regime shifts in ecosystems to degraded conditions. Environmental resource management and ecosystem management builds ecological resilience. Resilient ecosystems provide a number of services for humans (see next page).

Through protection and restoration, parkland and conservation areas also create more resilient floodplains. Parkland, particularly soils and forests, enhances carbon sinks, which has climate change mitigation effects.

Figure 4.2 Land Surface Temperature, September 1, 2022, 88 degrees Fahrenheit



Legend

County Boundary

Land Surface Temperature 2022 Value

- High : 107.587
- Low : 85.3798





HEALTH BENEFITS OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Parks and greenspace play a role in the well being of the environment as well as our health. In 2023, 24% of adults surveyed in the Dakota County Healthy Adults Survey had been told they had depression at some point in their lives. Of adults surveyed with an income below 200% of the poverty line, 46% had ever been told they had depression. Depression rates in the County have been rising since 2014. As for anxiety, **57% of adults surveyed with an income below 200% of the poverty line had ever been told they had anxiety.** According to the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (2020), greenspace use for adults results in a variety of health benefits including stress reduction, better mental and physical health, improved cognitive performance, improved sleep quality, and reduced cancer risk. For children, benefits of greenspace include improved attention capacity, concentration, emotional and behavioral development, coordination, balance, self-confidence, self-discipline, and social skills. Dakota County Greenways especially assist in improving users' physical health as well.

Green Infrastructure and Land Conservation

Green infrastructure elements can be at multiple scales. At the neighborhood scale, this may include rain gardens or restoring wetlands. At the landscape scale green infrastructure can include protecting large open spaces which bring value in terms of flood protection, habitat, carbon sequestration, erosion control and other ecosystem benefits.

The Dakota County 2030 vision for green infrastructure is "Through a unique intergovernmental and public/private partnership model, a comprehensive and interconnected system of parks, natural areas and other lands in Dakota County will be protected and sustained to provide multiple economic, ecological and social benefits for current and future."

The 2020 Land Conservation Plan outlines vision and goals, and strategies for intergovernmental and public/private partnership model and identifies 24 preliminary land conservation focus areas (CFA) that consist of natural features, connectivity, hydrology, and land ownership with renewed emphasis on water quality. These CFAs are landscape scale green infrastructure.

The preliminary CFAs provide a framework for landowner outreach, collaborative landscape conservation and public investments.

In 2023, Twenty-one restoration projects on 345 acres of land were actively managed. Staff worked with city partners to begin implementing the City-County Conservation Collaborative (CCCC).

A total of eight CCCC projects in five cities totaling 358 acres have begun with the County leading development of initial natural resource management plans.

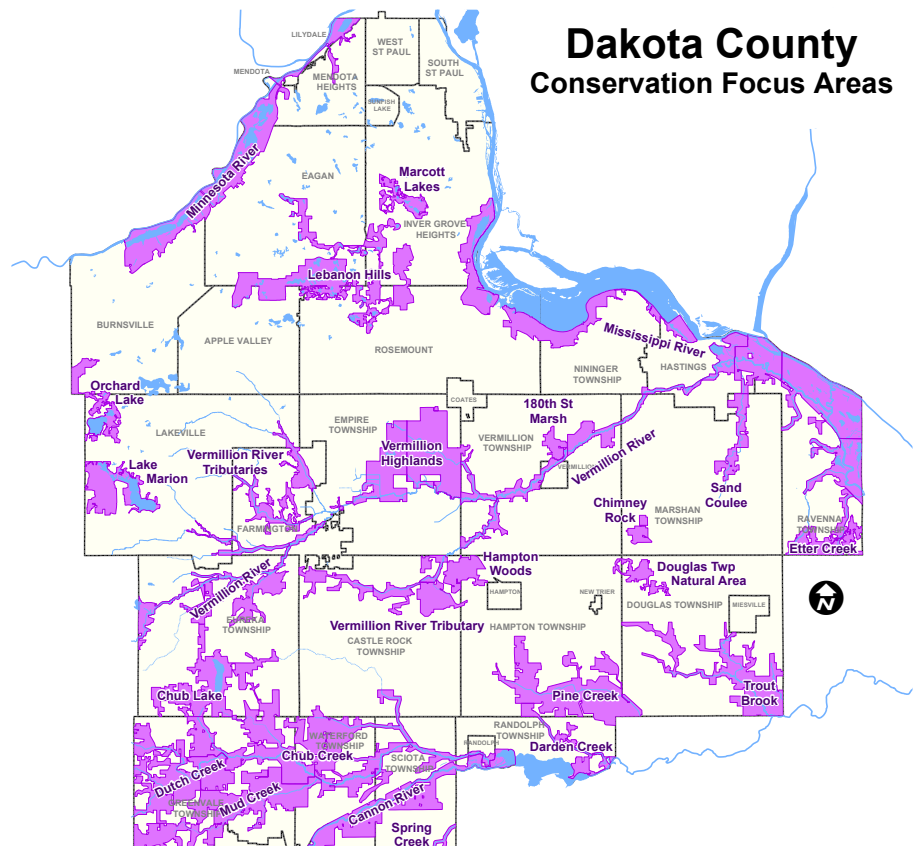
Green infrastructure is also present at the site or park scale – for example raingardens and storing stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces.

Land Conservation Ecosystem Services

"Benefits that protected and restored forests, grasslands, and wetlands can provide include:

- Absorbing nutrient runoff, toxins, and sediments for cleaner water downstream
- Promoting infiltration and groundwater recharge and protecting drinking water supplies
- Moderating drought and flood
- Improving soil health
- Providing wildlife habitat and sustaining pollinators
- Providing opportunities for recreation, education, and inspiration
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change"

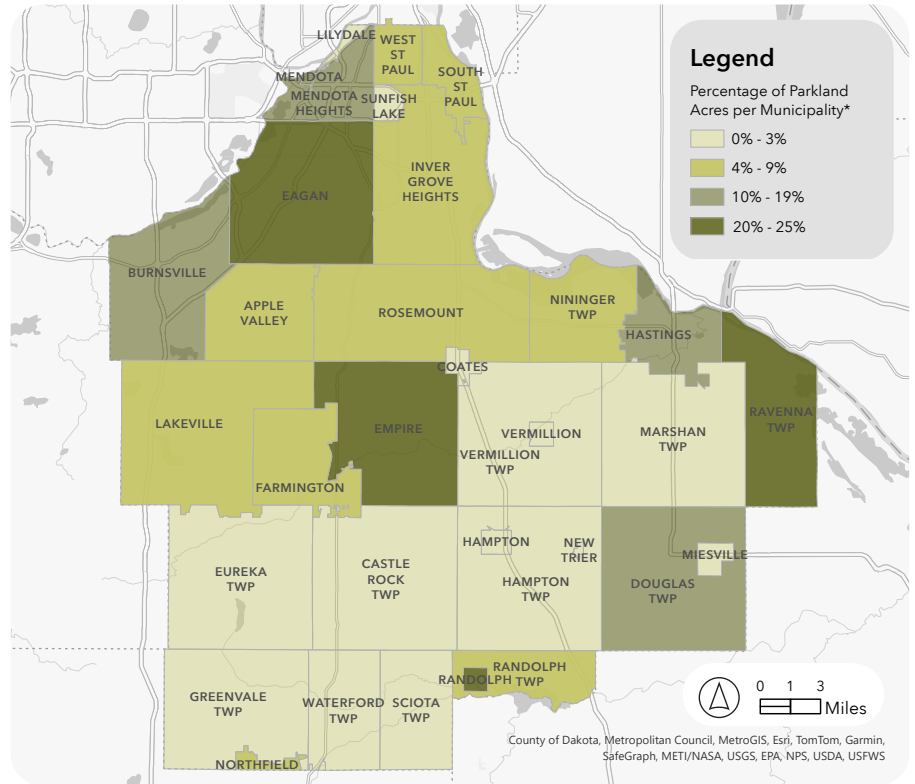
-Land Conservation Plan for Dakota County



PARKLAND ACCESS

Populated areas in the north are lacking access to Dakota County Parks.

Figure 5.1 Percentage of Parkland Acreage per Municipality in Dakota County - All Natural Areas



*Includes:
 City parks, County Parks, County Park Reserves, County Park Conservation Areas, US Fish and Wildlife Services Areas, and MnDNR Management Units

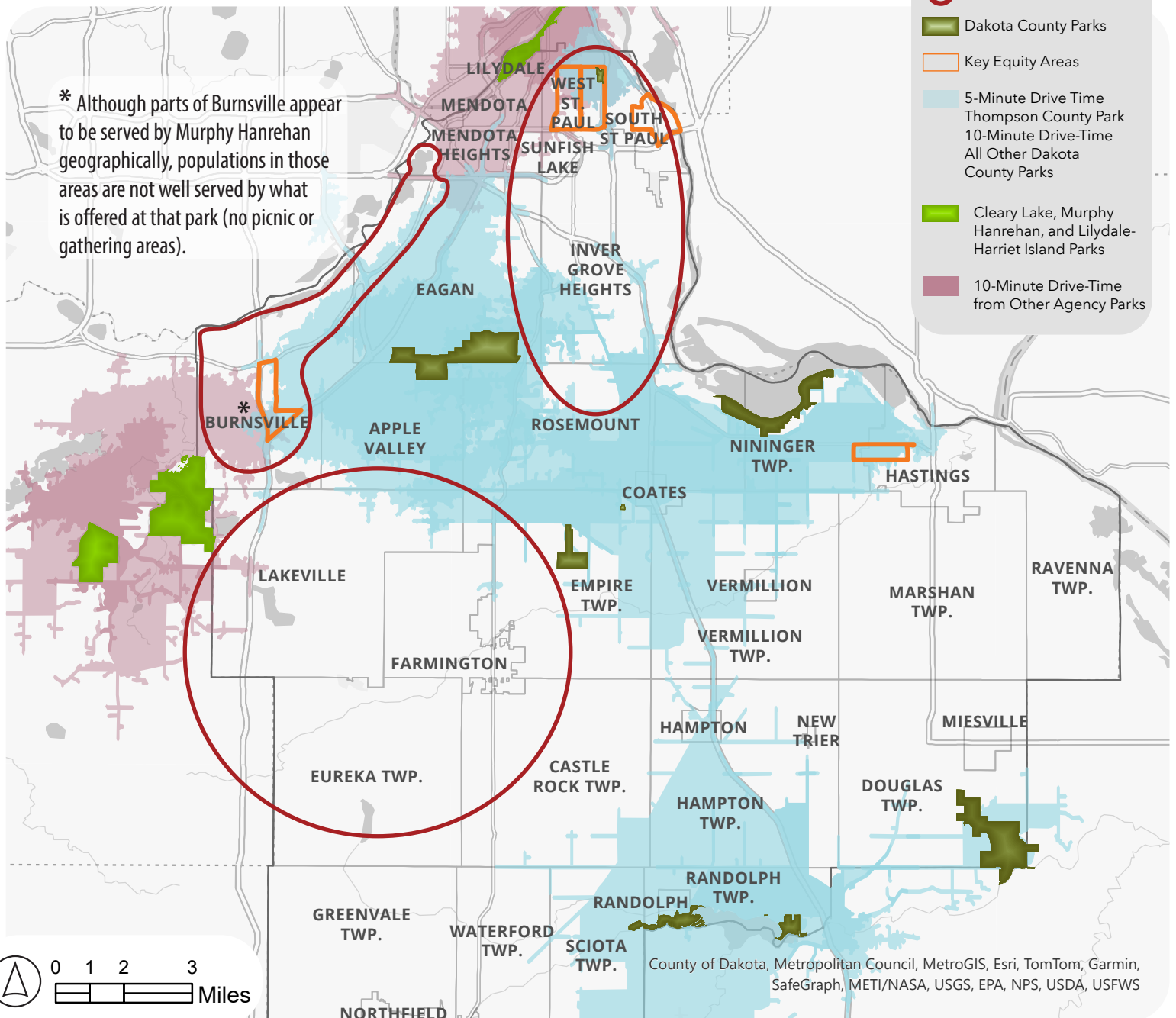


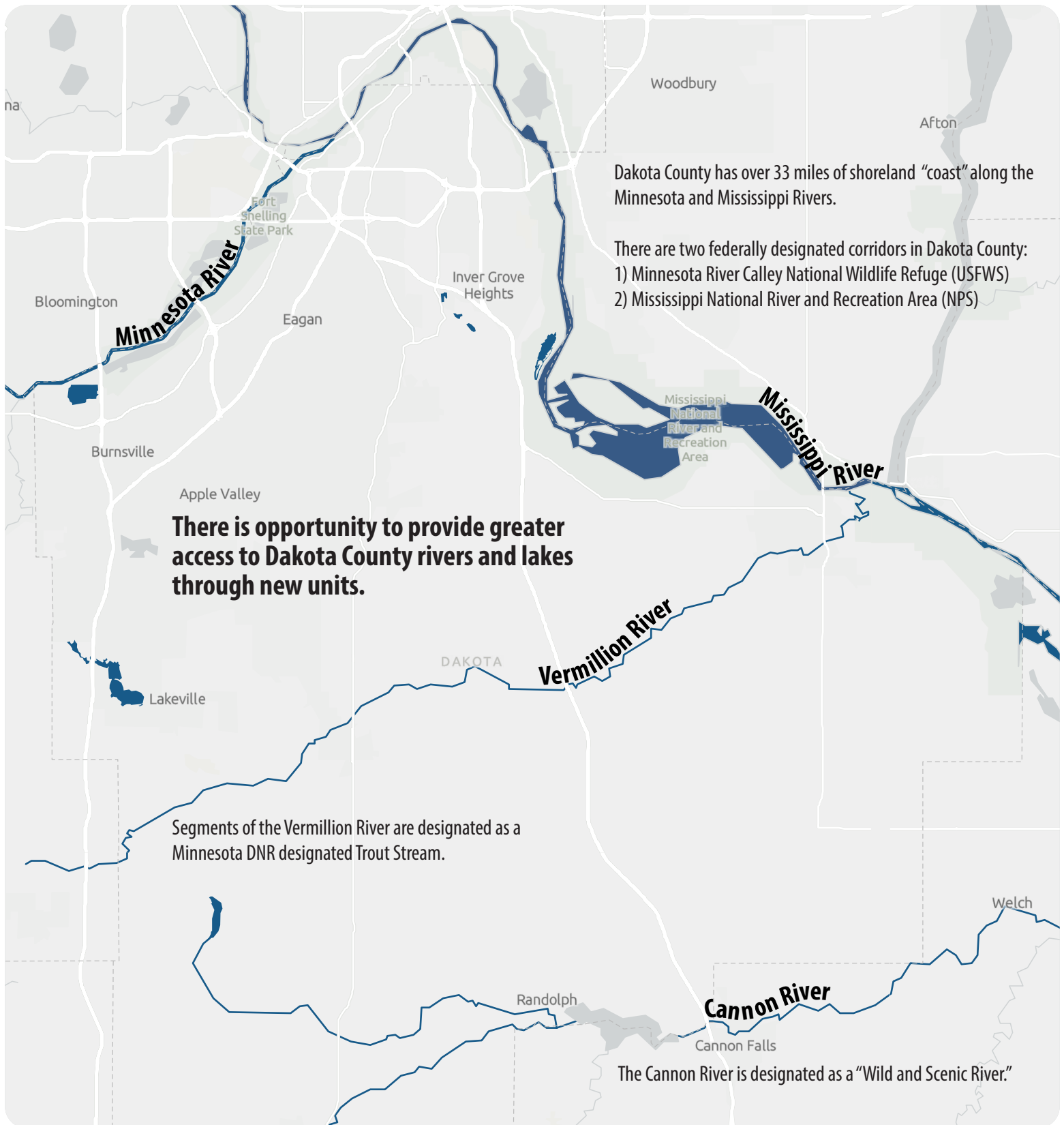
KEY FINDINGS

- In addition to providing park and greenway access to underserved areas and connecting new park users to facilities, parks and greenways can also function to protect natural areas from becoming developed.
- Protecting natural areas is a key function of some potential new park and greenway units, as well as potential bridging facilities.
- Significant Dakota County Park gaps exist along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, two rivers of state significance.
- Potential new park search areas: western Burnsville and the Minnesota River waterfront, Lakeville, and Inver Grove Heights.

There are access gaps in the north, even with other agency's nearby Regional Parks included in a drive-time analysis.

Figure 5.4 Drive-Time to Dakota County Parks, Key Equity Areas, & Park Search Areas





AREAS OF NEED

Bridging facilities may make sense in some areas of Dakota County that are close to where people live and close to populations underrepresented in park visits.

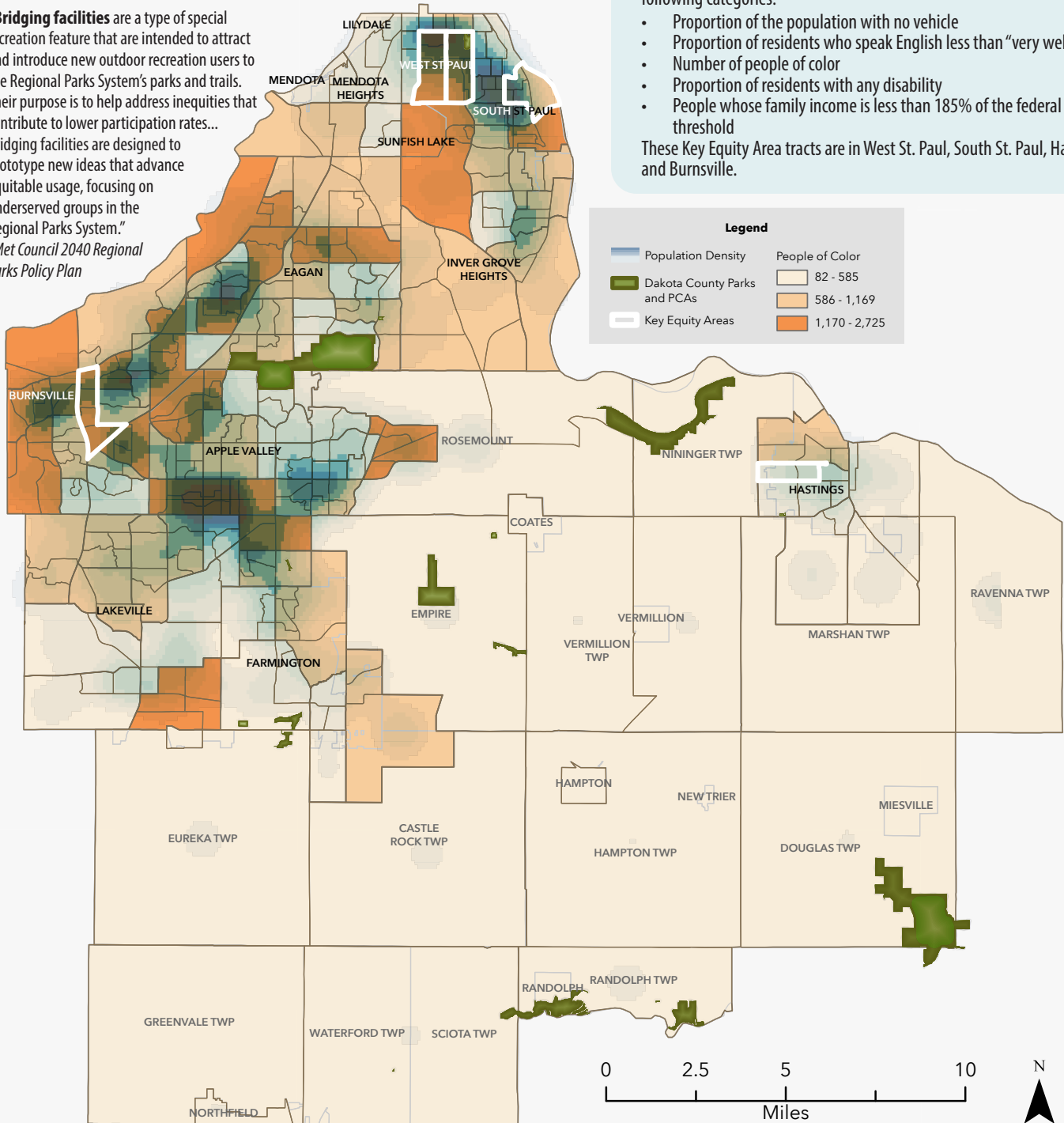
Figure 5.5 Population Density, People of Color, and Key Equity Areas

“Bridging facilities are a type of special recreation feature that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System’s parks and trails. Their purpose is to help address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates... Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on underserved groups in the Regional Parks System.”
-Met Council 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

Key Equity Areas are Census tracts that are high in two or more of the following categories:

- Proportion of the population with no vehicle
- Proportion of residents who speak English less than “very well”
- Number of people of color
- Proportion of residents with any disability
- People whose family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold

These Key Equity Area tracts are in West St. Paul, South St. Paul, Hastings, and Burnsville.



KEY EQUITY AREA CHARACTERISTICS

South St. Paul Tract

- Proportion of residents with any disability (603.01)
- People whose family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold (603.01)

West St. Paul Tracts

- Federal Area of Persistent Poverty (601.05)
- Proportion of the population with no vehicle (601.05, 601.04)
- Proportion of residents who speak English less than “very well” (601.04)
- Number of people of color (601.05, 601.04)
- Proportion of residents with any disability (601.05, 601.04)
- People whose family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold (601.05)

Burnsville Tract

- Federal Area of Persistent Poverty (607.11)
- People whose family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold (607.11)
- Proportion of the population with no vehicle (607.11)
- Number of people of color (607.11)
- Proportion of residents with any disability (607.11)

Hastings Tract

- Proportion of the population with no vehicle (611.06)
- Proportion of residents who speak English less than “very well” (611.06)

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APPENDIX B COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT SNAPSHOT

As part of the Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan, the Dakota County team and their partners conducted in person and online engagement of the Dakota County community.

- In-person engagement included meetings with community groups, pop-up events (i.e., tabling in parks or at existing events), and focus groups.
- Online engagement included a vision board (i.e., one question which asked what people would like to see in the future of Dakota County park, greenways and natural systems), survey, and interactive map.

The engagement approach sought to reach a wide variety of residents across Dakota County

as well as build upon the existing relationships that Dakota County has formed with community organizations. The engagement activities completed are shown on the next two pages.

19
Pop-up
Events or
Meetings

7
Focus
Groups

423
Survey
Responses

65
Ideas on the
Online Idea
Board

146
Map
Comments



The engagement team gathers input at the Party on the Plaza at Nicollet Commons Park.



A child points out her favorite place at a pop-up during Inver Grove Heights Days.



NAME	DATE	APX. NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Online Idea Board Comments	August 7, 2024- September 23, 2024	40 comments from 33 people	General Public
Online Survey Responses		423 respondents	
Online Interactive Map Comments		146 comments from 48 people	
Take a Kid Fishing Thompson County Park	June 9, 2024	~5 respondents	Current Park Visitors
Open Door Pop-up Northern Service Center	June 11, 2024	4 respondents	General Public
Parks Team Meeting Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center	June 18, 2024	25 participants	Parks Staff
Canoe or Kayak Program Lebanon Hills Regional Park	June 24, 2024	7 respondents	Families participating in Parks program
Open Door Pantry, Eagan District 3	July 2, 2024	8 respondents	General Public
Mexican Consulate St. Paul	July 3, 2024	10 respondents	General Public, Spanish-speaking, mostly non-DC residents
Tour de Rec, Mendota Elementary, Mendota Heights	July 9, 2024	5 respondents	General Public , Youth
Open Door Pop-up, Rambling River Center, Farmington	July 16, 2024	5 respondents	General Public, Low Income
Wilderness in the City, Stakeholder meeting	July 17, 2024 6-7pm	Organization board members	Community organization
Burnsville International Festival	July 20, 2024	5 respondents ~20 interactions	General Public
Mighty Machines Wescott Library, Eagan	July 23, 2024	6 respondents	General Public
Water Play Day Whitetail Woods Regional Park	August 2, 2024	9 respondents	Current Park Visitors
Outdoor Career Success Lebanon Hills Visitor Center	August 19, 2024	20 interactions	Youth
Thompson County Park 50th Birthday Thompson County Park	August 20, 2024	4 respondents	Current Park Visitors
Party on the Plaza Nicollet Commons Park, Burnsville	August 22, 2024	100 interactions	General Public
Eagan Market Fest Community Night	August 28, 2024	30 interactions	General Public
Burnsville Festival and Fire Muster	September 5, 2024	39 interactions	General public
Inver Grove Heights Days	September 8, 2024	113 interactions	General public
Interactive display, unstaffed Apple Valley Library	September 13- 22, 2024		General public
Latino Conservation Week Focus Group Lebanon Hills Regional Park District 4	September 14, 2024	25 participants	Latino

NAME	DATE	APX. NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Contracted Parks Liaisons Focus Group Virtual meetings	September 17 and September 19, 2024	10 participating organizations	Contracted Parks Liaisons working with demographic groups underrepresented in park visits
Somali Women Focus Group Lebanon Hills Regional Park	September 18, 2024	15 participants	Somali women
School of Environmental Studies, Student Engagement	September 20, 2024	180	Youth
Public Art + Policy + Ping Pong + Pizza Party in a Park Lebanon Hills Regional Park	September 22, 2024	60	Current Park Visitors
Hike in the Park with Residents of Color Collective (ROCC)	September 27 2024	4	Residents of Color, Families, Current Park Visitors
Indigenous Community Workshop at the Minneapolis American Indian Center	September 28, 2024	12	Indigenous cultural knowledge bearers, language speakers, and cultural educators
Indigenous Peoples Day at Friendly Hills Middle School Apple Valley	October 14, 2024	10 interactions	Indigenous, Families
Indigenous Community Workshop at the Minneapolis American Indian Center	February 15, 2025	9	Indigenous community members, including elders, artists, cultural knowledge keepers, and Dakota language speakers

- Across all engagement methods there was strong appreciation for the beauty of the parks systems and the access it provides to nature and scenic views.
- Family-friendly spaces are important to people, including places for multiple generations to enjoy the parks together.
- Access to parks, greenways and open spaces is an important to personal well-being, as well as an opportunity to make social connections and build community.
- Participants shared strong support for environmental sustainability, pointing out need for invasive species management and control of development to protect open spaces. This was strongest from respondents to the online survey.
- Focus groups provided additional insight to feelings of belonging and safety and the importance of Dakota County’s organizational outreach to community organizations.
- Indigenous community members, notably Dakota people, expressed the need for more Indigenous people working in parks and caring for the land according to Dakota values.

The 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.

The engagement method at pop-ups included an idea board and a map asking people to comment and flag the location for:

- What is your Favorite Place?
- What needs improvement?
- Do you have a great idea?

Meeting discussions were guided by these questions:

1. One thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas.
2. One thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas.

Interpreting the responses to these questions, the following themes emerged:

Access to Green Space, Scenic Views and Natural Areas

There is significant appreciation for the Dakota County park system in connecting people to

nature. The words “tranquility,” “peace” and “oasis” were descriptions of the park spaces. People communicated the appreciation of the opportunity to be immersed in nature and enjoy scenic views, comments most commonly connected with Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

While it is desirable to be immersed in nature, the remoteness of some park locations can be a deterrent, as there are safety concerns. People mentioned fear of being alone in the woods or, in some cases, harassment when alone. Consideration for access to staff, clear sightlines and other safety features should be considered.

Environmental Health

Many people expressed the importance of land protection, including controlling invasive species, minimizing development and increasing native habitat. “Keep up the restoration, keep parks healthy with native plants and free of invasive species.”

Clean and Well-Maintained Parks and Trails

Many people mentioned the cleanliness of park spaces. This creates a feeling of welcome and safety. Many people mentioned the importance of human comfort amenities in parks, such as access to bathrooms and water/drinking fountains. While parks are a place to get away and enjoy nature, they are places for people. Easy access to comfort



amenities is an important feature of the park system.

Access to Extensive and Accessible Trail System

The extensive trail system was repeatedly mentioned as a most-loved part of the system. Wide, paved paths through natural areas and near lakes provide access to many. There is strong support for the park system to be interconnected in the future by greenway trails.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an important consideration for trails and play equipment. Parks should be made more accessible to serve people of all ages and abilities. Low/no cost amenities and programming also make park spaces accessible to more people. Free parking should be maintained to ensure all are welcome to come to parks.

Family/Children-friendly Spaces

Parks are key places for children and families. People appreciate the many playgrounds, splash pads and programming for children found in regional and city parks. Many people come to the parks specifically for their children. Continued focus on youth-focused design and programming are desired.

In addition to the above, focus group participants

shared unique perspectives on what they value in public open space and how the Dakota County Parks System can support their communities and encourage greater park participation.

Multi-Generational Spaces

People are looking for park spaces that offer more to do for the whole family. For example, a basketball court, playground, walking path and comfortable places to sit in the shade all in one space. These are areas where multi-generational families can gather, see and interact with each other and still have independent activities that attract all members of the family.

Community-Centered Spaces / Programming that Provides Social Opportunities

Community-focused amenities in parks, such as grills or rentable shelters, invite larger families or community groups to park spaces. Many focus group participants shared that they value connecting with their larger community, which is not possible in smaller households or in spaces that require fees. Programming that provides education or recreational activity while allowing for social interaction are appreciated. More of this is desired.





The engagement team listening and gathering feedback at an Indigenous community workshop.

Culturally Sensitive/Aware Spaces

Facilities that support visitor’s cultural needs would improve belonging. Spaces for prayer, washing areas, signs in multiple languages would increase the sense of belonging.

Representation

Focus group participants shared that they would like to see stronger racial and cultural representation in park materials and in park staff. This would include people with many shades of skin, wearing different cultural clothing, and in multiple languages. These changes not only make people feel more welcome, but also increase the sense of safety by communicating to other park goers that all people belong in parks.

The Importance of Community Partnerships

Community organizations are a key connection to the parks system, especially for new immigrants or people from other cultures. Focus group participants spoke of their connection to Anna Ferris and her key role in connecting Dakota County Parks to people. An expanded outreach program could bring a more diverse population to park spaces.

In addition to the above, Indigenous participants shared unique perspectives on what they value and how the Dakota County Parks System can support their communities and encourage them to visit and learn more about cultural connections

to Dakota County.

Indigenous Programming and Representation

Indigenous people are looking for open spaces that are welcoming and incorporate Indigenous values, notably related to caring for the land. Increasing the number of Indigenous people working in the park system, and county wide, would foster a greater alignment of values and how they are expressed in parks.

Community Outreach and Partnerships

Intentionally reach out to Indigenous people whose homeland includes Dakota County to help forge connections and link people with the landscape that is part of their cultural heritage. Establish partnerships with communities beyond county and state borders to create stronger connections with Indigenous communities.

Traditional Knowledge

Incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge and intergenerational, oral knowledge into understanding and interpretation of sites throughout the park system. Expand educational and knowledge-sharing initiatives across sites and service areas.

Online Engagement Summary

423 people responded to the online survey, with 80+ people providing comments to the interactive map and vision board. Online comments

showed similar values and aspirations as other engagement methods, with an increased focus on environmental preservation.

93% of respondents identified outdoor recreation as high or medium priority when spending free time.

Values

“Looking forward, which of the below will be most important to your appreciation of Dakota County parks, trails and greenways?”

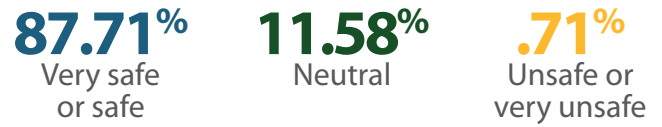


Additional comments indicated that respondents are looking for:

- More interconnected trails
- Invasive species management and natural preservation
- Accessible facilities
- Programming that attracts more diverse audiences

Safety

“Please rate how safe you feel while using Dakota County parks, trails and greenways?”

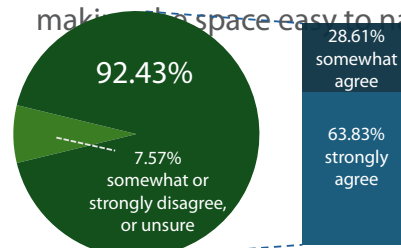


- Respondents cited the presence of other people, whether staff or other park users, as well as adequate phone service, as contributing to feeling safe.
- Cleanliness, signage, lighting and other cues to care increase feelings of safety.
- Lack of safety for some includes the secluded feeling of some of the parks and being alone in nature.

Belonging

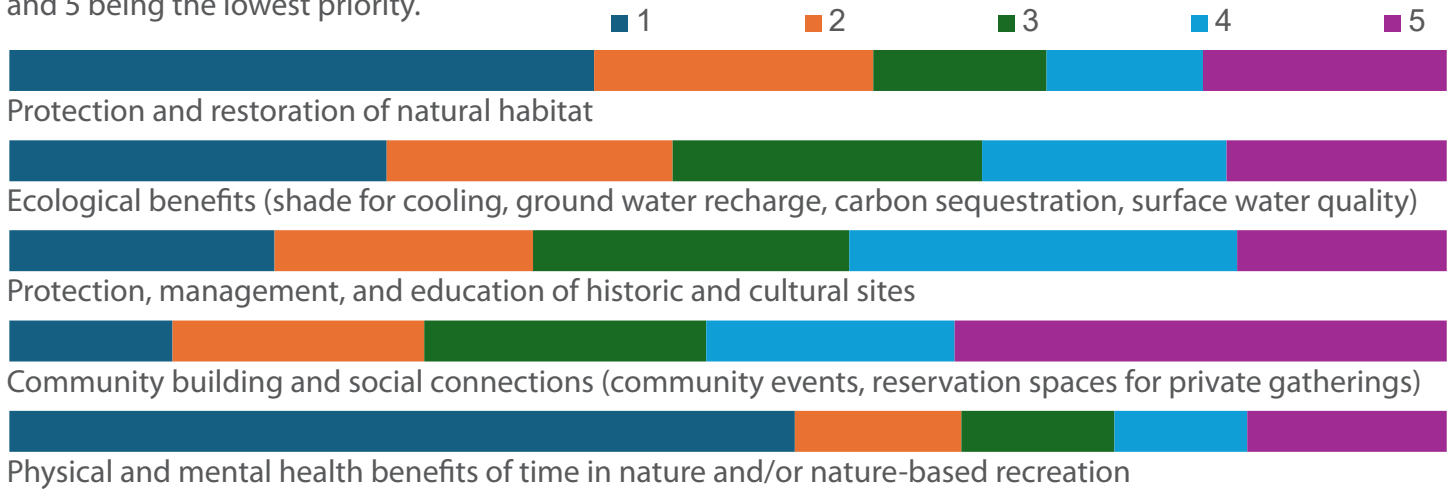
Respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with this statement: “I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks.”

- Many of those who feel a sense of belonging mention that they grew up here, have frequented the parks and feel very at home in these spaces.
- Others pointed out that they would like to see more diversity in the parks in order to increase their sense of belonging. Cultural acknowledgment and information about the history of the land would increase belonging.
- Others added that better accessibility would increase welcoming and belonging for more people.
- Additional comments pointed out that signage and clear wayfinding increase belonging by making the space easy to navigate.



Looking to the Future

“What are the most important benefits or services Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems will provide in the future?” Respondents ranked statements in order of priority, with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority.



Online Vision Idea Board

“If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?” Respondents were asked to comment as well as agree/disagree with other comments. The most popular comments were:

“
The Magic Wand would get rid of buckthorn and all invasive plants!
 ”

👍 14

“
Bike trails connecting all residential neighborhoods in Dakota County to Dakota County regional parks.
 ”

👍 11

“
Indoor walking trail with trees, dirt paths and yoga area to get a break from the cold, ice and rain. Solar powered and rainwater collection.
 ”

👍 11

“
Demonstrate environmental leadership: renewable energy, netzero buildings/facilities, native plantings, minimize use of pesticides.
 ”

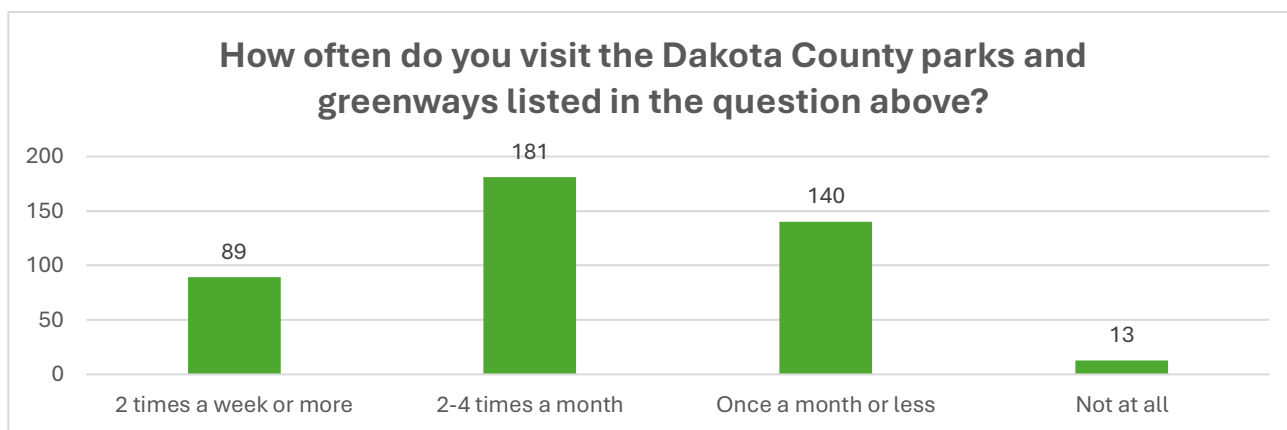
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APPENDIX B ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

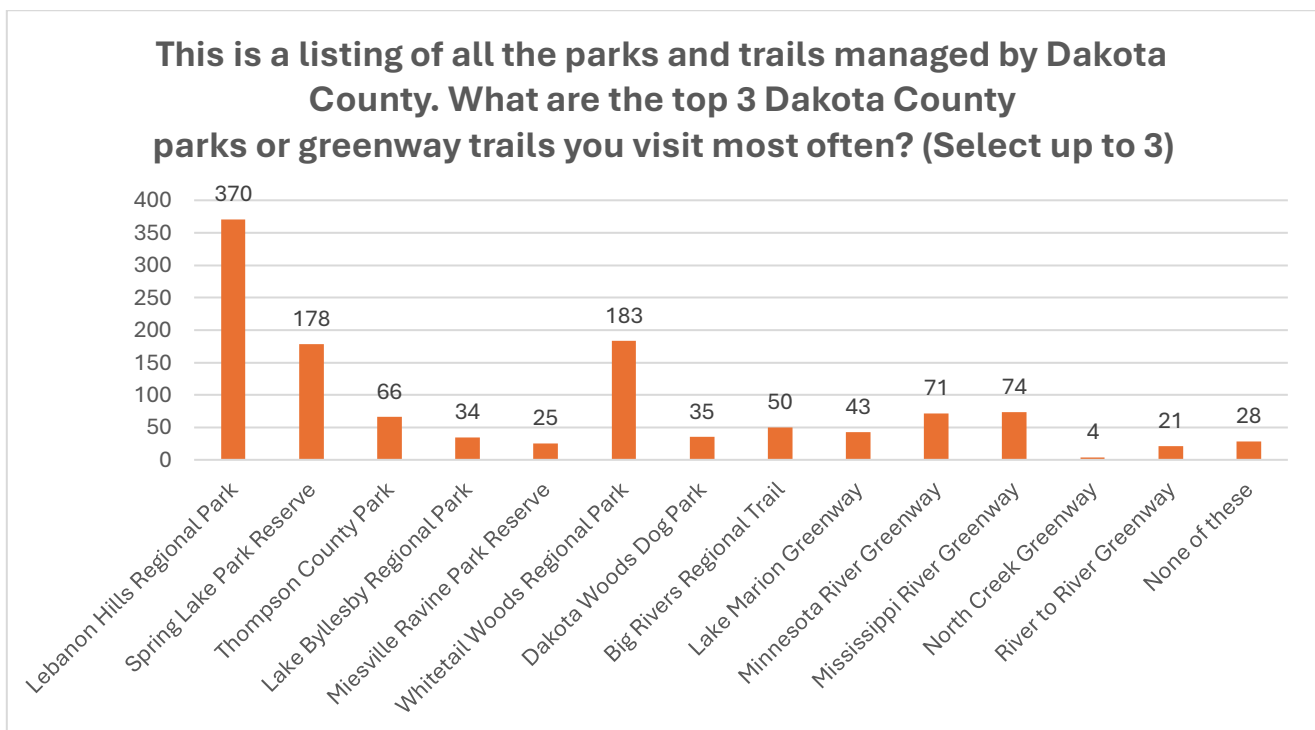
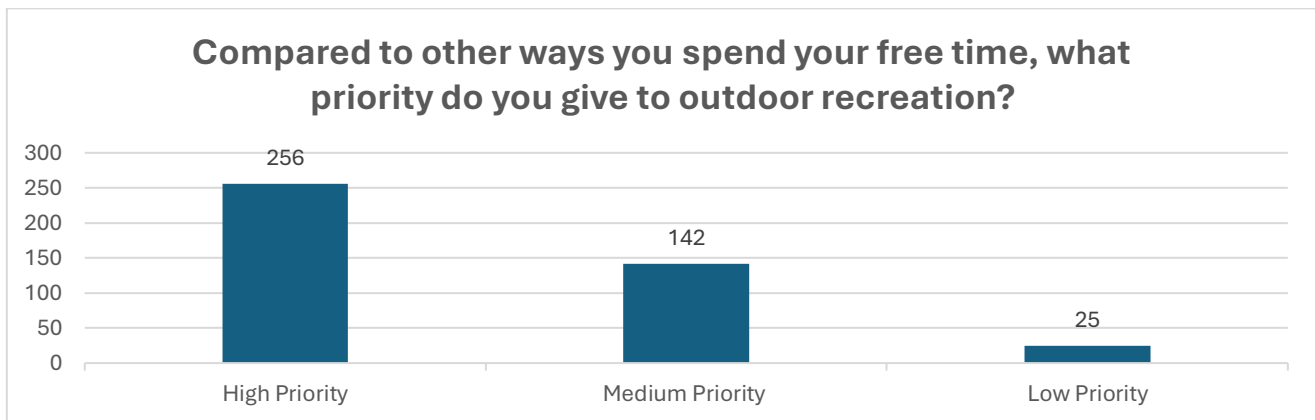


ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

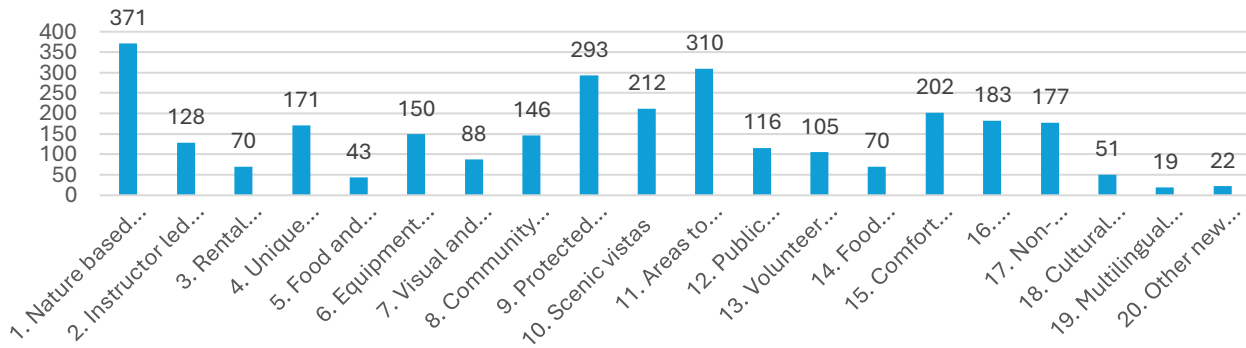




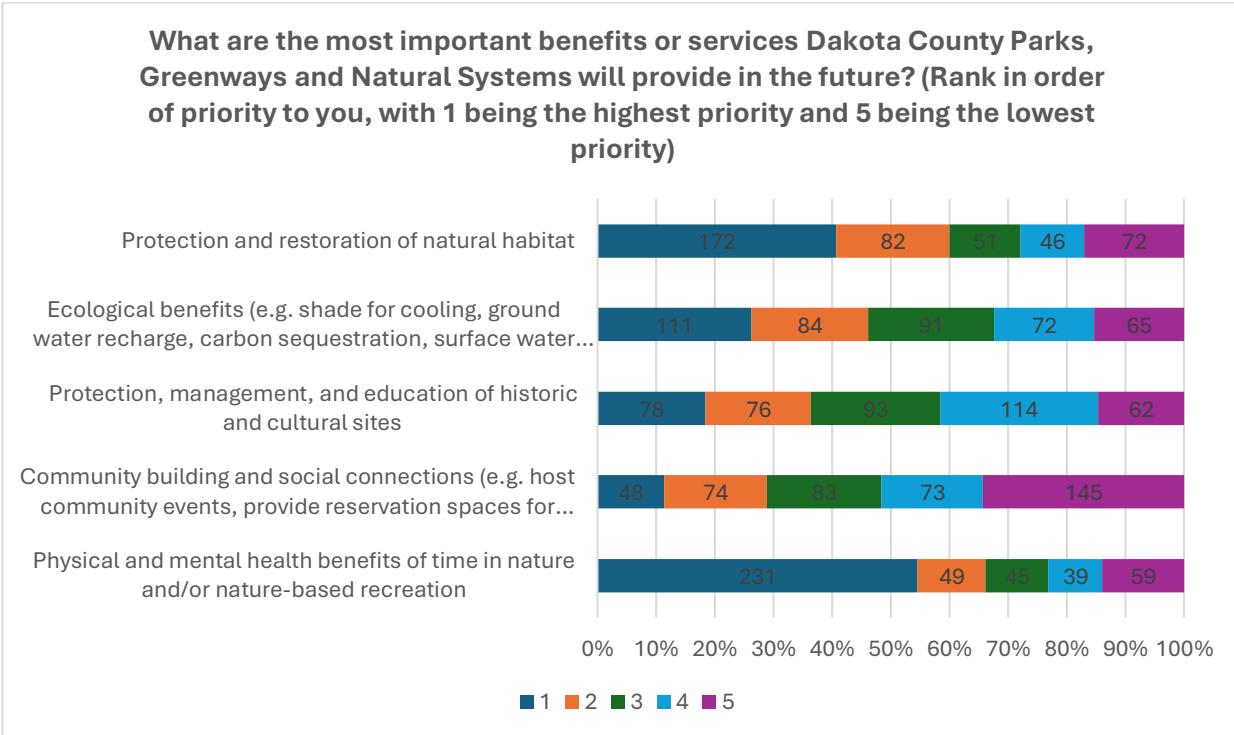
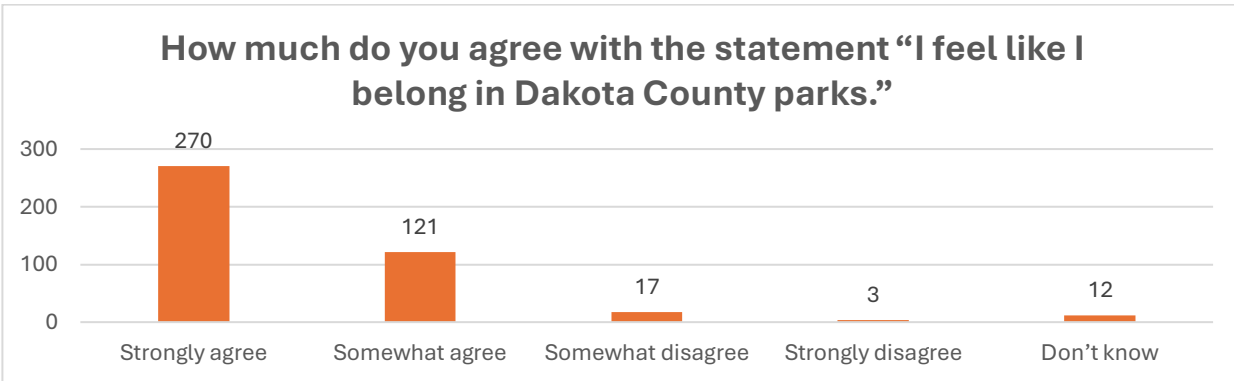
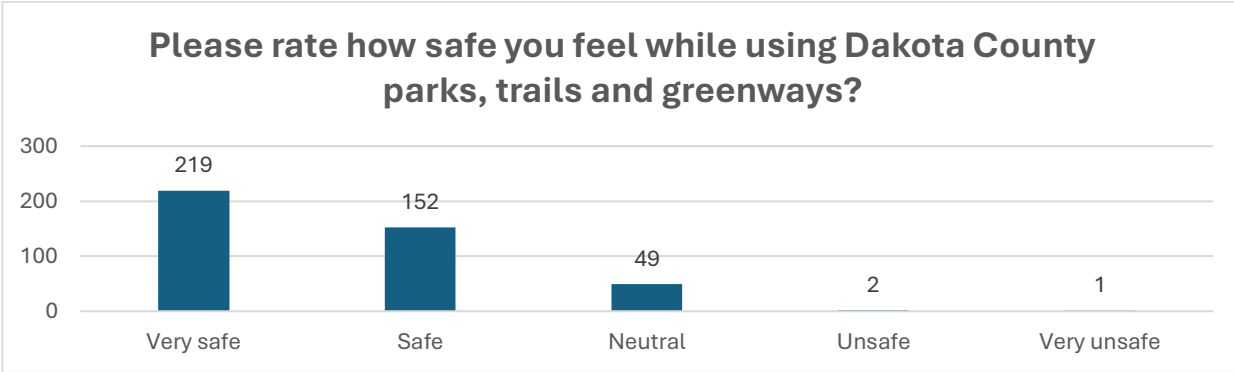
Online Survey Results



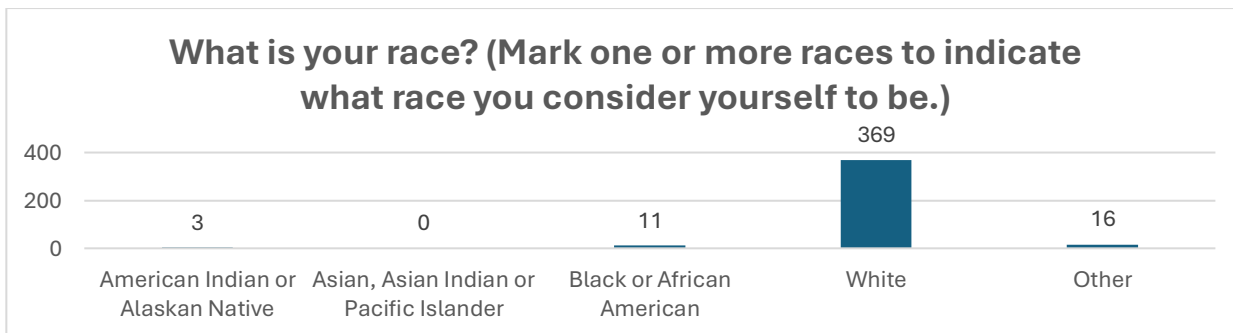
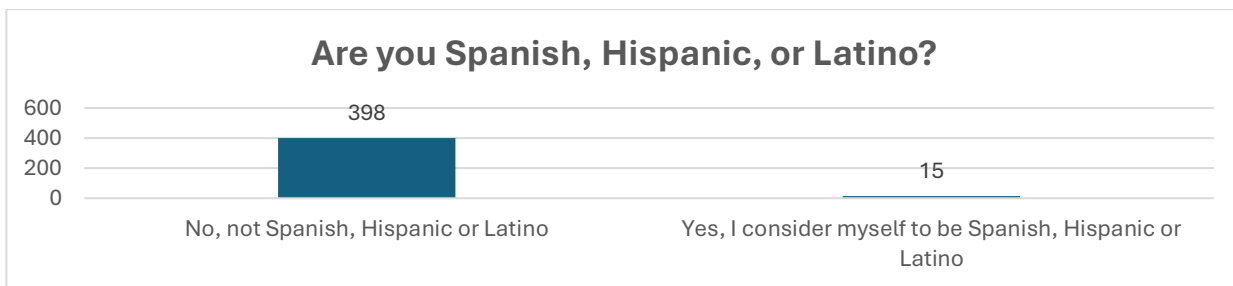
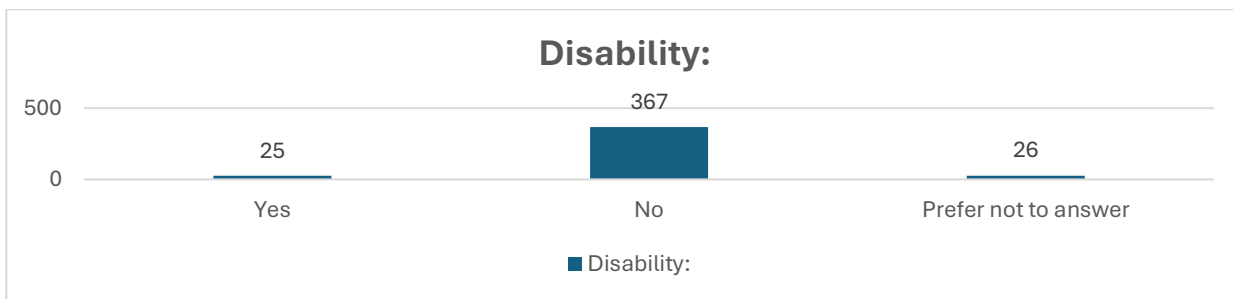
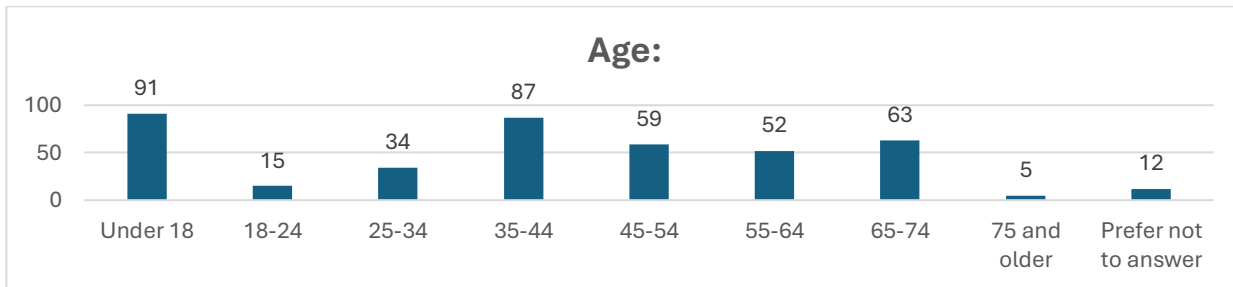
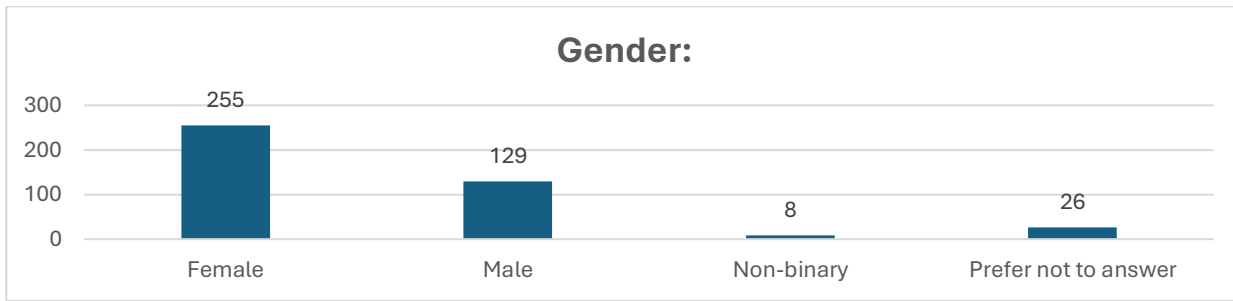
Looking forward, which of the below will be most important to your appreciation of Dakota County parks, greenways, and natural areas? (choose 7)



1. Nature based recreational opportunities (e.g. hiking, canoeing, picnicking)
2. Instructor led recreation skills, environmental, and cultural education programs (e.g. archery lessons, guided bird hikes, nature appreciation programs)
3. Rental spaces for ceremonies and social activities (e.g. large picnic shelters, indoor space)
4. Unique signature facilities to parks (e.g. camper cabins, destination playground, nature center)
5. Food and beverage concessions
6. Equipment rentals (e.g. cross county skis, watercraft)
7. Visual and performing arts (e.g. sculpture garden, music in the parks)
8. Community events (e.g. New Year's Eve at Lebanon Hills, candlelit trail walk)
9. Protected and restored habitat (e.g. prairie, woodlands, forest, wetland)
10. Scenic vistas
11. Areas to quietly enjoy being in nature
12. Public safety features (e.g. staff presence, wayfinding, lighting, emergency shelters)
13. Volunteer opportunities
14. Food production (e.g. community garden, foraging forest)
15. Comfort facilities (e.g. benches, wayfinding, restrooms)
16. Neighborhood loop trails for walking and biking that connect to the greenway trail system
17. Non-motorized regional trails in greenways
18. Cultural events (or events that celebrate a diversity of cultures)
19. Multilingual offerings (services, programming, signage, etc.)
20. Other new facilities



Survey Demographics



Survey Open Ended Questions

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.
I live in Savage (Scott County) so I feel more pride in parks closer to my home. However, I still feel very welcome in Dakota county too!
What makes me feel welcome is that there's a huge community of people who visit these parks and they can come from anywhere. We all have a common goal which is to enjoy these parks and have fun. So I believe that people from all around could easily find a sense of belonging here.
If there were more
The parks are open and accessible to all.
I'm typically around like minded people in parks
I think having more access history of the area, specifically indigenous people's history, would have a huge positive effect.
I feel lucky I grew up next to one. I think some are getting very busy, and some development is still encroaching on parks. I also understand the need to provide spaces for all to recreate as they wish, but avoiding as much motorized recreation as possible is exactly what makes the natural spaces in Dakota County feel really special.
More protected green space.
They're easy to navigate and allow me to disconnect
Don't see many Hispanics in the parks I usually visit. Build awareness to encourage people of color to visit the parks.
I am a SES student and I feel as one with the park because I have worked in the woods
I've been going to Dakota County parks since I was a kid, and I still enjoy all the things there, such as the hiking trails, canoe and kayak rentals, and more.
None
I always feel at peace in nature and parks are some of the easiest ways for me to be there
Theres clear diversity in each and every park that brings a sense os belonging to a wider group of individuals.
better lights and info
Yes
I love going and walking off the trials and exploring the different spaces of nature. Maybe add more smaller trails or spot that over look water of some sort.
-
I always feel welcome and like I belong.
Idk
I like being in nature
More activities for the community
I do feel like I belong whenever I'm there, I just don't go enough to truly feel like it.
I agree, but it depends on the person, see if they like it.
It feels weird when I go to a playground and there's a bunch of little kids

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

It's very easy to feel like I belong. A way to include others would be to make signage in multiple languages

I enjoy being outdoors and have never felt unwelcome in a Dakota County Park. Events targeted to young people would make me feel more welcome.

Idk

I grew up here and I visited a lot of trails growing up and I have sentimental value

I feel like I am always welcomed.

I feel like everyone belongs in a park

Having a welcoming environment with good people, people who value protecting nature

Maybe interactive or engaging pieces of history spread around that I can relate to.

Not much to say

better maps

I just don't have super easy access but if I'm there it is a joy, pleasure and fun to be there.

Neutral.

I feel like there is something for everyone but maybe in the smaller parks it can be hard to find your sense of belonging because there isn't as much variety

Nothing is saying I'm not

Maybe less waist around the outside

IT JUST DEPENDS HOW MUCH OF A NATURE PERSON YOU ARE

I think I feel a sense of belonging just fine, I'm just not an outdoorsy person.

Anyone and every one can go to these parks

I just live there, so I guess I belong

I am more of an inside person, but I still feel like I would be welcome in a park.

Neither

I don't go enough to belong

I feel like I belong quite well

I've lived here my entire life so I don't really know what to answer

More natural scenery

Overall I feel like I belong, but an improvement would be clearly post foraging regulations/guidelines in the parks.

I feel like I belong more when nature surrounds me completely

Having more opportunities to relax. (Hammocks, garden, etc.)

The parks are an amazing start. I love that they are focusing on repairing the natural environment. But there is like no history about the native population. No land acknowledgment.

I personally feel like I belong in Dakota County parks, but I think that others who come from different background then I do may feel differently. Indigenous people who don't see an acknowledgment of their culture and their land may feel a disconnect from the parks. A land acknowledgment could aid this.

No

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

I feel like I belong when I can truly take time for myself in a silent setting without a heavily disturbed area of land.

I like nature and feel I belong in the park.

I certainly don't feel like I don't belong - but there's not a lot to make me feel like I belong too much, either.

When I go to the parks I do feel calm and a sense of belonging being in nature but all I see are white people, makes me feel out of place

Idk

Some of the paths are paved which makes it good to walk on and other are paved or not but have place where you can trip

More docks, trails and natural flowers and plants

Improving the accessibility of the various trails etc would make it feel more belonging to me personally (ie benches). I feel like there also needs to be acknowledgment of the indigenous peoples and communities that had the space before as to have them also belong.

It just feels like I'm in a park. There's no sense of belonging or un-belonging, just there and not there.

The parks seem very open to the public and it makes me feel like I belong.

I feel welcome and everyone is nice. The only thing that would improve my sense of belonging would be more signs saying the the culture and history of the park.

I just think they're really cool, although I live in savage so I spend more time in Scott county parks

I've grown up mountain biking at Lebanon Hills Mountain Bike Trail

It's a place where you can be you and don't have to worry about others.

Events to connect us all together.

I feel my thoughts and feelings mean absolutely nothing to Dakota County. You only want my money and how I can serve Dakota County. Money is allocated and spent with no public input. And Dakota County keeps creating more areas for upkeep so the constant need for money and more, more, more never ends. Dakota County has eminent domained areas and that is wrong on so many levels. And by requiring 7 responses above illustrates the point how Dakota County does not care what I think. I don't care about any of these areas.

Ways to promote participation of folks like me, low financial barrier to entry

Bike paths that connect from my community to the parks.

Dakota County parks should feel welcoming to every person. I believe they hit this mark, with one exception. I think the parks/trails could be made more accessible to those with physical disabilities: additional benches, offering all terrain wheelchair rentals, etc.

More signs about the history of the land

Lebanon park is my happy place.

Based on how I want to use the parks, I'm able, and the county offers lessons when I'm trying to learn a new skill to belong.

I've lived in Dakota County for over 50 years. I've always enjoyed the parks.

Ease of access, proximity to where I live, ease of use.

I like the many natural (not paved) trails winding through natural beauty.

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

I would love to see the existing gravel infrastructure utilized in a manner that incorporates an "off asphalt" opportunity in the U More Park and Whitetail Woods area, near Rosemount and Farmington. Some beautiful and natural routes exist as a rarity in any suburb. Not to mention access to Lone Rock...

I enjoy being outdoors and as long as everyone was included in the parks, I'd feel the sense of belonging.

As a nature lover and someone who cares deeply about sustainability and the future of our planet, I feel like Dakota County prioritizes infinite economic growth and inefficient use of land (detached single-family housing, chain/national/multinational corporation branch locations) over preservation of the remaining green space that we have. As a resident, I would feel better about the future of Dakota County if the county prioritized the creation and preservation of new parks and protected natural areas.

Please finish paving and connect the bike paths so I can get to other parks and locations on a bike

Acknowledgment of indigenous history

Like the park and feel liked by the park!

I live in Washington County so I don't technically belong to a Dakota County Park. The parks are free in Dakota County and they are also far superior to Washington County Parks in terms of natural habitat so I prefer them to Washington County. Spring Lake Park really stands out with the bison herd and far better natural habitat with less invasive plants than Washington County. Please help Washington County improve their parks to be more like Dakota County Parks and please continue to restore the native habitat.

There are many park users who need to spend less time worrying about the rules. Some rules are outdated, many don't make sense (allow biking on the XC Ski Trails when they are closed to horses but not snow covered). Just relaxing on common-sense rule enforcement would be nice. We can't make full loops with a 4yr old skier, so should we not ski? We get yelled at almost every time for going wrong-way on a one way with a 4 year old. One vest yielding volunteer went far enough to say "well then you should stay home if your 4 year old can't make the full loop". That was disappointing to hear.

I often go to the parks alone or with a relative. I haven't participated in any community events at the parks, so I haven't met any new people at the parks or developed a sense of community or belonging at the parks beyond individual recreation. I would be open to participating in community activities at parks like invasive species removal, local food production, foraging, gardening. I feel like those kinds of activities can bring people together and build community. I feel like it's hard to find many opportunity like these in Dakota County.

Volunteering gives me a sense of ownership---having worked so hard to restore areas of this park makes me feel like it is a little part of me, like I am a little part of the park.

I don't know enough about the park and trails system or what is available, how to use different equipment. Some other patrons make me feel like I do not belong when I am new to the area or the particular activity and others are more seasoned. They are not always welcoming, do not help people learn and sometimes belittle those who are trying to learn and newly engage in the activities - those experiences discourage folks from returning or accessing the amenities. Trying to sign up for a class was difficult, especially when trying to register more than one person when multiple email addresses were needed.

My spouse and I enjoy the Dakota County parks a great deal, and appreciate the way they are maintained. Perhaps planning a few more community events to attract new participants would expand our sense of belonging.

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

More natural areas with trails and native plants.
I live on the border of Scott County, so my daily/weekly visits are to a Three Rivers Park within walking distance. Dakota County Parks are a half hour drive, so they are more special events, but they are great! (You can see from my trail concerns, we have a local issue with some people misusing certain trails and being resistant about complying when there is no consequence.) Never had a restroom issue, but that is huge for women feeling safe.
Lots of opportunities for women and children and families
As a Lebanon Hills Park volunteer, I feel welcomed and appreciated.
I visit many different parks across Minnesota but I live in Dakota County so when I visit parks near home there's always a bit more pride in those adventures I don't believe I could improve my sense of belonging
I grew up in outdoor spaces. I also have privilege as a white person. I welcome seeing people of color and sign/events that highly Indigenous people, people of color.
Lebanon hills is one of my favorite places to go to be in nature
Not sure
I feel they do community outreach and different public activities, so that's great! Also, I see all kinds of people using the parks all the time, so I feel like I fit in too.
Very dog friendly hiking trails big I would love to see more trails that I can bikjor on in summer with my dog.
The horse trails in Lebanon make me feel welcome as a rider.
Welcoming and open feeling for park systems
Na
Not sure.
I'm at home in the woods - I love being outdoors and have always felt included and represented by the park system.
Seems weird.
I spend a lot of time at E. Spring Lake Park, In the winter you don't have much for people who like to walk or snowshoe. Too many trails that we can't go on, you have to be a skier to use them. I've met individuals when I've been there who asked where are the trails that I can walk on. Very few want to walk a bike trail because there is so much more wind. Walkers usually want to be in the woods and there is only one trail and it isn't a loop. There are no snow shoe trails. I will snowshoe in the woods and blaze my own trail, but my friends don't like to do that. In the summer it grieved me that you made it so when I walk the zigzag, that you enter near the playground, that I can't come back out to the tree line. You blocked it off with a whole bunch tree logs. I use to come out and walk the tree line to the bike trail and follow it until the last trail back into the woods that brings you to the cliff edge trail. This was the longest loop I could take. So I feel you are making it harder and harder for me to do the walks that I love to do.
I need to explore more of the parks and greenways
I like that the parks are focused on nature and recreation - no extra agendas please
I guess I feel like I being there as much as anywhere else
All places I have visited are easy to access and provide good signage which help make me feel like I know what I'm doing.

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.
Don't live in Dakota county
I live here and feel like it's part of our community.
NA
I come and go as I please and no one bothers me.
I would love more recreation classes. My daughter wants to learn to fish and there are no fishermen in our lives. I haven't been able to get into one of the classes!
I think it's helpful to have signs that remind people the parks are for everyone, if your skiing they are also for hiking; if your hiking they are also for skiing; if your biking they are also for walking; if you are doing whatever you are doing fast the trails and space also for the slow; if you are experienced outside these spaces are also for people who are not. (I hope that made sense)
I started to feel this way when anna ferris started visiting our ecfe class and getting input from families who would be using the parks. And then seeing her and other familiar faces at family events!
I find Dakota county parks accessible.
Close by, safety feeling
We really enjoyed the new Antlers Park in Lakeville this summer. We got to paddle board, boat, swim, eat at Lakeville Brewing and food trucks. It is a great destination. We also did archery at Spring Lake Park. We would have benefited from smaller groups. We often use the parks for family pictures and senior pictures. We could use more middle school age activities/camps. We love to walk & hike the parks, but don't always know the best routes for young kids, dogs and getting exercise.
Just feels good to get out.
Continuing to keep programs and services as affordable as possible.
I appreciate that Dakota county promotes their parks and greenway and are always looking for ways to improve. The sense of community and importance the county puts into it's resources is admirable.
I am a tax paying citizen who respects the parks and therefore I belong.
N/a
Volunteering at the parks gives me a bit of ownership.
I belong in nature. Fortunately nature is close even in the suburbs
You don't reach farmington like you don't care- so ... bring yourself here. Whitetail is way the heck- you have to drive there. Our teens/kids/young adults need something closer.
They always feel welcoming for either individual adventure or to gather as a group
I love the outdoors and having spaces for people to be outside enjoying the earth and the many great things about it.
As I get older I greatly appreciate information that helps me to choose my activities - for example: information about trail difficulty or length, rest areas, bathrooms, and how to access help when needed.
More information to the public on accessibility, availability & amenities that we have & how to get there Just more info out there
As I have aged, I find it harder to walk long distances and hence use the parks less often
More unique parks and features, our kids love fawn crossings, the new park at Thompson, the vision at spring lake

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

I just feel comfortable at the parks. The hiking trails are marked well & there are shorter length options for me which I appreciate. I can't think of anything else that would improve my comfort level.
Connecting recreation bike trails
I use the horse trails 2-3 times per week. Mostly others with horses who enjoy the parks as much as I do.
Keep them well kept. Replace old signs, keep pathways groomed, etc
Staff is always welcoming and signage is helpful.
I have been able to volunteer with plants, weeding, and music in the parks. There were a variety of times available and everyone has been very welcoming. Having clean bathrooms, drinking fountains, and paved trails makes me feel comfortable inviting all kinds of people to come to the park with me.
The more you ask to see how i feel and i belong, that itself makes it clear we're in la la land, not actual reality.
the park spaces feel welcoming to me, and I haven't noticed anything that would make someone feel unwelcome
I just moved to the Amber Fields neighborhood in June and have yet to get any community involvement magazines or community education packets. I would have liked to see more FREE activities at the Irish days festival. I've heard there's suppose to be a food truck thing coming up but I only heard that because I watched a City Council election on YouTube. I don't know where when what food trucks prices etc. No, I do not use social media, which is probably where this info is. Also considering this is a new neighborhood why isn't there any neighborhood involvement activities for us? I can't be the only new family in this area, right?
Making trails more interconnected
I feel like I am welcome when the rules are being followed. The rules make sure everyone is enjoying themselves. Dedicated winter trails for hiking and different trails for skiing make me feel safer. Enforcement is very important
I am not sure why I wouldn't belong. Parks are for everyone
N/A
Better signage for no bikes in east leb off 120th street
I feel a part of the parks because of the many hours that I volunteer doing natural resource restoration.
The nature, birds, plants and the fresh smell of the woods is the best part. I enjoy the nature walks and feel very connected.
multilingual signage as appropriate, environmental educational tools (signs, placards, handouts) for visitors
Parks feel welcoming to me, in part it is how they have been designed within nature's characteristics.
We attend knee high naturalists with our daughter quite often and enjoy some of the other places as well and the parks are very family friendly and inclusive from my experiences.
Garrett has done a great job helping people get involved thru the volunteer program. I sometimes feel the park board listens more to big business then they do the patrons using the parks.
More signage and maps to know where trails go in the parks. I get afraid of getting lost or going too far out of my way so I don't explore new areas or trails.
More open hiking/snow shoeing trails in the winter and fewer cross country ski only trails.

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

I have been going to Lebanon Hills since I moved to Eagan in 1993. I feel at home on the trails.
I walk my dog at Thompson Park almost every morning.
They are clean, and the staff is friendly when I have a question. Trails are well marked and maintained, and I see a variety of other people (ages, languages, individuals, couples, families) enjoying the same space.
More single track mountain bike trails, especially starting to incorporate more modern trail building techniques/features. More machine built trails with focus on progressive jump lines, technical features, drops/wood features. A bike park would be amazing.
I feel like Dakota County provides good information about the parks. I love trees, plants, and animals and I feel like I can enjoy them at the DC parks I visit.
Admittedly, I am a white person and feel comfortable in the parks. Most people I see in the parks seem like me. I think for the future of the parks, attracting new types of visitors and gaining their support is essential. I think more people means more support for nature and conservation, which is a good thing.
No suggestions for improvement.
We've been enjoying Dakota County parks ever since moving to MN over 20 years ago and never felt out of place.
Since the pandemic I've become more sedentary so haven't been in the parks much I'm 72 years old and have gained 25 pounds since 2020
Dakota County has done a super job of keeping areas for parks / green space so we have options. And a good job of advertising the options. The e-bikes are getting too aggressive on some trails. I have had to jump or move out of their way when they should have waited for "traffic" of walkers and pedal bikes to move along so they could pass. Include more signage as the parks develop and have the signage oriented the same way across the county. For example, when I'm looking at way finding, am I facing N, S, E or W?
Public art that focuses on national pride as Americans.
Ensuring that all users are treating nature respectfully.
I use the parks often and also volunteer in them.
I think the Parks does a good job of trying to cover a very wide demographic of people, ideas, and backgrounds. You can't please everyone all the time. I would suggest making sure that park quality and staff service are the top things staff are striving to accomplish, Meeting that makes everyone, no matter who they are, feel welcomed and enjoy their time.
I like seeing the preserved areas and the emphasis on recycling.
Welcoming staff
There is not enough seating and lighting.
There needs to be more of a focus on nature, on habitat restoration and expansion of natural areas, and on connecting parks through greenways and making them accessible by modes of transportation other than cars.
I feel like I belong. I'm not sure that statement would apply if I wasn't a white middle-class female. Representation is important, and people that feel less comfortable on trails could really benefit from more group hikes that are specific to BIPOC, etc.
I would like more paved/gravel bike trails

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.
Being listened to about keeping the Natural Resources from being over-run by trails and facilities
There are no Dakota County parks in Lakeville. I have to travel 20 minutes by car to get to Whitetail or Lebanon. Hard to feel like I belong there when they are so far removed from Lakeville.
I personally feel like the facilities, parking lots, recreation are well signed and inclusive. Improvements could be adding multilingual signage and/or some more education on the Indigenous peoples land that we walk on in our parks.
I've lived here for over 50 years. Tunnels and bridges to cross busy highways.
Easy to access
I love our parks but would like them better lite with LED lighting.
Being in nature is welcoming to all - nature doesn't discriminate and nothing in the DC park system is discriminatory. There may not be a significant amount of things that would help people feel welcome, but that doesn't occur in nature either. The park system should aim to welcome all without feeling obligated to add things that would help others feel more welcome - this can actually lead to others feeling discriminated, especially in a nature environment. Reserveable spaces are a great way to allow individuals/groups to customize the space to their desires temporarily.
The park system is easily accessible. There is minimal invasiveness of crowds (unless you seek a particular event). The parks are well maintained.
Connecting with our natural world is what keeps us grounded, centered, and happy.
Great
Welcome staff and/or volunteers who are knowledgeable and can help with way finding and providing information on the park on site
I am an active volunteer and interact with natural resource staff regularly. They are knowledgeable and dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the high quality natural environment in the parks. I am unable to think of anything that would improve my sense of belonging. The county just has to maintain the budget and resources to keep on track to achieve the vision of our "Forever Wild" park system
I feel like I belong. No issues
Ability to volunteer with Dakota County Parks is a huge reason lots of people, myself included, feel a sense of belonging.
Love all the signage and staff when I see them are very friendly
I feel perfectly at home on Dakota County Greenways and in Parks
I generally feel like I belong in the parks. The Dakota County "Forever Wild" motto really resonates with me.
Continued quiet trails for walking in wilderness-like areas.
When you own property out of state, local parks are not important.
I feel like i belong
My enjoyment from experiences and activities in the parks contribute to my sense of belonging. Positive interactions with other people in these parks does also.
Having bathrooms/ port-a-potty open all year round.
The greenways tie our neighborhoods together.
I've in Dakota County for 43 years and love biking, hiking, skiing and paddling in our County Parks. I only wish my house was right next door to a park or greenway.

Tell us more about your answer and what would improve your sense of belonging.

The trails are well-maintained and I can hike on the trails and enjoy hiking, bird watching and spending time with friends and no one looks at me with suspicion.

Opportunity to volunteer in various ways from trash pickup or learning how to care for water/ponds

Please do not cut down any more trees. Too many trees have been cut down at Spring Lake Park Reserve and Dakota Woods dog park. There are very few wooded areas in our county and they are a precious resource. Please add more kayak access to the river.

I would like them to remain parks, and not become recreational centers. More payment means less places for the native flora and fauna to survive.

Keep up the good work

I volunteer a lot in the parks with very committed people. We feel that in our stewardship, an ownership of the park—like it's in our care.

We need more interpretative signs and learning opportunities on signage. Also making sure that access to parks is equal across demographics (maybe needing to add more parks in the future to more areas?).

Don't steal land. Don't steal money to pay for parks via taxation.

I am a person with a disability and need to use a walker. At Whitetail Woods I can use the paved sidewalks; at Spring Lake Park my walker gets caught in the paved walkways which have funny stones in them and I cannot walk there. I would like to get to Schaar's Bluff before I die.

Already answered— taking the survey again. I was kicked out before I finished.

Love the nature trails. More benches for resting on long sections of trail.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

When I'm in a Dakota country park a lot of other people are there too. Knowing that I'm in the company of good people, typically families, that I can reach out too if there's a problem makes me feel safe. Also, having a designated community facility with county employees helps improve safety too. Along with having a public phone to use, just in case.

Other people around

Park is well kept, no homeless people or shelter, patrolling, no drug group hanging out

Moderate lighting, level trails, presence of other park users.

Being off busy streets

Being in a place away from busy streets and high traffic areas but still close enough to shelter and emergency services is what makes me feel safe.

Lighted and WELL MARKED paths. Weather shelters.

Good wayfinding pieces, having not too many people but some around.

Fewer people, fewer houses nearby.

Cleanliness

Have not heard of past incidents, the parks are quiet, families use the parks.

I feel safe because I feel like I can walk around the park and not feel like i am being followed

Maps to guide us, clear trails so you don't get lost

Parks in general are pretty safe, only thing that makes me feel at risk is the lack of lights

Ahhhhh しずかに。

Lights in open areas (especially parking lots) and being with other people I trust

The diversity and uniqueness to each and every park. Alongside their attractions and nature views, there is something different, big or small, in every park that makes me want to explore more of the Dakota County Parks knowing they're all ran by the same organization.

good lighting at night and info on plants and animals

Lights

Quiet areas with no creepy people

There are maps around so I know where on the trail I am. The trails are a relatively good size.

Signs and maps which tell me where I am! I like to see signs fairly often

I like being able to see what's around me and being in a place that's well lit in places where people are if it's dark.

Idk

Knowing where I am

Surrounding community

Having people who work at the parks in the general area so I know there's at least someone to go to if something bad happens. Also having a main space that's fairly open and easy to see around.

When you with family or friends.

Not too many people nothing feels secluded

Clearly marked trails, lack of hostile plants and animals, easily navigated paths.

Clear line of sight. Lots of trail maps so I don't feel lost.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Knowing there are park rangers to speak to or contact if I need help
Being near residential but still being secured within the greenery of the trail
The trail markers, info signs, accessible trails, and more.
The lack of people
Other friendly people, maps to know where you are, good community
A clean path that is easy to follow. Some sense of security. Cameras?
Being in the woods
Im strong asl so I can run up on any opps that try to catch me lacking
the fact that i have cell service and am close to a hospital safe trails
The community that is near enough to reassure me that there aren't people out there.
Being around other people in a public space.
Good maps, nice community and friendly rangers
It's clean
Maps how calm and clean they are
HOW PEACEFUL
I feel pretty safe since I'm a 6 foot tall white man. Other than that I think that the parks have plenty of trail postings so you don't get lost
How often it is used and how well it is maintained.
I don't have an option on how save and unsafe.
The maps
Well-kept and taken care of.
Well kept and marked paths and a very familiar area keeps me feeling safe
The mapped trails and other people
Knowing the area
All of the rangers present
Idk
Lights
It just feels comfortable
Lighting in necessary areas
The woods
Railings on the edge of cliffs
The way finding maps and the fact that the parks are within cities. It is easy to use your phone to call for help, and the maps make it so that you know exactly where you are.
I feel like at the beach for example I have a lot of people close by if something happens
When I have phone service.
When walking in the woods at parks there is a map at every fork in the road
Very open areas, not incredibly secluded
Natural biodiversity

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
When I can be in a quiet place in nature and not have a motorized vehicle speed past me
Being alone out there
Adequate lighting in the parking lots, open space, and well kept areas all make me feel safe in parks/greenways..
Lighted trails and less people nearby
Seeing other people walking by, the signs and maps that tell me where I am, the employees being around
I'm sigma
Trail maps so I know where I am
That it away from people but that also makes it more hard to call for help
Nothing in particular just like being in nature
Although most trails and areas are separated, you always feel as though someone else can see you. Plus there is never really a bad feeling.
not a lot of people, paths aren't visible to one another
Easy to read maps
Widened paths and lights, along with an office or building with information and people you can go to for help.
Knowing I can call for help if needed
It feels very secluded and secure
Proximity to civilization, not as isolated as backcountry
The fact that it has cell reception and availability to the public.
Being with other people, having safety features
The paths are straight and wide.
Having lights, cell service and park rangers or officials nearby
The sense of place and piece and quiet I have while I'm out there.
People
I don't really know
Lighting, and overall well kept maintained areas.
Nothing the county does makes me feel safe.
Signage outlining guidelines, lighting in parking areas, occasional presence of staff or patrol vehicles.
Lighting
Other people present at the same time as me. A busy park.
Occasional police presence. Well-marked trails.
Cleanliness & a sense that the park is well taken care of/maintained often
Presence of peace officers/staff
The park is clean, there are not damaged equipment or graffiti on buildings or signs. The trails are well kept and used and other families are using the space.
No issues to deal with

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
Well up kept trails and facilities, staff that are present and active.
Trails generally well-maintained with clear map indicators of location.
There are usually other people enjoying the park at the same time. Undesirable people don't often spend their time in the parks.
Well maintained trails/paths, minimal congestion
Well-maintained trails, lighting, periodic presence of park staff
Daylight, other people, and familiarity.
Trails are well marked and well maintained. The parks are used by others so if I need help I know that someone is nearby.
Well-kept trails with not a lot of people.
Other people around enjoying the park responsibly, especially families
Just nature. I've never felt unsafe, but I know some ethnicities don't feel this way.
Well lit, open spaces, occasional patrol on biked
Trails are well maintained and used; I don't feel like I'm alone The periodic presence (visual) of DaCo staff The addition of lighting at the dog park
Other park visitors and on Site staff
Not worrying about something getting stolen or crimes. I had a catalytic converter stolen on Christmas Eve at Spring Lake Park. It was scary. I noticed cameras installed temporarily later. I hope they have better security in the future so that does not happen. People who obey the rules and keep their pets leashed. People who don't control their pets and pick up after them should not be allowed in the parks. It is the wildlife's home and they need to be respected just as if you were visiting a person's house. The wildlife should feel safe and not feel threatened by people and pets.
Signage, people around, lights.
Healthy surrounding community.
Well maintained trails Sightlines to other areas Wayfinding maps & signage Presence of other trail users
Other people are around, familiarity with the park
Signage with wayfinding and using parks and greenways during daylight hours
Well lit spaces, emergency facilities (accessible phones to call for help), keeping out the riff raff (no loitering or drug deals, etc.).
I feel very safe in nature. I trust that people using the parks are also there to be respectful of nature and each other.
Trails are typically well marked and maintained, and signage is good.
Not safe - car break-ins at Ritter Farm Park in Lakeville.
Have my car NOT broken into while hiking.
Natural landscape with people hiking, instead of loud groups.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

No motorized vehicles. Zero bikes on unpaved trails. Only leashed dogs. Clear and enforced policies regarding these, which means occasional staff presence, giving consequences. Signs in big parks to check location when hiking. Safe restrooms-well lit if appropriate, no people sheltering or loitering there, easy viewing around and in to check for safety.

No trash, no graffiti, no people just hanging around, no drugs, rangers or employees onsite

Lighted visible parking lots. Staffed visitor center.

Generally the people I meet are there for the same reason I am - to enjoy activities in the park.

The parks are always so peaceful and scenic it gives an air of safety

not a lot of other people around, good lighting, lack of trash/not dumpy looking/no vandalism

Clear path, clear where to go for help

open paths, lights

Cleared of downed trees/branches, weeds and garbage.

Good signage to make sure you don't get lost

Lighting, access to nearby people -- whether it's staff, neighborhoods, a main event center, or something. Also I feel physically safe because they clearly do tree maintenance and watch out for dangerous limbs or blocked paths.

Well marked trails and maps that are easy to read.

Physical space from other people.

Fellow park users that are encountered, have never experienced incident that makes me question safety

Volunteers

Not too remote, good signage.

Other people being around.

Great signage and volunteers

lighting, many people

Good signage so I don't feel lost -
A well used park so I don't feel completely alone
Seeing park staff out and about occasionally
Well maintained and lit (in appropriate places)
Cell phone coverage in remote areas

Trails and maps

Having passable and groomed trails in all seasons.

Clean facilities. Good lighting. Friendly people. Well kept and cared for parks and facilities. No graffiti.

It's nature and it seems pretty safe with the low risk of a bear or other large animal being sighted

How many other people are using it and my dog makes me feel safe on our walks too.

Amazing trail maps and signage. Lots of lights in parking lots. Location of Parks

Well lit areas, accessible trails

Well kept paths and maintained trails

People and families are present, signage is helpful. Visibility of park rangers and staff.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Other people being around in the general area.
Clear maps showing the trails
A visitor center, good lighting, a parking lot with good lighting, maps and easy to read signage along the trails
It helps when there are other people around.
No reports of crimes.
Well maintained trails and lighting (where appropriate); being away from traffic (particularly when biking)
Nothing
The park layouts, seeing other folks hiking or walking on the paths. Lighting in the parking areas.
Environment, friendly people. Never have any issues.
typically I am walking with a 70lb dog. I am often the only one walking where I am walking.
There are generally many people around
Well marked trails
Lack of crime, well-maintained parks
Most likely my privilege; but that aside- signs, maps, classes (taking a class helps me to feel like I belong doing whatever it is I'm doing where I'm doing it), knowing the rules and conventions also help.
Staff around, others using the park, clear signage, designated parking, lights in parking area.
Often see very few other people. Nature = serenity. Wild spaces give me a sense of security.
Factor in other individuals.
Presence of other people
Well marked trails. Other people and families around.
Well-maintained facilities and trails, clear signage
Well lit parking lot, well kept trails, seeing other people enjoying similar activities
Signage.
I think the people who visit these parks are generally safe and mindful. Approachable and kind staff also helps.
No graffiti or trash or dog poop Park amenities clean and in working order Well lit parking lots and buildings The rules and laws of various areas are respected by the public and enforced by county employees
Not a lot of other people around. Or if they are around, there's enough space between.
Lighting, presence of other families
Being with a group of nature lovers.
Number of other people. Feeling like I'm in nature but also close to help if needed
I'd like to see trees cleared At vermilion in farmington it's kinda creepy- and yet want it nature based - kayaks canoes Pattle board rentals (cheap so affordable but something for (especially) our teens & young adults to do)
Open, we'll used, not a lot of litter to suggest crime (needles, beer cans, etc.)

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
Lack of seclusion , history of safety, preparedness/awareness
Good lighting, a lot of people, and often park and police presence.
Clear trails, good signage, maps, lighting near buildings and parking area. Banning guns within the parks/trails.
Well lit spaces, open, visible, amenities available
I've only been to parks with a group Versus on my own
People seem friendly
Good trails, clean, good signage
There are always people around so if I were to need help, I'm confident I could get that. I walk alone a lot or with my dog & I've never felt uncomfortable at a Dakota County Park. Keep in mind that I only visit the parks in the daytime.
Enough open space that I encounter few people
Knowing there are other people around; trails that are well marked and decently clear
I've never experienced any safety issues while using the park. I do see park staff in the park, along with law enforcement checking in.
Lots of other people around. A popular park is a safe park. NYC is relatively safe because there are so many people around.
I feel safe because there are usually enough other people around that make it feel like I am not alone, yet I can still feel alone in nature.
I bike hundreds of miles a year through Dakota County Parks and the bikeways, river paths, & green way connections make this an area of the Twin Cities that I feel the safest from vehicle traffic. I've been biking for the last 12 years throughout the Twin Cities and Dakota has improved this more than any other area of the Cities. Hopefully it continues to get better!
People--there is a fair amount of people using the park. I know that when there are trash cans and bathrooms, staff will eventually come around as well. It might be helpful to have some emergency call stations
Signage--it's helpful for planning hikes and knowing how to get back
Nothing, there exists danger everywhere.
How the park is situated, having people around but not too many people
Staff, volunteers, community members. Everyone I have come across is very friendly kind and considerate.
Gates to control park access (closed after hours/rain), signs indicating emergency trails, etc.
I feel safe when I see a dog has a leash. I feel like I belong and I am safe when I see the signs that say cross-country skiing only. I feel like there's at least some effort being put forth for skier safety and enjoyment.
Location of parks
Other people around
Quiet and good trail markers
Adequate signage/wayfinding, lights

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
I'm grateful for the lights in Dakota County parks because often when we are able to go enjoy them after work, it is beginning to get dark. I appreciate when trails are maintained and easy to casually hike and enjoy.
I go hiking/walking at most of these parks and with so many paths leading towards different directions, there are signs at every intersection plus the benches some parks to rest. Also how the walk trails are separated from Bike trails.
Well maintained, well used, high quality, well designed to limit risk
Absence of troublesome individuals.
Staffed areas at Lebanon hills, moderate usage (more people than just me/my family there), Good and updated signage/maps on bike trails. Adequate lighting for winter after dark.
No reason, I just do
There are often other people around.
DCSO Park Rangers making regular patrols
Good signage. Well-maintained trails. Friendly people sharing the trails.
I have my dogs with me.
Other than occasionally seeing off leash dogs I have never had a problem.
Clearly marked trails, clean environment.
In general, the people who use the parks are respectful and kind. The few negative experiences have been anomalies.
Clear visibility on the walkway without too much overhead branches or blocked views around corners.
The city of Eagan is a safe place to live and do things.
Ease of finding personal space
They are typically not overly crowded.
I feel most of Dakota County is pretty safe in general. Dakota County provides great maps.
The wayfinding and national grid signs.
Primary use is for outdoor recreation rather than a gathering place for loitering.
Guests that I encounter in Dakota County parks are like-minded people who are out to enjoy nature - not to harass others.
Cameras
Lights and other people
Seeing other people and only being out in the day time
Seeing other solo hikers or families and seeing county employees.
When grasses are cut down at least 6 feet away from the trail as at Whitetail Woods.
Active park with lots of people using it. Free of homeless encampments and litter.
Rarely see other people and those that I do are out enjoying nature as well
No shady people lurking in parking lots, no theft, no litter, lighting, no graffiti
I always feels safer in nature and than on the streets. But tripping hazards on paved trails are unsafe.
Presence of staff and volunteers at many areas of our parks.
The areas are always clean and well-lit.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Signage

Signs, staff

Lighting

Ample lighting, an emergency call box, maps of the park.

Proximity to nature, trails, sightlines, other people.

Open trails, other people around

Being familiar with my surroundings. Seeing other people (but not too many!). Good signage so I feel comfortable that I won't get lost. Trails that are well kept.

lighting
safety personnel
cameras

Nature, respectful users

Maps

Well lit area, good signage.

I never feel there's a negative threat at the parks I've been to.

Clean trails and trailheads. There aren't people living in the woods. I think having an officer or two in the parking lots also helps keep it feeling safe.

I feel very safe on our fabulous paved Greenways. I put on 2500-3000 miles per year mostly on Dakota County paved trails and Eagan sidewalks. Below I will list the 5 reasons I "occasionally" feel unsafe on Dakota trails:

- 1) I feel unsafe when I am riding my bike on a paved trail with a skim of wet dirt or thick dry sand, typical of riding the MN Greenway after a flood. As of Aug 24, this MNG paved trail that parallels Black Dog plant road was still not cleaned up from the flood.
- 2) I try to avoid riding on the Hwy 13 shoulder, but at least twice per day I have to ride on the shoulder from Eagan's Four Oaks rd to the Lone Oak trailhead. It would be nice to have a sidewalk on the east side of Hwy 13 from Four Oaks or McCarthy road to Lone Oak trailhead. I know Lone Oak rd is planned for a trail from Pilot Knob to the trail head. It will be nice to have but very steep incline to climb. McCarthy or Four Oaks rd would be ideal.
- 3) Occasionally the Lillydale stretch of the Big Rivers Trail is closed (rockslide, tree down, new uplift station). When this occurs it forces many more bikers onto hwy 13 shoulder. I have met some folks on the trail that will not risk hwy 13. It is especially dangerous riding down on the southbound side with virtually no bike lane. I was almost run over by a car 2 years ago during the months long uplift station install. It would be nice to have an alternate trail when BRT is closed for work and better marking to tell autos to yield to bikes.
- 4) I emailed Mike Lexvold 4 photos of a huge cotton wood tree that root system is exposed along the cliff overlooking the Big Rivers Trail. The hwy 13 culvert directs water into that big cotton wood root system, 1/3 of which is totally exposed on the trail side. I and other riders believe in the storms we have of late it will fall either on the trail or Hwy 13 and will create a bad rock slide that could injure folks. It would be good to work with MNDOT to proactively remove the tree.
- 5) Throttle only based (no pedalling) ebikes that are obviously going too fast have been a hazard on a few of my rides this past year. Not sure what could be done to prevent speeding.

Thanks for listening and for our awesome trails and parks !

Other people around, ways to get in touch with people

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
I'm 73 and bike ride. It takes a lot to shake me.
Seeing staff and number of people
Not overly secluded
Well maintained trails, workers
I would like better lighting in some of the parks and especially the tunnels.
I have never felt in any danger and have observed open areas that can be enjoyed without fear of someone "lurking". I have seen patrol vehicles come through on occasion as well.
Dedicated path away from car traffic
Parking lots are well lit, ample directional signing on trails, frequent visits from park sheriff
Presence of others
Confident of surroundings, clear markings of trails
Good signage when on trails. Park patrol presence from time to time in parking lots (where break-ins can take place).
Knowing that my car won't be broken into while I am out hiking.
Lighted parking lot, good maps, good cellphone service
Visibility of families and park staff
Confidence in knowing my location and destination when hiking in the parks, especially Lebanon Hills, as a result of excellent maps and signage, as well as my familiarity with the trail systems. In addition, fellow trail users are generally friendly and we exchange greetings. The staff at the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center are friendly and helpful and responsive when I call in downed trees or other issues I observe while hiking.
I feel safe because the parks I go to most often are busy and there are lots of people there.
I am at parks often, and I know where I am going, feel comfortable in nature. Also, many other kind, friendly people out hiking.
Lighting, safety features, emergency phones
I only go in daytime. I would like more staff presence
Being with another person. I would not use the park alone.
The lack of motorized traffic and the bountiful nature.
Visitors are generally well behaved. In most instances dog walkers will control their pets if they are not on a leash. However, off leash dogs can sometimes be a problem.
I simply feel safe in the Dakota County parks I visit.
Do not use them.
Other people around, good lighting
I've never had any problems, negative encounters or experiences in any of these parks and that helps me feel safe in them.
There's cell phone reception in case of an emergency. There's a shelter to protect me from sudden weather changes.
Well maintained site.
I'm always with someone.

What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Parking lot with streetlights, well maintained and groomed trails, well-used park.
Lighting and free of trash)
Because they are well maintained (cleared roads, litter picked up, clean bathrooms, and daily visits by Dakota Sheriff's department. I have been hiking the paths since 1986 and have never had any reason to be worried.
There are other users around
Good community
That it's not totally empty, that it's clearly well-maintained, there are bathrooms, there are ways to reach help, that my car won't be broken into
Never had a negative interaction on them
Cellphone service, legible signage, wayfinding, ranger patrol, staff accessibility
I've never lost cell service in the parks
Knowing that they are frequently used so I know there's always someone not far around. Also nature makes me feel safe and I try not to worry about what "could" happen.
To know that it wasn't land stolen by eminent domain laws or paid for by a punitive tax system.
Other people.
Other people around

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

Keep reaching out to schools in the area! So many kids get stuck inside a building all day and need to get outside. I go to the School of Environmental Studies next to the MN Zoo and, compared to my previous high-school (Priorlake), it has been a great joy to actually get out into different spaces. We had some fourth graders come in and visit SES for a field day and while we walked them around they were extremely observant and excited about the environment. They were restless when we didn't move so we gave them lots to do. In fact, the kids made up a lot of their own fun by throwing rocks and sticks in the pond, collecting different items, or just being observant. Elementary through highschool kids can and will definitely enjoy field days away from their school. Just keep reaching out! The whole reason I'm filling out this survey is because you guys sent Lil, a county employee, to my school. So thank you!

Too many trees are cut down for houses. Too many new neighborhoods don't have parks. Need more trails around water. Would like to rent pontoon on Lakeville lake. Would like community pool. Not enough parking at parks. Need unique parks (huge playground, treetop walking path, scavenger hunt, nature tree logs, bridges, story pages, landmark signs).

Access to trails is restricted due to county roads not having safe methods to cross. For example pilot knob road has no safe way to cross by walking or biking because it is high speed vehicle traffic. I would like to see a bridge crossing over pilot knob road at junction of 195th street to go over the round about or some type of light system that a pedestrian could push to stop traffic. I fear for my life when I cross that road on my bike.

More loop trails!! 2-3 miles in length. Greenway are nice, but not conducive to walking for most. If you do an "out and back" from a parking lot, you only get to enjoy a small portion of the trail

Continue to lean towards habitat restoration! Your ecological staff are outstanding.

I love the Dakota County parks system. I greatly appreciate the smaller bits of protected land as well. My only hope for the future of Dakota County, is to continue or even accelerate protecting any portion of land while they remain undeveloped. Witnessing the rapid development of Rosemount and everywhere else around the metro has been extremely saddening to say the least.

The parks in Dakota County are by far the nicest and most well maintained I have visited in the Twin Cities. Great work!

Nope

There have been all terrain track chairs that have become available for rent at some state parks. These are for people who need help getting through more difficult trails, and I think it would be nice if people could have access to all of the different trails around the parks, not just paved paths.

None

Just staying up to date with "trends". Such as, adding more charging stations for electric vehicles, adding more signage along trails also with QR codes on them to read more about the space you're in and what invasive or unique species surround it.

No

I hope that it becomes more normal for schools to come and just walk around the parks. I think it would be cool for kids to get an early on experience of nature.

No

No

No

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

Nope
I think it would be helpful if the portages were more accessible.
Cleaner lakes.
No.
Nah
rain gardens
It would be cool to have animal rehabilitation programs such as the bison that are in various Minnesota parks.
They should have bat boxes
No
I hope there are more off road hiking trails that don't have path ways.
I think I have high hopes for the parks. They're currently well-maintained and enjoyable and I can only hope that they continue to be.
Less invasive species
No
Nah
Control the bikers 🚲
N/A
Better maps and signage please
I think facilities should be updated so that quality is maintained- strong bike racks, efficient plumbing, handicap accessible trails maintained, functional drinking fountains, etc. I also think common foraging plants should be checked on every so often to monitor/control over harvesting. More pollinator gardens should be implemented in the parking lot areas of parks- similar to Holland Lake's, but bigger. Navigator maps that have been worn down should be redone.
Try to get the younger generation involved with field trips!!
No.
I hope to see installations that reflect on other aspects of nature besides the science behind it, ie. the mental benefits, the influence on literature, the history of the land etc.
No
Consider more area of natural wildflower growth
I like all the trails, would like to see more docks
Jah
Get better bathrooms
No there isn't.
Please tell Scott county how to make a good park
No
More protection

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

How many more areas are you going to take over??? And then expect the few remaining private land owners to pony up and pay the bill Dakota County created?

Please continue to develop the longer connected walk, bike, hike, running ect paths such as big rivers trail. Continue to add to the Lake Marion trail. Also consider doing some of the trails as packed gravel instead of pavement. Thank you!

I would like to see additional habitat protected as housing grows in Dakota county so all residents have equal access to trails

More paved paths for walking please. Build more bike paths in Dakota County that connect all the communities and parks.

I would love to see more nature play areas - these are wonderful spaces that let kids play but also blend into the scenic landscape and there are not many currently

Love our parks!! Would like more bike trails through nature areas. Love the Hastings trail and one in IGH and look. Forward to when they're connected!

I hope that the park system expands programs to invite and welcome all the diversity of Dakota Co residents and visitors well protecting our beautiful natural resources.

I would love a more robust approach to invasive species removal and restoring native habitat. The woods near the mountain bike trails at Lebanon Hills over nearly overrun with buckthorn and garlic mustard and it is depressing.

Expanded areas of undisturbed natural areas, or with minimal maintenance trail access

More programming at Lake Byllesby in general, and more Dakota County Parks presense at the campground, similar to what Lake Elmo Park Reserve does with campfire programming. Partnership with Dakota County Libraries, possible story times at Lake Byllesby and/or art in the park, education about the Dam and the Cannon River. Night sky programming, cultural storytelling about the night sky from native storytellers, programs about the auroras, women retreats like Three Rivers Park District.

I really like the visitor center / event space at Spring Lake Park. Nice modern architecture and features of energy efficiency. That is an outstanding facility.

I would love for there to be a disc golf course somewhere on this park. There are fabulous disc golf courses at similar county parks but nothing available in Eagan. Three Rivers Park has Bryant Lake Park disc golf course and Elm Creek disc golf course.

Keep it natural and non-motorized and not paved. Sure, there could be one paved (or tightly-packed dirt) trail in each park for wheelchair users but keep the rest natural. No playgrounds--or if there are any, keep them on the outer perimeter by the parking lot.

Areas to legally forage for food

I believe there is an untapped potential in creating a bicycling/hiking gravel corridor near the Lone Rock and Whitetail Woods area, which could potentially become a future route for tours or races etc. Potential for Cyclo cross exists as well.

More classes, events. Perhaps an artist in the park series

I don't want nature to be changed too much. Trees, natural areas, etc... If the greenway doesn't have to go "through" Lebanon Hills, that'd be great. Alongside - is fine! Animals (birds included) should still have a home.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I wish Dakota County would higher prioritize the creation and expansion of natural systems and "green spaces". As a current Lakeville resident and former Farmington resident, over the last 5-10 years I have watched as so much of the nature in the area has been destroyed and removed for the creation of single-family detached housing units. The level of suburban sprawl and poor, inefficient use of land in this area is very sad to see. I wish more of this land would be preserved and designated for nature to thrive.

Please connect and finish paving the paths!

Love the park system and the thoughtful connections. Would like to see continued greenway expansion in the more rural parts of the county. Consider how the county could leverage other assets (vermillion river, vermillion highlands) and work with other jurisdictions. DaCo has more assets than many of these smaller jurisdictions so your financial lead may also be necessary. Continue to seek input in a variety of ways. Thank you for doing this!

Repair the Bridges around Jensen Lake

I would like more events with traditional ecological knowledge from indigenous people and nature walks. More volunteer events to help restore habit. People need to give more back to nature. More educational events.

We need a greenhouse to grown our own native and to partner with the Dakota County Master Gardeners!

Take a look at Carver Park and Lake Rebecca, Elm Creek among others.
Blow snow for skiing, create multi-use paths to navigate across the park via something other than foot or hoof. Reduce horse trail options, they are rarely used. Revamp the middle of Leb, it is beautiful but mostly unused. Biking is popular, people want more mountain bike trails, trail builders are growing in numbers and do amazing low damage work, don't listen to the people who yell the loudest. The leb "old guard" is changing and now is the time to go with some new ideas. And clean up the lakes! The cattails/lily are winning and filling up with muck. As a canoe-er I've seen it firsthand the past 20 years. One thing Dakota Cty could do with Leb that basically no other park can do is make those waterways even better by turning them into real small pond/lakes with fish and aeration. The list goes on, and they are all good problems to have. We love our parks!!!!

Unless you live within walking distance of a park, it seems like a private vehicle is the primary way people access the parks. Most parks aren't even accessible to me by bike due to distance & hills. I wish the parks were easier to access via transit, as is the case in other parts of the country. I would love to see the county do more to show environmental leadership at parks and build community around that. Solar energy and perhaps wind energy in more rural parks, net zero energy buildings, restoring the natural hydrology, more ecological gardening and local sustainable food production with opportunities for community members to participate. I wish we had something like a public botanical garden or arboretum in Dakota County. Encourage people to get out in the parks, showcase their work and build community by hosting nature photography competitions and publishing residents' work in county publications and putting local parks photography on display at county buildings.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

To me, the parks represent the best of Natural Resources in bringing back environmental habitats and the inter-connectedness of flora and fauna. Green space is shrinking all around us. Urban sprawl seems to be accelerating. Protecting these jewels of the county for all to experience and enjoy, no matter income or race, is paramount. The healing power of being in wild spaces is well documented. Let's concentrate our efforts on the natural world and its benefits for all.

I want the parks to be as ADA accessible as possible and to work to prevent and manage the presence of invasive species. I've visited some nearby state parks and SNAs that are choked with garlic mustard and buckthorn and it's kind of sad.

The online sign up system and website need to be updated. They are complicated, difficult to use, and it makes no sense why you cannot register more than one person for an event (like the Patio Pots class) in one registration. It should not require a separate email for each individual. Stuff is too hard to find, especially without a class ID number.

The restoration of the park land from turf or buckthorn and other invasives to a much richer diversity of plants and animals making the parks home is of top priority. The nature playground at Whitetail Woods is worth replicating. Offering ISD 196 more opportunities to bring all students to the parks is also a top wish. Repairing the quality of the lakes (Jensen, Bridge) so that people could once again canoe and kayak them would be awesome.

More shaded play grounds. They always seem in full sun and unusable in the afternoons

Install limestone steps at Whitetail Woods, where there are worn short cuts (with erosion) for those who don't want to walk the entire winding paved path from the parking lot to the lower elevation.

You have done a great job with mixed use management. I enjoy the Spring Lake bike trail connection to other trails, but for me, unpaved bike-free hiking trails will always be central to my happiness and will drive my choice of where to live. Thanks for saving habitat and having a long range plan as population grows!

More mountain bike trails. Jr Biology classes/camps. Opportunities for children/families to engage in scientific research. Marble track trail like in Switzerland.

Continued funding for Natural Resources - staff, programs, restoration. More interested in taking care of what we already have and making the parks system as healthy ecologically as possible.

I hope Dakota County continues to support our parks.

I'm unsure why so many mature trees were removed along the trails just south of Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center at Spring Lake Park. The trails used to be much prettier and shadier. Perhaps more signs explaining the need. Thanks.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

1. I would like the assurance that ALL parks have full access for special-abled persons - wheelchair and blind person access on trails and other special needs facilities. "All-Terrain" wheelchairs would be great to have available if park has more rugged trails - with only access for persons who request one for a visit.

2. I would like to see a parcel of land somewhere in southern Dakota County that will serve as a "Memorial Park". New trees, bushes, and gardens filled with favorite plants or, even better, native plantings by using loved one's ashes incorporated in the soil.

It would be a more joyous place for grieving families to visit a "memory tree" dedicated to their loved one as well as know the earth is benefiting from newer growth of trees, plants, et.al.

I want a place like that for my son who loved to be outside and would often watch the leaves flutter in the trees.

I also envision this park to have trails and some open spaces throughout for ALL persons to be able to enjoy the outdoors. This "Memory Park" would be a life-giving place.

More places to mountain bike in Dakota County parks to help with the crowding at Lebanon Hills

I like what you're doing, so keep it up! Remember to keep making decisions that aren't just sustainable for the environment, but sustainable for the workforce, too. It takes a lot of staff to maintain so much land, so please be sure to take care of that great workforce! They clearly do great do great work!!

Please consider making horse trails bikjoring/multiuse trails.

Please continue to support the horse trails, and consider expanding to other parks.

More mountain biking trails!!!

Continue to build paved bike trails. Through Lebanon Hills and connected to both Minnesota Greenway and Mississippi greenway.

Build additional mountain bike trails. Large loop from West trailhead over to visitor center and back.

Continued connection and access points in/around park systems, including more pathways curated to provide multiple options to explore and experience park.

Need lit ski trails and snow making for winter cross country skiing

At Lebanon Hills, I don't venture very far on the trails because I'm afraid I'll get lost. Better maps and signage would be awesome.

Cross Country Skiing is very important to me as there is not much else for physical activity in the area during winter but due to the lack of snow, snow making is needed.

Keep focusing on long term ecological benefit management, less chemicals the better and improving plant diversity slowly over time.

I'd love to see more variety in the cross country ski trails in the Dakota County park system. Winter in MN is LONG! Help us enjoy it outdoors. The classic ski trails at Lebanon Hills are great, but the skate trails (at the Mountain bike area of the park) are VERY CHALLENGING and not fun at all. I'd love to see some of the existing classic ski trails made into (or shared) with classic skiers. Also, a lighted loop would be really awesome!

I would like to see project funded solely by Dakota County dollars. The cost participation with cities essentially double charges residents, once on the city tax side and another on the county tax side. If project can't be solely county funded then they should be re-prioritized.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

We need more natural space with trails. Lebanon hills is a very unique park system that gets people outdoors in various ways. I wish there were a lot more parks modeled after Lebanon.

A suggestion for Spring Lake Park Gathering Center paved lower side of the loop, there are benches to sit on. It is beneficial to not allow the brush/bushes to block the view of the river. One time I was there and the park had allowed, over time, for a lot brush to grow to the point there was no view and individual asked me where the best place to go to in the park to see the river. I had to tell them it didn't exist. I'm noticing it's growing back and the visibility is getting less and less. When we sit in the benches we want to see the river.

- Dedicated bike paths between parks that could connect them
- Upgraded skills bike path at Lebanon
- Bike trail through Lebanon camp grounds
- Nice shaded areas near playgrounds

Continue to protect the park and fulfill the "forever wild" slogan that Dakota County Parks proudly displays. Please don't overdevelop the parks. Keep it wild. I was so disappointed to see a maintenance facility being built at Lebanon. That is as far from wild as we can get. I attended a woodcock walk earlier this Spring and we learned all about how important the park is for these birds whose population is declining. One of their main areas they use in the park is so close to the future home of the maintenance facility. So sad to see so much clearing of preserved land to be a garage for loud trucks leaving at all times of day/all days of the year.

More bike paths that have a physical barrier from the roads (grass strip, concrete barriers, etc). More interconnected pathways, green walkways, and bike paths between parks to link them together. A bike path or large walking trail thru the Lebanon campground connecting the Eastern and Western parts (the Lebanon Visitor Center and the Mountain Bike park).
 Less grass turf around the existing parks and more wildflowers or clover.
 Beehives (if feasible) at parks to encourage pollinators.
 Lebanon Hills mountain bike park's walking paths aren't as kept up as they could be. Frequent erosion makes some paths hard to walk.

Accessibility for all physical abilities

Continue to connect current trail systems together and provide maintenance (trimming and path repaving) on an appropriate schedule

make use of trees that are cut down instead of leaving the whole tree to turn to rotten wood. WISE USE of our natural resources instead of total waste. There is a demand for logs, lumber, firewood and it will be met by other suppliers in the form of living trees cut down. So why not make use of this wood rather than let it go to waste.

No

Don't waste our taxpayers money on your ridiculous ideas. Maintain and nurture nature, have clean spaces and areas and make it safe for women. That is more than I can ask for

It would be very awesome if Dakota County had a space where one could train their hunting dogs. Similar to Four Brooks WMA.

I hope Dakota County continues the current trend of investing in parks and making climate-friendly decisions

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I really like the I can! Program through the DNR. I feel really privileged to have access to green spaces and appreciate the work and planning you do.

I love the classes dakota county offers. I would love to see more folk art/ hobbies/craft classes (ie axing out spoon blanks, making grass brooms, diy pizza oven, knife forging, sharpening hand tools, ect) offered with a sliding scale for payment so all families have an opportunity to partake. And if a class fills up quickly, try to offer that more often as the needs of the community can be met. I love all the classes I've taken so far, like watercolor, spoon carving, fly tying, and fly fishing for women!

Keep it clean. Clear out buckthorn!

Would love to see a play area for children like they have in Hyland Lake Park Reserve in Bloomington.

Continuing to connect parks and green spaces with walking and biking paths, as well as increasing environmental education programming

I think Dakota County does a great job of providing areas to enjoy nature. I love Lebanon Park.

Please use social media more to promote any news or changes with Dakota county parks etc.

Than you for keeping equipment rental costs low. I think you are doing a great job and should continue down your current path. I was disappointed when you chose to locate a massive utility building on a beautiful prairie in Eagan on Cliff road instead of re-using the preexisting location. It is an eyesore at the entrance of our beautiful park. Did the public have any say in this choice?

It would be fun to have a nature playground in one of the more south parks. I hope they don't put one in Thompson - it's already in the city, it would be nice to keep as much of the woods in tact as possible

Dakota County has one of the best park systems in the country.

Please consider coming into farmington. We need bike trails and walk ways to high school- to connect to Lakeville- safe ones.

Watch Netflix the blue line- how to live longer- make our town better & so people can bike places. Canoe kayak paddle board- fish? etc. clear some trees from bridge in farmington - make it seem and beautiful-. You focus on little kids but not preteen/ young adults- they are bored. And we are too.

Bike path Access to LH mountain biking trail from east side of LH so I don't need to load up bikes & drive there, but could ride my bike.

All in all clean parks with many services bring people outside. Less impact on earth with AC, we spend less and it brings people and communities together. There are all upsides to having greater access to more parks and activities outdoors. I know I didn't check rental gear. I spend 60-70% of my free time outside. Having gear available and in good order will encourage more people outside and make activities more accessible.

Additional interpretive signage - names of plants, wildlife to watch for, features of a particular habitat, strategies to maintain the habitat and adapt to changing climate. Lighted cross country ski trails.

Keep all places well maintained get information out there

More x country skin trails

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I would like to see more adaptations for people with physical disabilities and/or limited mobility. I appreciate paved trails that are shorter for those of us who aren't able to go long distances on uneven terrain. I wonder if the county parks could afford to have the powered all terrain chairs that are available at some state parks? I think anything you can do to include all people regardless of physical ability is really important.

Don't take private property in order to expand.

Accessibility can always use a boost; including spaces for people of varying ability and who utilize mobility aids is a great way to boost a sense of the parks being for everyone in the community.

Hope future plans includes keeping equestrian trails. They are few this close to community barns. Such a treasure for us equestrians to have such a beautiful park to enjoy.

Expanding if possible. They aren't making anymore land in Dakota County. Developers will get their hands on everything eventually. Also to make sure lower income families have good access.

I think we should consider a "natural playground" similar to the natural play area at the MN Zoo.

Plan like you are planning for your grandchildren and make this effort is fully funded. These decisions being made now are what will make Dakota Country a great place to live in the next generation.

Maybe some places could add a bike fix up station with air.

I love to see signage explaining the plants and animals in the area.

Maintain the parks as well as they currently are, and add on additional spaces as able

I want to build friendships and have my kids build friendships. I have a high schooler who is new and says it's very click-e- at Rosemount. She did join tennis but she says no one has reached out. I'm also finding it difficult to be a positive member of Rosemount if the new residents aren't willing to get to know one another. But maybe I need to be doing it more than I currently am. I will continue my efforts.

Snow making equipment for CC ski trails would be great in the absence of snowfall

It's important for me that the trails and Greenway are connected to each other.

Horse riding trails

Multi use trails in summer for hikers horses

I think finding more ways to engage with parks and greenways would be awesome! More walking and biking trails and pickleball courts would encourage my spouse and I to spend more time there.

While the parks are very well maintained, some areas especially at the Lebanon hills regional park walk area with mud slides is hard to go up. Unfortunately I don't have ideas to share as I know it's not easy maintenance but if something could be done for those deep ditches especially while going uphill or coming down will be helpful.

keep doing what you're doing

I would like to see increased efforts placed on connecting various public lands together and to complete trails where gaps between segments exist.

The more you can connect natural spaces with trails that minimize having to be on road, it will help a lot for the future. I see more and more people on bikes and ebikes but this is a tough area to get around still worrying about traffic. We live in IGH and I'm looking forward to the new greenway to connect to Eagan but I think a lot more can be done to connect the city and county parks with trails.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

There are a lot of Minihaha style parks, but very few Lebanon Hills style parks. I hope the park board understands and appreciates what we have by leaving it as natural as possible.

Clearly you don't care about the environment since you are planning on cutting down all the hundred year old trees on lone oak road and destroying everyone's properties. Shame on you. Stop lying that you care about the citizens because you don't you only care about wasting my property tax money on stupid crap to justify your jobs. And then you raise my taxes for more worthless projects.

I'd really like the parks to become more and more sustainable. Less turf grass that needs to be mowed and more natural prairie or woodlands with trails. I think we need to look at alternatives to blacktop paved parking like permeable pavers. Look into solar panels to provide electricity to run buildings. We also need more destination playgrounds for older kids.

Thank you for all of your work to plant native species along the river to river greenway in WSP!!! Washington county has a cool bluegrass festival.

Excellent signage for trails that needs to be maintained. Very proud of our parks and I enjoy them immensely. They add great appeal to Dakota County (along with its libraries.)

Allowing under utilized horse trails to be used by cyclists. Specifically not mountain biking trails with MTB features, but trails suitable to gravel cycling that are separate from vehicle traffic and allow quiet time in nature.

Keep up the good work!

Handicap accessibility. There are pot holes around Thompson Lake and the bridge is not wheelchair friendly. There is a ridge that I would hate to navigate on both ends of the bridge.
REquiring a certain # of responses meant that I had to pick some I didn't really care about

I think we shouldn't cut back the forests for easier walking areas. I walk at Patrick Eagan park and I find they are mowing areas and cutting trees for opening up areas. We need to keep our trees and forests. Also I think that people should not be allowed to walk there dogs off leash in parks. Dogs trample nests and scare off deer and birds.

Thorough elimination of invasive to reflect the natural environment as it should be with proper stewardship

Pickle Ball courts are a nuisance when outdoors and should not be located within sound distance to any residential properties.

Minnesota is fast becoming a Mountain Bike destination from across the U.S. I would like to see Dakota County incorporating this into their long term plan. Mountain Bikers are some of the best stewards of the nature area's at our parks and put a lot of volunteer time and effort into not only maintaining trails, but also ensuring the natural environment around the trails is clean and enjoyable for all users.

I would hope to see Parks collaborate with other county departments to bring nature into more urban spaces. I.e. I would love to see pocket prairies or "mini parks" at all the libraries and other public-facing county facilities.

There is no dividing line between "nature" and "not-nature"! Let's make it easier for residents to connect with our shared natural environment and invite more wild creatures back into our cities.

Please preserve as many non-motorized and non-developed spaces as possible for the animals and people to have a quiet and natural environment.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I always support more off-street bike trails and connectivity. I also support any effort to restore habitat and use native plants. Programming and educational opportunities are important to me too.

I would love to have a track chair available to increase access. I recently hiked in a state park with a friend who used one; she was thrilled to be able to be out in nature again, but none of them are close enough for regular use.

Let's not build a paved path through the middle of Lebanon Hills Regional Park, as proposed several years ago. Also, continue efforts to mitigate invasive species in the county parks.

Snowmaking for XC ski trails would be nice

Obtaining the "wheelchair / scooter" with tracks so those non mobile can enjoy the parks.
If a park will conduct community events, ensure the park has lighting to find our way back to parking lots.

A destination adult calisthenics park.

Keep nature natural

Keep foraging free and accessible, it's one of the biggest draws but because of stereotypes few people will admit that is why they go.

Repave all old biketrails. They are not fun to ride on, too rough.

Have you seen the amazing playground and facilities at Clifton E. French Regional Park in Plymouth? That playground area is amazing and a huge draw to the area for families. Every time we go, it is packed. On the other hand, our kids get stumps to play with at Whitetail Woods.
Last summer, I remember a whole bus of parks & rec staff (obviously from a conference of some sort) got out to tour the whole thing at Clifton. I've never seen that kind of interest at our county parks. That park is also very wild and protects their land. Yes, you can have both.

To continue preserving natural habitats. I really enjoy seeing native plants, flowers, and grasses instead of grass I see all over my neighborhood.

Safety in the parking lots.....too many break ins.

Would really like expanded class offerings for adults as well as families. Also more connected greenways, we like to ride our bikes on them (very hesitant to ride on the road since we have a toddler) but there are many places that aren't connected.

My family and I are so grateful for the great parks and all the work that you all do to maintain them!

More beginner level mountain bike trails

Finish the greenways! More parks! More protected and restored habitat. More acquisition of farmland for restoration. More partnerships to accomplish these goals.

I love the parks but frequent 3 rivers parks because of the amount of family and adult classes they offer (forest bathing, education for young children and families(not homeschool programs) I would love to see more offerings like that in our natural spaces. I volunteer and the hoop house in particular is one of interest but as a working adult it is unavailable.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I would love to see a splash pad and/or natural playground at Spring Lake Park. Hastings not not have either.

Signage (names) for parking lots would be nice at Spring Lake Park, since there are so many. When meeting people at the park it would be nice to clarify where to meet when referring to parking. Example- Meet in the "eagle parking lot"

Lebanon Hills is my "happy place". I love that it is wild and I can run five miles on dirt trails. I know that not everyone can do that, and accessibility is important, but I think Lebanon is different, and I hope the county decides to keep it wild!

Population demographics should drive park planning. Meaning older adult-friendly spaces and activities should be the focus.

Something closer to Lakeville area would be great. All of the current parks are so far away to drive to for a quick visit.

I appreciate and support the county's provision of technical assistance to local municipalities that lack the staff knowledge to plan and carry out natural resource maintenance and restoration procedures. Unfortunately, the local elected and appointed officials must be educated the most. To set priorities and make resources available to apply regenerative principles based on place, not on projects.

In my community, in particular, the orientation towards development prevents them from understanding that the built environment is not always desirable. Taxpayer dollars wasted on converting open spaces into Parking lots, athletic complexes, Water Parks, Arenas, and even golf courses require a Hundred Million dollars to Build, a Hundred Million dollars to Operate, a Hundred Million dollars to maintain, and a Hundred Million dollars to renovate—all in the name of Sports. Not to mention separating families from shared meals because parents are too busy having to shuttle children back and forth by motor vehicles out of their neighborhoods to engage in play.

In the meantime, a large portion of community members' recreational needs go unmet in the very neighborhoods in which they live—not even considering Nature's valued social and economic health benefits in many aspects.

Viable ecosystems support clean air and water, reduce the heat island effect that shade trees provide, and sequester carbon. Wetlands and upland native plants not only filter stormwater runoff by retaining the flow, but some of the water has the chance to infiltrate and recharge aquifers, which has a side benefit in reducing flooding. These are the economic benefits saving us from having to build infrastructures to handle the intensity of rainfall events that a warmer shift in our atmosphere has brought about.

Yet society continues to encroach upon what little natural areas are left with the mentality of build and destroy. Parks should live up to the slogan "to enjoy naturally" or "Naturally Wild." Human existence depends upon us leaving a livable world as our legacy.

We need a Dakota County park in Lakeville!

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I love Dakota County Parks and thier efforts to maintain and restore the few wild places we have left. In the age of constant/endless development of any "non-productive" land, I'm very happy that I have many great high quality parks to choose from.

My biggest want would be adding more land to the parks system to keep people from developing the land.

My second want would be maybe more signage signage to show people how amazing the wild areas in thier local area actually are and the ecosystem services they provide for very low cost. I think many people don't realize how cool and important to thier lives our wild areas are.

Third, I love seeing the restorations and seeing the Bison come back. I'd like more of this!

Thanks!

Dear Dakota County Parks Team:

I appreciate so much when I am on the trail and see something, I call the 952-891-7000. most the time talk to a Dakota County employee, sometimes a recording (probably a wkend). When I see something on the trail that needs attention, they have acted quickly to get the issue fixed. Examples: 1) day after recent August storm Big Rivers Trail from Mendota Hgts trailhead to Mendota bridge was strewn with debris. Other rider and I tried cleaning but much too extensive. The day after I talked to a DC person on the 7000 number this portion of trail was clean as a whistle ! 2) July 2024 one of the Dakota peoples history placks at Mendota trail head had fallen off and was on the ground. After I called the 7000 number a team was there in 45min, they fixed it back onto the black iron/wood circle and it still looks good as new ! 3) Several times I have called in a tree down and the 7000 number person responded with a team that cleared it up in a day or two.

Thanks for all you all do for us Dakota County residents !

Mark Dobbelmann (lived in Eagan since 1972)

612-221-3198

East Lake park development

Love the increasing interconnectivity.

I am looking forward to continued growth of the park system without significant changes to how it operates. Recent changes have been excellent - particularly the bison.

More interconnected bike paths, for commuting

Increase the green space of the county (not necessarily for human use).

Limit growth (seriously, where are we getting our water???)!

I could rant on, but you get the picture.

Would like to see an extensive, long-distance, primitive hiking trail system (single-track / low ecological impact footprint type trail) developed at Miesville Ravine Park. I think it would be a unique offering in the Dakota County Park systems repertoire.

Keeping Lebanon's New Year's Eve party. It is centrally located and the buildings for staff are much appreciated there, while having other sites further out as primitive is fantastic.

Great

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I think of our National and State park systems as worthy of emulating in our County regional park system. Our regional parks were created to protect the highest quality natural resources in the county. We need to preserve and restore these natural areas and to encourage nature based recreation. We need to resist the temptation of trying to be all things to all people by collaborating with the planners of city and neighborhood parks and recreational facilities so that inappropriate uses are not created in regional parks.

I love Lebanon Hills and Whitetail Woods parks. Those are the parks I go to the most. We like the playgrounds and walking and hiking paths.

I appreciate Dakota County's vision for natural resource restoration and preservation of county parks and land. As the population continues to grow, our parks are a refuge for both the flora and fauna in the natural world and the people in our communities. Please keep up the great work, and continue on this strong, forward looking path.

Thank you for adding the trail from Holland lake to visitor center along Cliff road. Thank you for adding path into the campground from Johnny Cake ridge road.
Please address bike riders on walking trails through the area between Johnny Cake and Galaxie. There are more riders that use the walking trails. Also, please address walking trail quality in the area especially on hills. It seem that there are just rocks to control erosion which are difficult to walk up and down. please reroute the trail to switchbacks instead of straight up and down hills. Thanks!

Maintenance of paved trails, some are getting a bit bumpy

Addition of social activities for virtual workers and others - music in the park, happy hours etc .
Hyland/Three Rivers in Bloomington does some of these.

I'd like to see more Greenways and connections to Greenways throughout Dakota County. The Greenways are not only amazing pieces of infrastructure on their own, but the more they can be connected to each other and to the communities in Dakota County the more those communities can leverage the network effect of the extended network, for recreation, sport, or productive transportation for commuting, errands, or transportation for other destinations (restaurants, bars, shopping, etc.)
The natural systems and parks are excellent overall, keep up the good work and keep the naturalists taking care of our parks! The clearing of buckthorn, burdock, garlic mustard, and the other invasive plants that had taken over our natural spaces has been wonderful to see and experience, and I want to see the job finished and maintained to keep our parks natural and free of said invasives.

I visit Lebanon Hills most often. The Jensen Lake trail is in danger of being over-used. Would like to see really good landscaping shielding the new maintenance yard from view at the visitor center entrance drive because it takes away from the sense of getting away to the park. Hopefully, the old facility and location will be completely rewilded.

More could be done with the walking/hiking trails at Spring Lake Park. The "new" paved bike is amazing and great for walking in Winter! However, it is so popular that in fairer weather it's not so great to share with bicycles.

Thank you!

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your hopes for the future of Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems and/or is there something you've seen at another park that you think Dakota County should consider in the future?

I appreciate your hard work and generally excellent facilities. My husband and I, however, are disappointed in the construction of the new service facility at the entrance to the Lebanon Hills visitor center. The now past natural setting of the entrance was very welcoming. It no longer is. The old service facility in the middle of the park is not particularly attractive, but it does not take much away from the surrounding trails. It has always taken a bit of walk to reach, so the sight of civilization in the middle of the park has been ok.

On the other hand, we love all the new facilities and amenities at both Spring Lake Park and Whitetail. Congratulations on your excellent planning and construction in each park!

Let's be very careful about spending more on parks. It seems like we need to spend more of our resources on crime prevention and safety.

Appreciate good bike trails and ability to stay off roads while biking

Safely connect bike paths for longer distances.

I really enjoy the experience in the camper cabins in the parks and hope for those to continue and would enjoy more cabins in additional, different locations.

North creek greenway has some nice trail signs in Apple Valley. Would like to see quality signage from Northeast lakeville down to Farmington and more updates made to the north creek greenway trail.

I'd love to see bird banding and annual bird counts (like the Christmas Bird Count) done at Dakota County parks, as well as guided bird watching hikes led by a trained naturalist, and nature-based merit badge classes for Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts, offered at Dakota County parks.

This is great- thanks for allowing community insights

Please finish the kayak launch at spring lake. Please do not cut down more trees. It is very sad and disappointing for residents.

Focus on enhancing, restoring, and preserving natural areas. We desperately need to act on this front. Part of that is creating ways for people to engage with nature, but that's a less immediately important goal to me.

I especially appreciate the restored natural areas. Volunteering there is fun, rewarding and fulfilling.

More signage for no bikes on trails and dogs must be on lease.

More acknowledge of indigenous land and learning opportunities. I love the signage along the Minnesota river greenway by black dog road. I love that indigenous artists were hired to provide education and art in our parks.

I live in fear of all you good intentions. Everything you do is a treat to me. Please leave people alone.

Better upkeep. Maintenance before more new developments.

Online Vision Board Results

If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?
More hiking trails with scenic overlooks. Additional indoor rental spaces (simple to keep them affordable) for groups.
local biodiversity/ecology research opportunities!
I'd love to have place where I know the indigenous peoples are considered when molding the part
More areas for off leash dogs.
Continued improvement of the land through restoration of native ecosystems & robust natural resource staffing & volunteer involvement.
I would like to see walking / snow shoe paths alongside the horse/cross country ski paths on the northeast part of the park
More funding and staffing for invasive removal and habitat restoration
More nature play areas! Similar to the play area at Tamarack nature center. Spaces that blend into the natural landscape
Preserve the natural sense of trail hiking in Lebanon Hills Park. Specifically avoid adding paved trails.
Would love a disc golf course somewhere in Dakota parks. Could also use it for skate ski cross country skiing
Want an place where ANYONE can go for a hike and feel safe. if trail needs to be flat, do the outside of park, not thru the park.
It would look like Carver Park, or Lake Rebecca but be way cooler cause Leb is the GOAT.(we need to realign and add multipurpose connectors)
Demonstration gardens with ecological landscaping using native perennials & pollinator friendly plants to give people ideas for their yards
More visible & innovative green infrastructure: collect & use rainwater, rain gardens, bioswales, natural filtration & retention on-site
Demonstrate environmental leadership: renewable energy, netzero buildings/facilities, native plantings, minimize use of pesticides
Better bike & pedestrian & bus connectivity between neighborhoods & parks.
save native plants and animals. abundant planting of native flowers, trees. indoor nature walking trail with no sports (Thompson Park)
More diverse cross country ski trails. Skate ski trails (not the really hard hilly ones at the MTB park). A lit ski trail and snow making!
Indoor walking trail with trees, dirt paths and yoga area to get a break from the cold, ice and rain. Solar powered and rainwater collection
More dedicated bike paths connecting neighborhoods and parks. More parks, more mountain biking parks that aren't just Lebanon Hills
Our family would love to see an outdoor skate park like Rosemount has and or a bike skills park similar to Taft bike park in Richfield.

If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Connected bike trails throughout Dakota County
Bike trails connecting all residential neighborhoods in Dakota County to Dakota County regional parks
More mountain biking/bike trails
Path to FHS./ Clear river down in farmington. The old "lab" building by the bridge made into a park area- where you can rent kayaks, etc-
Emphasis on planting trees & native plants that are adaptable to climate change More programs that are tailored for older adults
Horse riding trails
-dedicated pickleball courts -bike & walking trails connecting multiple cities -community pool in Burnsville -outdoor fitness equipment
Plant more fruit trees and native trees/plants.
Stronger signs of stewardship w/ a more thorough elimination of invasive and interpretive signage to help public understand work.
Why do you ask people to take the survey, then you won't accept it?
More programming and amenities that bring people of all backgrounds. More support and participation means more appreciation of nature!
Adult Calisthenics Park equipped with various height pull-up bars & dip bars. A running track with mile markers, and water station.
A CONTINUOUS dedicated bike trail connecting Burnsville to other cities, especially to Lakeville, Apple Valley, and Savage.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Easy access from multiple points •Preservation of native grasses, flowers, trees and spaces •Frequently used by all demographics
Natural space with a lot of activities for everyone, including diverse communities.
the Magic Wand would get rid of buckthorn and all invasive plants!
Preserve more historic landmarks in the form of parks and trails.
We need a community pool
I'd love to see bird banding, guided birdwatching hikes, and an annual bird count done at at least a few of these areas

Survey Open En

Online Interactive Map Results

Access - Are there any issues with accessing parks and trails?	Park/Greenway
sure would be nice to be able to ride a bike through this part of the park. multi-use multi surface (non winter) option.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
What is a dead end horse trail doing here? Time to get with the times and link a bike path across the park... get campers to the swimming beach and visitor center safely. Reorganize and reduce unused horse trails. Focus equestrian use to Spring Lake Park.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
A paved multi use trail connecting all three sections would be awesome. Having to ride/walk along Cliff or McAndrews is a bummer.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
These neighborhood access points are great... but they can be outside walking range for many. It feels bad to have to drive to a local access point... could we get bike racks?	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
There needs to be a bike lane or trail access on this road. The road is currently unsafe for walking or biking. And there needs to be a crosswalk for the neighborhood across Cliff to access the main road to the park.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
With a new housing development coming in across the street, I expect parking to become very limited at this entrance. Finding a way to keep a few parking spots would be great.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Thank you for adding path along Cliff from Holland Lake to Visitor Center. Thank you for adding path from Johnny Cake to Campground.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Lilly Lake is essentially a private lake, which can be okay. But then I see yard signs that say, "Support Lilly Lake" or something, as if they want public support? I understand it's probably public land, but it's all private backyards and a church, and without public access, it doesn't feel like a public lake. I think I would at least prefer a clearer understanding of the lake's role?	Other - Lilly Lake

Idea - Share your ideas with us!	Park/Greenway
This section of ski trail should be two-way. From marker #38 -> #50 is a ridiculous forced loop for younger and older populations looking to ski. A little signage change between #7 #38 would be a very welcome change, especially for locals who access the park away from the visitor center.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Why not utilize some old access road and connect to the Maint. Facility Access Road (once it has moved over to Cliff) to 120th Street. This would be an awesome multi-use trail and require VERY little cost / trail re-alignment to achieve.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Please pave the whole trail from the parking lot to the canoe access and provide carts.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add a loop of lighted ski trails	Lebanon Hills Regional Park

Idea - Share your ideas with us!	Park/Greenway
Would love to see some of the cross country ski trails (maybe less used further from visitor center) have the ability to be used for skate skiing. The trails at the mountain bike park are too hilly and difficult for beginners.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The skills course at Leb is decent, but aging fast. Innovations in techniques and ideas in the mountain bike world have shown our course to be lacking in what it could be. This mountain bike park is phenomenal and truly a trophy of the metro area, having a newly designed and built skills course would really amp up the kids who come to ride and set them up for success in the long haul. The MORC volunteers (of which I am one) would love the skills course to be revamped and would love to help build it!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Consider adding more guided nature walks w/park staff/volunteers, and also more "nature bathing" and contemplative activities	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Consider offering canoe/kayak rental at this location. The lake is large enough to make it a more interesting outing than the lake by the visitor's center	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add a paved bike path throughout lebanon hills and connect it to Mississippi parkway	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add additional mountain bike trails that connect the West trail head to the visitor center	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Provide more sitting benches around this paved path and lake.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add signage and highlight the old mine shaft entrance. This is some great local history about the area as well as the 56ft deep lake!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add a board walk on the lower section of trail. This area is usually soggy/muddy. It's almost level with the water.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Work with DNR to add more predator species. Such as bass, pike, or walleye this would help with the stunted bluegills and add more target species for catch and release.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Fishing pier. Would love to see more access to fishing in this pond	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Add poopbag stations	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love Lebanon Hills. The wayfinding is great. I would like more interpretive signs along the trails!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Please address the bike riders using walking trails. Also, please reroute the walking trails to switchbacks to control erosion rather than just adding a bunch of rocks. The rocks are difficult to walk on up and down the steep hills.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The 6 ft round x 2ft high beautiful stone monument engraved with the rivers and Dakota names for rivers areas. This year the bushes growing to about 4 ft all all around, hide the monument & speaker stand. Perhaps trimming / thinning the bushes would allow folks to see and enjoy this beautiful interpretive monument. Thanks to Dakota Parks for this monument and other monuments (black circles with the interpretive plaques along trails)	Mendota Heights Trailhead

Idea - Share your ideas with us!	Park/Greenway
Add a small parking area here. People with trouble walking may not be able to walk the whole distance to see the bison when there are moved to this location.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Add more winter hiking and snowshoe trails in SLP woods. There are no snowshoe trails at all. Where are we suppose to go for these two sports in this park in the winter? Could they make the ski trails wide enough to accommodate both skiing and hiking/snowshoeing?	Spring Lake Park Reserve
The people of Hastings would LOVE a mtn bike trail here. What amazing landscape to carve a beautiful trail into. Plenty of trail-builders to connect with for ideas in the midwest nowadays.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Several bison viewing areas/raised platforms with viewing binoculars. Would love he chance to do a drive through like minneopa, even if it was timed in a parks vehicle.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Add raised viewing platform so easier for people to see the bison.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Be proactive and partner with UM Extension/State DNR for this 8,000 some acres. Do not allow this beautiful land to be developed with Rosemount/Farmington expansion plans. They are being very aggressive in developing right now.	Vermillion Highlands Research Recreation and WMA
Please allow biking on the maintained summer XC Trail Paths. There is so much potential combined with UMORE Lone Rock Trail for a rustic prarie-views mountain/e-bike/fatbike riding.	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
I really like Whitetail Woods! What would get me out of the metro on a weekend would be more seasonal activities -- guided wildflower walks in spring, fall foliage hikes, hikes w/naturalists to see owls or other wildlife.	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
Would like to see a boardwalk through this area and the Dodge Nature Center property so that people can value the existing wetland	Other - Friendly Marsh Park
Wayfinding and signage to show people how to get from this park to the greenway	Other - Mendakota Park
Would love to have a better place for the 4th of July fireworks. (The old location at the high school was great!) We no longer even attend fireworks in Lakeville.	Other - King Park
A trail all along then creek from Steve Michaud Park to Cedar Avenue would be a great addition to the trail system in the area.	Other - Foxborough Conservation Area
Purchase this property to save from development. Oaks and wetlands.	Other - 205th St W & Keystone Ave

Idea - Share your ideas with us!	Park/Greenway
<p>This is 200 acres of land that is currently one private property with cattle and is directly adjacent to the Soberg Waterfowl production area. The woodlands on and near this property are mainly oak woodlands and there are several nice wetlands as well. This would be a great location to reestablish prairie in the open lands and improve the woodland. This is the only location in Lakeville that I've seen yellow headed blackbirds. Suggest the County purchase this land for park. Also suggest that the County continue to look for lands to protect to the north of this location to eventually connect to Ritter farm park. All areas south of Ritter & west of 35 should be looked at to preserve as long term park and protect from development.</p>	<p>Other - 215th St W & Laigle Ave</p>
<p>Why no county parks in Lakeville and/or Burnsville? Local residents would love to have something accessible to them in our own backyard.</p>	<p>Other</p>
<p>Would it be possible to provide better access to Quarry Island?</p>	<p>Other - Quarry Island</p>
<p>Add poopbag stations around this lake.</p>	<p>Other - Day Park</p>
<p>This location is the McMenomy farm and contains a 'Hidden Gem' in Dakota County. The hidden gem is an original trail established when the farm was first established in the 1800's. It was used to move cattle from one pasture to another. It is approximately 1 mile long. I've been working the farm for over 20 years and would like to see this beautiful trail preserved. The farm is surrounded by development and is threatening the trail.</p>	<p>Other - McMenomy Farm</p>
<p>Next time there is construction where beautiful prairie once grew consider relocating native plants to public property (provide signage) or providing opportunities for private property owners to have pocket gardens.</p>	<p>Other - Patrick Eagan Park</p>
<p>There needs to be an additional garbage can installed here as some park goers are too lazy to walk to the trash can by the tennis court to dispose of their trash. I often bring a bag to pick up trash around the playground and I think the distance of the garbage can is part of the problem.</p>	<p>Other - Ridgecliff Park</p>

Needs Work - What needs improvement?	Park/Greenway
<p>Huge cottonwood tree on the edge of the cliff overlooking trail has about 1/3 its rootball exposed on trail side. A culvert on Hwy13 feeds runoff directly to this huge tree. I think Dakota County and MNDOT are looking into if it should be proactively cut down before it falls onto the trail and creating a huge mess and potentially injuring someone.</p>	<p>Big Rivers Regional Trail</p>
<p>This is a real challenge very thin 1ft down hill bike lane right next to curb and gaurd rail, and on a curve. I have been almost hit by a car 2 years ago. It would be ideal but a MNDOT challenge to figure a way to widen this HWY here to allow for safer southbound side bike lane. At very least maybe more signage and or make clearer that the northbound bike lane could be used for southbound bikes.</p>	<p>Big Rivers Regional Trail</p>

Needs Work - What needs improvement?	Park/Greenway
The trail on the south side of the Minnesota River has a few sections that can become impassible because of water. A few small bridges would make this trail great.	Fort Snelling State Park
There is so much buckthorn and garlic mustard on this section of the park, it's starting to feel hopeless. There is also no current plan for addressing invasive species in this section.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
We were told this space will be 100% returned to a natural state. But we have our doubts as we didn't see any funding/written documentation in the new Facility Plan for it. Please follow through on the guarantee. Such a beautiful location nestled between bodies of water.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I get yelled at for biking and recievew weird looks of concern when I ride a bike on this path. Let support two wheels at leb (non-mtn bike), there is an entirely new aging population looking for beautiful places to ride e-bikes. We've seen how quickly a forest recovers from trail building at Spring Lake Park. What are we waiting for at Leb?	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Leb has done amazing things, but have they had a freshwater shallow lake/pond rehabilitation study performed to manage these amazing bodies of water? The cattail growth and thick vegetation has spiraled over the past 20 years and the lakes are literally filling into muck before our eyes. Please help these small bodies of water by investing more in rehab and maintenance (invasive weed removal, aerators, fish, etc.). There is SO much potential with these connected bodies of water in a protected park. The BWCA might be the only other place to compare to and that is saying so much for Leb's small but unique waterway system.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The damage walkers do to ski trails are a real bummer when we have to pay extra for use of the trails. The available signs are nice but there needs to be more and some enforcement as well. These trails are a regional magnet for skiers and for folks to travel far and wide to have to spend money to ski beat up trails is a bad experience.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
There's a yearly flooding problem and it's only going to get worse. I object strongly to spending tax dollars on a trail that's not usable for months of every year. This section needs to be re-engineered (maybe an elevated boardwalk?)	Minnesota River Greenway
This beautiful trail from Nichols trailhead to 35W usually is cleared of flood mud / silt within a few weeks, now a month later it is not cleaned yet?	Minnesota River Greenway
The Greenway here has languished for a long time. Once construction is finished, partner on habitat restoration with adjacent landowners.	Mississippi River Trail - Pine Bend Trail
Need signage here for entrance to this beautiful park.	Pine Bend Bluff SNA
Could there be signage/wayfinding at Marie to direct people to the trail in this area? It's not easy to find.	River to River Greenway
Would like to see a bike lane and/or pedestrian trail on Dodd Road to connect to the greenway	River to River Greenway - Dodd Road

Needs Work - What needs improvement?	Park/Greenway
This very old Lillydale Trail to Marie Ave to Dodd needs very badly to be repaved to be a much better and inviting addition to the River to River trail.	River to River Greenway
River to River trail is great, but can be a challenge to find the correct route. The signage along its length could be much better. I think more folks would use it if there is improved signage.	River to River Greenway
I'm confused why the mature trees were removed. I love shade and woods. Perhaps add a sign explaining the need to remove the trees. Maybe this was done and I missed it.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Less of this.	Other - Amazon MSP6
People drive insanely fast on this road and it's a coin flip whether or not they will stop for you at the pedestrian crossing. The trail between Casperson Park and Antlers Park is one of my favorite locations in Lakeville and the two crossings on 205th St W feel very unsafe.	Other - 202nd St W
Please consider turning this for-sale lot and the surrounding area behind Target into a park or conservation area. The green spaces in this area have become so heavily fractured and whittled away through recent building of the Panda Buffet, the massive medical complex, and the wholly unnecessary "pet spa". More regional and city green spaces - less national/multinational branch locations and unnecessary businesses!	Other - Kenrick Ave & Orchard Trail
Please finish this connect path so we can safely ride from Burnsville to ST Paul	Other - Nicols Road
Please finish the road so you can get to the trail from Blmntn	Other - Lyndale Ave S
Entire trail needs to be fixed. The city council here seems disinterested in supporting citizens goals for trails	Other - Adkin Road
The bridges on the trail are awful. The city seems to spend no money on trail maintenance.	Other - Native Prairie Planting Park
agree with other post. This section of 70th is not safely bikeable and I hope there are plans to update since the other portions of 70th/Lone Oak are nice now.	Other - 70th St East
Add poopbag stations to address people leaving their dogs' excrement everywhere.	Other - Alimagnet Park
Old bike trails need to be resurfaced as they are very bumpy and hard to ride on, even dangerous as some weeds come through the blacktop.and are a tripping hazard for walkers. The new trail is nice and smooth.	Other - Adkin Road
This area is really scary on bikes road virtually has no shoulder and bike lane is about 1 ft wide. I avoid this area and now take 80th after a few scary situations along this stretch	Other - 70th St East
riding bikes down four oaks rd to get to Lone Oak trail head places you on hwy 13 shoulder then crossing at the light. It would be safer to have a sidewalk on hwy 13 east side to Lone Oak light. I know Lone Oak trail from Pilot Knob is planned but Lone Oak is just too steep for some folks biking.	Other - Sibley Memorial Highway
The overhanging brush and garbage in the pond need to be addressed.	Other - Crosstown West Park

Needs Work - What needs improvement?	Park/Greenway
The old sidewalk pavement is so badly cracked by tree roots. The raised cracks in pavement are at least 3-4 inches above the paved surface creating a potential hazard.	Other - Schwanze Lake
Would be very nice to have a paved sidewalk / trail all the way to Lone Oak. I have talked with many riders that dislike hwy 13 shoulder.	Other - Sibley Memorial Highway

More of This - What would you like to see more of?	Park/Greenway
The Big River trail is wonderful, using it at least 5-6x/wk daily. The team that maintains this trail is amazing especially appreciated after the recent storms. Thank you for what I think is the best and most beautiful trail in Dakota County! Now with Mendota Bridge open again we even have more routes!	Big Rivers Regional Trail
Finish the Lake Marion Greenway. It's been a few years since the nice trail was added in Burnsville near Sunset Pond, now it needs to be finished so we can bike safely into Lakeville and beyond.	Lake Marion Greenway
Love all the work being done with the vegetation/restoration in woodlands and grasslands! Keep it up throughout the park!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The mountain biking at Leb has been the best in the metro for years. Many new trails are being built in the metro however, that are equal or better. Adding more trails to the existing Leb network that are more current in their style would keep Leb on the top of the metro list of places to ride. There are several professional trail building companies now that can design and build additional top notch trails, further expanding the usability and popularity of the trails.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Excellent recently re-paved and newly added trails along Cliff Rd plus the roundabouts are so great for pedestrians safety !!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Looking very forward to more and faster progress on completion of the new trail from here to Lone Oak trail head. It would be great to see an updated plan given the delays caused by flooding and etc. I believe it was planned completion trail & bridge by EO 2025	Minnesota River Greenway
Very cool area, needs some cleaning and repair but very cool The rental kayaks are a cool idea but I wish they would be open longer	Other - Lilydale-Harriet Island Park
LOVE WTW ❤️ Think adding historical info would be great	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
Finish all the bike trails so that St. Paul is connected to Hastings.	Other - Minnesota Hwy 55
More partnerships with State and local entities to protect and restore habitat that isn't just a Dakota County-owned park.	Other - Hampton Woods WMA
Looking very forward to the completion of the Veteran Memorial Trail that will take us from Dodd Rd all the way to the Mississippi trails that take us to Pine Bend and Swing Bridge Trail heads	Other - Veteran Memorial Trail
Excellent recently re-paved trail and smooth transitions from trail to driveways	Other - Silver Bells Road

More of This - What would you like to see more of?	Park/Greenway
Excellent recently re-paved trail and smooth transitions from trail to driveways	Other - Sibley Memorial Highway

Favorite Place - What is your favorite place?	Park/Greenway
This is an amazing trail everyone enjoys, the 2 rivers, views, bald eagles, trees lining the path, paddle wheel boats, etc. And its always 2-4 degrees cooler in the summer than sunny portions of the trail.	Big Rivers Regional Trail
Excellent and quick work on excavating a longer S curved with new pavement for the approach to the just re-opened Mendota Bridge trail. The Facebook "Biking Minnesota" group were all excited to hear of the new approach and bridge open!	Big Rivers Regional Trail
This Trailhead has it everything including amazing sunsets over the lake and river. It is the most utilized trailhead. It is very impressive what Dakota County Parks has invested this historical overlook. The design, facilities, time, maintenance, security very impressive! Thank you	Big Rivers Regional Trail - Mendota Heights Trailhead
Excellent Trailhead and trail, bike tools, map, seating, picnic benches, plenty of parking. Very anxious to utilize the trail btwn here and Nichols Trailhead.	Big Rivers Regional Trail - Lone Oak Road Trailhead
Great additions of water and lights - thank you!	Dakota Woods Dog Park
Please, please protect the native plant remnant communities near this area! The new development social trails are somewhat of an issue.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Love these remote, undeveloped areas at Lebanon. Keep up the great work with invasive removal and native ecosystem restoration. Lebanon is a priceless refuge, in a developed metro area, for wildlife and people alike.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
We love the main area of Lebanon Hills. We use the beach, we hike, we sled, we snowshoe, we canoe... we've had work meetings in the A-Frame. The New Year's Eve Party is such a blast. They pack a lot of fun into a small area	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
100% 5+ Stars for relocating the Maint. Facility to this location. Can't wait to see the restoration take place at the old site.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Schulze Lake is our favorite local beach. Sandy, clean, bathrooms/changing rooms, gradual depth entry, and free. Thank you for making a place for those of us who don't have family cabins to enjoy "lake life."	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Camp Sacajawea is a fabulous option for groups. Please keep it for that use!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The A-Frame is my favorite place at Lebanon. I love the scenic view, and it's just gorgeous! It feels a bit secluded, but not too secluded.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Absolutely love the hiking trails and really enjoy the geocaches as well!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The visitor center, Schulze Lake and McDonough Lake are family friendly, accessible, beautiful and fun! We love the community events offered for kids and adults, as well as the beach and walking trails!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park

Favorite Place - What is your favorite place?	Park/Greenway
The Lebanon Hills Campground is top notch! It's a true oasis in the city and you feel like you're really far away from 'the city'! The campground is exceptionally maintained and the staff is always pleasant to work with!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
The trails here are great but too many people abuse the trails by riding them when conditions are not good. If more can be done by the county to support volunteers to keep people off wet and muddy trails that would be awesome!	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love this section of trail	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love this park. It's unique in its scale in the metro area -- and you can walk on dirt paths and have a sense of being out in the woods/wild area. We need more of this.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love Lebanon Hills for walking, programming, sitting, and the native plant communities.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Been in Eagan since 1972, this park has been a blessing: hiking, snow showing, nature & photography.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
We love walking around Jensen lake as a family and the kids like the playground. I like that there are bathrooms and a drinking fountain. I also like that it's pretty busy so I feel pretty safe going by myself.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love this park. I use the horse trails and they are always in great shape. I love that I have an opportunity to ride in a beautiful park so close to my home. Please do not change this park - it deserves to stay as is as it supports so many people through hiking/snow shoeing trails, horseback riding, nature walks, etc.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Great Mt biking	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
Lebanon Hills is a gem during any season. I've enjoyed the kayaking and wreath making classes. My husband and I hike and ski there, and were even interviewed by WCCO TV news once while hiking there on a day with hoarfrost.	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love this park	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
I love to go to Miesville Ravine to get away from busy life. It's a great place for bird watching.	Miesville Ravine Park Reserve
I love this trail. It's close to my house, it's a great wildlife viewing area, and it's bike- and walking-friendly	Minnesota River Greenway - Cedar Ave Trail Bridge
Beautiful on the water dock platform overlooking BDLk is awesome: very peaceful, and great for watching migratory birds, especially awesome watching 50-100 American Pelicans 2x/year..	Minnesota River Greenway - Black Dog Lake

Favorite Place - What is your favorite place?	Park/Greenway
<p>The bike trail out from Hastings past Schaar's Bluff to the current end-of-the-line is amazing! I love the views from up high and also all the native wildflowers alongside the trail. My husband and I ride it multiple times a year and it's our favorite metro bike ride.</p> <p>Last time, however, the young grass mowers chose to roar right around us while we sat on the bench at Schaar's Bluff resting. I wish they would have started on another section of the vast area they were mowing since we were the only folks to work around at the time. Maybe a training item for next year?</p>	Mississippi River Regional Trail
I love this area. I run here all the time and having bathrooms and water fountains is great. The view of the river is very pretty too.	Pine Bend Bluff SNA
I love that they added this bridge over the water and the paths around the library area! It's great!!	River to River Greenway - Near Wentworth Library
Beautiful creek/gorge segment of the River to River Trail!	River to River Greenway - Kaposia Park
I love the bison and we visited them often.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Beautiful park! I also appreciate the nice, clean facilities, too. Nice work with pollinator-friendly vegetation, too.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Love the bison and habitat restoration. Happy to be a volunteer.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Love the bike trails through Spring Lake Park. Hope they can finally connect to IGH soon.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Spring Lake park is amazing.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
Beautiful park with great views of the river, wonderful walking and biking trails. It is a great place to enjoy year round.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
I love the view of the river and the hiking trails here, I'd love to see bird banding and guided bird watching hikes offered here.	Spring Lake Park Reserve
This accessible playground is a favorite with my kids and we love the nature theme, just wish it had some shade in the summer!	Thompson County Park
This accessible playground is such an asset to our community. My kids have friends who use wheelchairs and walking aids and this is a place they can all gather and play together.	Thompson County Park
Local and easy access; I walk here all the time! I love to see all the families at the playground and picnic shelters. They did a nice job updating the park and I'm so glad to see it!	Thompson County Park
Love the playground here with the pumps and water features. Love the trails. Have been wanting to come to a music in the park and just have not been able to make it on weeknights. Maybe consider a couple weekend music events in the summer as well?	Whitetail Woods Regional Park

Favorite Place - What is your favorite place?	Park/Greenway
Whitetail Woods is amazing.	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
We love walking at Whitetail Woods park. The kids like the nature playground. We also want to try out the sledding hill someday. I think the camper cabins look super nice too. We like that this park has super nice bathrooms.	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
W spot no cap. You can fish, bike, walk and they have a great park for children.	Other - Blackhawk Park
Great DISC golf course. Fund it with county budget and make it a free (and/or optional donation) supported.	Other - South Valley Park
Kenwood Trail DISC golf course is one of the best in the area! Keep this excellent course.	Other - Kenwood Trails Disc Golf Course
Absolutely love the diversity and uniqueness built into this playground! My kids could spend all day here!	Other - Woodhaven Park
What a beautiful and sacred place!	Other - Pilot Knob Preservation Site
Definitely a great park - shelter, playground, walking path, fishing peer, nature, etc. We love it!	Other - Blackhawk Park
Patrick Eagan Park is a gem of a location with natural trails and a wilderness inspired playground. There are benches (made from trees from the park, I think) that offer respite while walking the extensive trail system. The overlooks are nice - although the one on the East side of the park no longer overlooks much since the trees have grown so much over the years. The trails can be very steep and there are tree roots and rocks on the trails so it is not very accessible, but I do love this park and the ability to immerse yourself in nature here.	Other - Patrick Eagan Park
I really like the walk around Blackhawk Park. It's accessible all winter long. And you can snowshoe on the lake once it's frozen.	Other - Blackhawk Park
We love the walking path around Sunset Pond!	Other - Sunset Pond

E-mail Input

From: [Redacted]

Sent: Saturday, August 31, 2024 6:28 AM

To: Leatham, Lil

Subject: Suggestions for development of new objective for Parks and Greenways

Dear Lil

Hi

My name is [redacted]. We met at the kiosk of Dakota Library at Central Common at the Eagan farmer's market on Wednesday, August 28. As I mentioned that day, I am an urban planner, and with my experience in planning, I wanted to suggest some ideas for developing new objectives for parks and greenways. (Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan)

1. Development of Viewpoints along the park's water bodies and scenic terrain for visitors to stop by and experience the views. some seating areas/gazebos could be added.

2. Stargazing is a wonderful way to connect with the cosmos and community with similar interests, and the best locations for this activity are typically away from city lights, in areas with clear skies and minimal light pollution. Some parks in the city could be proposed with these designated stargazing arenas within the parks and have switching-off light systems/mechanisms when required by people to minimize light pollution. These parks could be identified based on location, higher altitudes, and minimum tall trees to view clear skies. celestial events such as meteor showers, northern lights, and blue moon nights can be observed from these parks.

3. Theme-based gardens within parks which could be maintained outdoors, if weather permits, or indoors/ in a Greenhouse. Various themes could be

i) The garden of 5 senses- fragrance, colorful, aesthetically appealing

ii) Garden of Herbs/ Herbal Gardens

iii) Starter Plant Libraries

4. Open Gym Area / designated areas/ Platform to Practice Yoga with soft rubber padded floor areas.

I have shared all my ideas above. Please feel free if you need to discuss these further or need more information.

Thanks and Regards

From: [Redacted]

Sent: Friday, August 30, 2024 11:15 AM

To: Leatham, Lil

Subject: 2050 Vision Plan

Happy Friday Ms. Leatham,

My name is [redacted] and have enjoyed living in Dakota County for 43 years. I was interested in the 'Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan' project and submitted an idea on the website. It was the one about the 'Hidden Gem' in Dakota County consisting of a 'trail' or 'lane' located on the McMenomy farm in Rosemount that was established when the farm was first settled in the 1800's. What I had neglected to mention, is that every year in the first part of September, there is a massive migration of Monarch Butterflies that congregate for about a week in and around this trail. There are literally tens of thousands of them at that time on there way back to winter in Mexico. I'm not sure who to contact, actually, on who to help preserve this area, as it is being squeezed by surrounding development. As I had mentioned in my idea, I have been helping the owner farm this property for over twenty years, and I know a potential beautiful, historic trail when I see one, as I have hiked several trails throughout the country, including the Appalachian trail, Haleakala National Park in Maui, Cloud Peak Wilderness Area in

Wyoming, The Boundary Waters Wilderness Area, Superior Hiking Trail, North Shore State Trail, and several other Minnesota state and county park trails. It would be a shame for a developer to come along and just bulldoze this area into oblivion and build more housing. This would be a trail in Dakota county with a long standing history and with trees that have been there since before Minnesota was a state!

Thank you for your consideration

From: [travoyager](#)
To: [Leatham, Lil](#)
Subject: 2050 Vision Plan
Date: Friday, August 30, 2024 11:15:16 AM

WARNING: External email. Please verify sender before opening attachments or clicking on links.

Happy Friday Ms. Leatham,

My name is Jeff Wilcziek and have enjoyed living in Dakota County for 43 years. I was interested in the 'Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan' project and submitted an idea on the website. It was the one about the 'Hidden Gem' in Dakota County consisting of a 'trail' or 'lane' located on the McMenemy farm in Rosemount that was established when the farm was first settled in the 1800's. What I had neglected to mention, is that every year in the first part of September, there is a massive migration of Monarch Butterflies that congregate for about a week in and around this trail. There are literally tens of thousands of them at that time on there way back to winter in Mexico. I'm not sure who to contact, actually, on who to help preserve this area, as it is being squeezed by surrounding development. As I had mentioned in my idea, I have been helping the owner farm this property for over twenty years, and I know a potential beautiful, historic trail when I see one, as I have hiked several trails throughout the country, including the Appalachian trail, Haleakala National Park in Maui, Cloud Peak Wilderness Area in Wyoming, The Boundary Waters Wilderness Area, Superior Hiking Trail, North Shore State Trail, and several other Minnesota state and county park trails. It would be a shame for a developer to come along and just bulldoze this area into oblivion and build more housing. This would be a trail in Dakota county with a long standing history and with trees that have been there since before Minnesota was a state!

Thank you for your consideration,

-Jeff Wilcziek- 12800 Bacardi Ave, W. (612) 839-2981

From: [Eva](#)
To: [Leatham, Lil](#)
Subject: Suggestions for development of new objective for Parks and Greenways
Date: Saturday, August 31, 2024 6:30:11 AM

WARNING: External email. Please verify sender before opening attachments or clicking on links.

Dear Lil

Hi

My name is Eva Gupta. We met at the kiosk of Dakota Library at Central Common at the Eagan farmer's market on Wednesday, August 28. As I mentioned that day, I am an urban planner, and with my experience in planning, I wanted to suggest some ideas for developing new objectives for parks and greenways. (Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan)

1. Development of Viewpoints along the park's water bodies and scenic terrain for visitors to stop by and experience the views. some seating areas/gazebos could be added.
2. Stargazing is a wonderful way to connect with the cosmos and community with similar interests, and the best locations for this activity are typically away from city lights, in areas with clear skies and minimal light pollution. Some parks in the city could be proposed with these designated stargazing arenas within the parks and have switching-off light systems/mechanisms when required by people to minimize light pollution. These parks could be identified based on location, higher altitudes, and minimum tall trees to view clear skies. celestial events such as meteor showers, northern lights, and blue moon nights can be observed from these parks.
3. Theme-based gardens within parks which could be maintained outdoors, if weather permits, or indoors/ in a Greenhouse. Various themes could be
 - i) The garden of 5 senses- fragrance, colorful, aesthetically appealing
 - ii) Garden of Herbs/ Herbal Gardens
 - iii) Starter Plant Libraries
4. Open Gym Area / designated areas/ Platform to Practice Yoga with soft rubber padded floor areas.

I have shared all my ideas above. Please feel free if you need to discuss these further or need more information.

Thanks and Regards

Eva Gupta
Urban planner
Eagan

+1-612-987-4507

Sent from my iPhone

IN-PERSON EVENTS



Take a Kid Fishing

Event date: June 9, 2024

Event location: Thompson County Park

Event leader: Dakota County

Questions

1. Things people really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - The trails, fishing access, Dakota language teaching spots
 - How clean the parks are.
 - Positive Environment, family-friendly
 - Very beautiful park, nice job with the event (second time at Thompson, Spanish translated)
 - Fishing, Trails, Play Area, Picnic Tables
 - Lots of things to do and climb on
 - The rentals
 - The trails
 - Family-friendly activities
 - The art
2. One thing people would change:
 - More things to climb on (from a young adult respondent)

Open Door Pantry

Event date: June 11, 2024

Event location: Northern Service Center

Event leader: Dakota County

4 Total respondents

Questions

1. One thing people love about Dakota County Parks & Greenways:

- Access to nature close by
- Public pool / water area / shade cave (add)
- Kid-safe climbing area (add)
- Nerf war (add)
- My kids love parks with splash pads

2. One thing people would change:

- More single-track trails; none paved
- Thompson County Park is unsafe for blind people
- Portable toilets get messed up in some parks; get rid of them

Canoe or Kayak Program (Spanish program)

Event date: June 24, 2024

Event location: Lebanon Hills Regional Park

Event leader: Dakota County

7 total respondents

Questions (Spanish)

1. Cuéntenos algo que realmente le guste de los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:
 - La seguridad y los lindos paisajes que podemos disfrutar. *The security and the beautiful landscapes we can enjoy*
 - Me encanta la naturaleza, la playa de los lagos y el servicio que les dan. *I love nature, the lake beaches and services.*
 - Las condiciones excelentes todo muy limpio y mucho para conocer. *Excellent conditions, everything is very clean, and a lot to know.*
 - Las diferentes actividades que realizan, lo limpio y el personal que atiende. *The different activities, how clean they are, and the staff.*
 - Es una excelente oportunidad de disfrutar de la naturaleza. *It is an excellent opportunity to enjoy nature.*
2. Díganos algo que cambiaría/mejoraría en los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:
 - Nada cico, siempre me ha paicado un lugar lindo y seguro. *Nothing fancy, I have always like a nice and safe place.*
 - Realmente yo no cambiaría nada. *Really, I wouldn't change anything.*
 - Nada, todo es hermoso. *Nothing, everything is beautiful.*
 - Que puedan realizar mas actividades y personal de habla español. *Offer more activities and spanish speaking staff.*
 - Cambiar nada es algo muy divertido ojalá más familias pudieran disfrutar de esto. *Change nothing, this is very fun, I wish more families could enjoy this.*
3. ¿Algo más que quieras contarnos?

- Muchas gracias y hacer este tipo de actividades para poder pasar más tiempo de calidad. *Thank you very much and hold these types of activities here to be able to spend more quality time.*
- Me encanta la atención que nos dan a todos y solo quiero agradecer por tener todos los programas gratuitos y enfocarse en las familias Latinas. *I love the attention you give us and I want to thank you for having all the free programs and focusing on Latino families.*
- Solo dar las gracias por sus parques recreativos y familiares. *Only to say thanks for parks for recreation and families.*
- Todo es muy lindo. *Everything is very nice.*
- Si que las personas voluntarias son magníficas gracias por todo. *Yes, the volunteers are magnificent, thank you for everything.*

Questions (English)

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - The biodiversity of plants and the general conservation state of the park is just amazing. Keep up the good work!
 - We love Lebanon Hills Park. It provides my family with quiet space to walk around the lake, walking trails, and benches to sit and breathe fresh air.
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - I saw some polythene papers around. It would be great to do a weekly/daily checkup if you guys usually don't do!
 - Water fountain would be very helpful to provide fresh drinking water.
3. Anything else you want to tell us?
 - This is a great place, I met wonderful people here.
 - Me and my family have built a connection with this park. We lived in Eagan in 2021 and this was our go to place to walk. Now we come here from Bloomington.

Open Door, Eagan

Event date: July 2, 2024

Event location: Open Door Pantry

Event leader: Dakota County

8 total respondents

Questions

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Preservation of areas to not be developed.
 - Amazing, well kept trails
 - They are clean
 - Dakota County parks connect us to nature
 - What I love is that the parks are clean and family friendly.
 - Love the natural nature. Hiking trails. Buffalo reserve is so special. Trails through neighborhoods.
 - I love lakes and trees in the trekking trails.
 - Paths at Lebanon Hills
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Increase in water fountains with bottle fillers
 - Adding more!
 - More sitting space
 - I would add nature playgrounds
 - Maybe add exercise equipment for the parents.
 - Nothing I can think of
 - Signals and lights for
 - Need to maintain walkability on trails in Lebanon
 - Make greenways local destination places
3. Anything else you want to tell us?

- I would like if there were safe walkways to and from many of these parks. Like to Lebanon Hills, also public transport there. I enjoy walking around the lakes and the length tends to be adequate.
- Dakota County Parks are fine as they are.
- Love the art mixed throughout. Love the basketball courts – ping pong etc. [She may have been thinking of Eagan Parks?]

Mexican Consulate

Event date: July 3, 2024

Event location: Saint Paul

Event leader: Dakota County

10 Total respondents

Overall observation

All respondents at this event were Spanish-speaking and none of the respondents lived in Dakota County, though some lived nearby in St. Paul and Minneapolis. Their home locations are with their comments. Many came from a long distance. Gaby from Parks filled out the survey as well (she lives in Eagan). These responses give a more general idea of what the Spanish-speaking population in the region is looking for in parks.

Questions

1. Cuéntenos algo que realmente le guste de los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:
 - Me gusta porque podemos salir a caminar, jugar, montar bicicleta, y distraernos un poco (WI) / *I like it because we can go for walks, play, ride bikes, and have a little fun*
 - 3 times a year (St. Paul)
 - Flores y fuentes de agua; camino para correr (Austin, MN) *Flowers and water fountains; path to run*
 - Todo muy limpio (St. Paul) *Everything very clean*
 - Áreas verdes y muchos arboles (Freeman, SD) *Green áreas and many trees*
 - Así como están se me hacen muy bien muchas áreas verdes y bellos jardines (Blaine)
 - Me encantan que los parques tengan mucho arboles verdes, plantas de flores y juegos para los parques. (St. Paul)
 - Correr, andar en bicicleta (Willmar, MN)
 - Acampar, nadar, pescar (Willmar, MN)
 - I like that they are free. Bathrooms are clean and there are a lot of greenways and trails to hike and run. (Eagan, MN) – Staff comment

2. Díganos algo que cambiaría/mejoraría en los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:

- Mas áreas verdes (WI)
- Have more bike trails (St. Paul)
- Mas juegos (St. Paul)
- Reforestar más arboles (Freeman, SD)
- Organizar algunos eventos de vez en cuando (Blaine)
- Mas bien pouer [?] más de verdes (St. Paul)
- Control de insectos (Willmar, MN)
- Control con los mosquitos (Willmar, MN)
- None

3. ¿Algo más que quieras contarnos?

- No, todo de maravilla (St. Paul)
- Felicitados por fomentar la integración familiar, así como a la sociedad felicidad por su esfuerzo (Freeman, SD)
- Que nosotros estamos satisfechos por el trato la vigilancia y están haciendo buen trabajo (Blaine)
- Que los parques tuvieran juegos para los niños, más vegetaciones verdes. (St. Paul)
- Me gustan mucho caminar viendo los árboles. (Willmar, MN)
- Mas árboles, baños más higiénicos (Willmar, MN)
- Pienso que es una buena oportunidad para hacer conciencia y cuidar nuestros parques (Willmar, MN)

Tour de Rec

Event date: July 9, 2024

Event location: Mendota Elementary (Partnership between West St Paul Parks, Mendota Heights Parks, Dakota County, and School Districts)

Event leader: Dakota County

5 Total respondents

Questions

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Well distributed throughout the county. Well maintained. Good programs.
 - Love the trail systems for running and biking. Rest areas are plentiful and hills are mostly kid friendly.
 - The variety of activities/rental equipment there is available
 - Accessibility
 - I have many things that I love about DCP/G&NA especially the connection with the community through the events. So many fun events
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - More shade trees at playgrounds (or non-natural shade awnings until trees grow). More loop running trails.
 - Nothing comes to mind
 - Maybe mail out more flyers with information about upcoming events. Some people don't use social media.
3. Anything else you want to tell us?
 - Love the emphasis on pollinator habitats! More barriers between roadways and paths (trees, shrubs, etc) would be great!
 - I appreciate the effort to communicate the park projects, changes, etc.
 - Keep bringing the fun.

Open Door Pantry, Farmington

Event date: July 16, 2024

Event location: Rambling River Center, Farmington

Event leader: Dakota County

5 total respondents

Questions

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - The clean wide paths
 - Haven't really been to many parks / Like flowers, lakes/water
 - Clean parks nearby home
 - It is clean and well maintained
 - The trails are easily accessible and clearly marked.

2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - More rest areas for elderly
 - Flowers, lakes, picnic areas
 - More kid friendly/baby friendly [activities?]. Splash pads
 - More bathrooms available daily and hand sanitizer
 - More benches

3. Anything else you want to tell us?
 - N/A

Burnsville International Festival

Event date: July 20, 2024

Event location: Nicollet Commons Park, Burnsville

Event leader: Dakota County

8 total respondents

Overall observation

This event was well attended by a diverse audience, including many families. I interacted with many people and most (I'd estimate 3/5, especially people of color) did not know that the Dakota County Parks and Greenways existed. Everyone that I spoke with who lived in Dakota County expressed interest in learning more about the parks and programming. Several people also noted how the parks are not close by where they live in Burnsville.

Questions (Spanish)

1. Cuéntenos algo que realmente le guste de los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:
 - Las caminatas/naturaleza & las actividades culturales
2. Díganos algo que cambiaría/mejoraría en los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:
 - N/A
3. ¿Algo más que quieras contarnos?
 - Keep up the great work!!

Questions (English)

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - How well-maintained they are
 - I like the trails and how much greenery there is. More natural scenery.
 - Love the paved trails @ Lebanon hills. The super clean facilities are also nice.
 - Beautifully maintained
 - Paved bike trails, playgrounds
 - Very clean and well-maintained campgrounds
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:

- Easier to read trail maps.
 - N/A
 - Not a thing
 - Easier access to animals. Biking paths separate from walking paths
 - More bike trails
 - Nothing!
 - More available camping, including cabins
3. Anything else you want to tell us?
- Stay cool <3
 - Love the parks!
 - Thank you
 - Thank you for having so many spaces for us

Mighty Machines

Event date: July 23, 2024

Event location: Wescott Library, Eagan

Event leader: Dakota County

6 total respondents

Overall observation

People enjoy the parks and have little to say about improving them. Some people have not been to the parks.

Questions

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Clean bathrooms and camping at Lebanon Hills
 - Long walks on paved paths by lakes – for strollers and kids’ bikes
 - I like the tranquility when walking on the trails
 - How many parks, activities there are to do
 - Trails, camping in Lebanon
 - Trails, playgrounds
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - More accessible parks/playgrounds – separated by age
 - Update the maps or make them easier to understand
 - N/A
 - Not really
3. Anything else you want to tell us?
 - Thanks for everything, my backyard is Lebanon so I love going there. Thanks.

Water Play Day

Event date: August 2, 2024

Event location: Whitetail Woods Regional Park, Farmington

Event leader: Dakota County

9 Total respondents

Overall observation

This event drew young families with only a few people of color present.

Questions (Spanish)

1. Cuéntenos algo que realmente le guste de los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:

- Me gusta la integración que generan y tienen en todos los ámbitos, me gusta que ayudan de manera divertida y entretenida a los niños a aprender y a relacionarse con el entorno.

2. Díganos algo que cambiaría/mejoraría en los Parques, Vías Verdes y Áreas Naturales del Condado de Dakota:

- Todo ha sido y estado bien por lo pronto. No tengo comentarios

3. ¿Algo más que quieras contarnos?

- Mis niños aman este tipo de actividades.

Questions (English)

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:

- Availability
- The play park area how it is incorporated into nature. The paved paths and trails.
- Well kept.
- The large “natural” kids play area
- Most of the parks we visited are kid friendly and had kids play areas which we really like.
- A lot of County Parks available in Dakota County
- I love that there is such variety and they are all over. Trees. Accessibility.

2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:

- Bugs
- The bugs are not fun.
- More shade on play areas.
- More waste receptacles along the paths
- I know it is impossible to change but mosquitoes are horrible to enjoy the parks sometimes
- More opportunities and areas where two and under can play. Toddler-inclusive aspects in parks. In Lakeville/Farmington/Apple Valley – splash pads.

3. Anything else you want to tell us?

- The bison were a great addition. Love the hiking trails and water play area and natural play areas.
- Love Whitetail and Lebanon
- You guys are doing a really good job keeping these parks nice for us. Thank you 😊
- Thanks for doing what you do!

Outdoor Career Success Youth Activity

Event date: August 19, 2024

Event location: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center

Event leader: Dakota County

Event format: Focus Group/Activity

Key questions and information shared: Short introductory presentation about planning careers, park planning, and the Vision Plan project. Staff facilitated a prioritization activity where participants were divided into groups, asked to discuss and fund, with play money, activities in twelve categories. Each small group then shared their priorities with the larger group.

Prompt:

1. Read the twelve category cards together as a group.
2. Discuss which ones you think are the most important and why. Think about the future of the parks and greenways and how you would like it to be in 25 years. We are taking your feedback into consideration for the actual plan.
3. As a group, choose how you want to invest your money into the categories. You can put more than one bill in a jar. Make a note on this page which categories you chose and how much for each.
4. When you are finished, select a spokesperson to put the money into the jars in the amounts the group chose. This spokesperson will report out to the larger group what the group chose and why.

How many people attended the event: 20

How many people we interacted with: 20

Demographic information: Youth

Activity Summary

Group 1:

Experiences with nature and not disturbing it – nature hikes. Less trash, less people, less damage to ecosystems.

- **Natural Resources: \$600**
- Special Events: \$400
- **Water Quality: \$500**
- **Land Conservation: \$500**

Group 2:

- **New Parks \$450**

- New Greenways \$300
- Maintenance \$200
- Natural Resource Restoration \$200
- Water Quality \$100
- ADA \$50
- Programming in Greenways \$50
- New Conservation Lands \$50

Group 3:

- **Water Quality \$500**
- **Signature Facilities \$500**
- New Parks \$250
- Special Events \$200
- Maintain Parks \$100
- Natural Resources \$300

Group 4:

- **Water Quality \$300**
- **Programming in Parks \$300**
- **Trail and Sidewalk Access \$300**
- Programming on Greenways \$250
- Improve ADA Access \$200
- Natural Resource Restoration \$200
- Special Events \$200
- Signature Facilities \$150
- New Parks \$100

Group 5:

- **Natural Resources \$650**
- Water Quality \$200
- ADA Access \$150
- Special Events \$150
- Programming \$150
- Signature Facilities \$100
- Maintenance \$100
- New Greenways \$200
- Sidewalk Access \$50
- New Parks \$50
- Programming on Greenways \$100

Key takeaways

- Groups differed in their top priorities: new parks, water quality, signature facilities, and natural resource facilities all rose to the top.
- Taking all of the group’s budget allocations together, natural resources and water quality were by far the top priorities. This was likely skewed slightly by Group #1’s strategy of focusing funding on natural resources, water quality, and special events.
- Aggregate ‘budget’(all five groups added)
 - Natural Resource Restoration \$1,950 (19.5%)
 - Water Quality \$1,700 (17%)
 - Special Events \$900 (9%)
 - New Parks \$900 (9%)
 - Signature Facilities \$700 (7%)
 - Land Conservation \$700 (7%)
 - Trail and Sidewalk Access \$600 (6%)
 - New Greenways \$500 (5%)
 - Improve ADA \$450 (4.5%)
 - Programming \$400 (4%)
 - Programming on Greenways \$400 (4%)
 - Maintain Parks and Greenways \$400 (4%)

Thompson County Park, 50th Birthday Party

Event date: August 20, 2024

Event location: Thompson County Park

Event leader: Dakota County

4 total respondents

The event had about 40 people in attendance and was a somewhat diverse crowd.

Questions

1. Tell us one thing you really love about Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Love hiking and wildflowers
 - I LOVE Thompson Park because of its location and accessible playground – The Lodge is always a perfect place to hold events.
 - The attention to MN native plants and ancestral environmental zones
 - Convenient green space within the urban area
 - The lodge, the trails, the park for the kids. We love the staff (Anna)
2. Tell us one thing you would change/improve in Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas:
 - Place an info marker about Thompson in Thompson County Park
 - More cultural designed events for the Black community
 - The Bison should not be considered wild, but I think all the right people know that
 - More events?
 - Cleaning the pond. If you have kayaks we can get a group of people to clean up the lake.
3. Anything else you want to tell us?
 - As a former resident of Hennepin County, I speak objectively; Dakota County Rocks!! Great Commissioner, great reps, great volunteers. So glad I moved here! Fabulous parks!!
 - Hiking events at Thompson Park would be awesome for those new to hiking or who are not able to go up north.
 - Thank you for your hard work!

- Very interested in the long-term plan for the parks specifically Thompson. Would like development kept to a reasonable minimum.

Party on the Plaza

Event date: Aug. 22, 2024

Event location: Nicollet Commons Park, 12550 Nicollet Avenue Burnsville, MN 55337

Event leader: Dakota County/Zan

Event format: Pop-Up

Key questions and information shared:

- Vision board with Post-It notes: If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?
- Map board with flags: What is your favorite place (in Dakota County parks system)? What needs improvement? Do you have a great idea?
- Handout with information and QR code to Social Pinpoint site.

How many people attended the event: ~300+

How many people we interacted with: ~100

Demographic information: N/A

Common themes

- Many people love Lebanon Hills for its many paths and trails, markers/maps, pavilions, accessibility (easy to get to), bathrooms, playgrounds, range of activities, and water/drinking fountains.
- People would love to see more organized activities and social events at parks and in natural areas.
- Many people mentioned amenities for children, particularly playground equipment.
- Younger park visitors are most appreciative of playground equipment, while older park visitors are most interested in seeing more walkways and clean, serene natural spaces. Families with children also valued bathrooms and water/drinking fountains at parks.
- Because of its large size, people would appreciate more signage at Lebanon Hills directing them where they can go.
- Interest in seeing the park system be interconnected in the future by a trail, similar to the Grand Rounds trail system in Minneapolis.
- Many people are not familiar with what a “greenway” is.

Other comments

- One mother mentioned wanting to see structures/activities at the parks that are directed towards older kids. Her younger kids use the parks often, but her older son did not. She suggested adding an obstacle course.
- Other parks outside of Dakota County that were praised include Terrace Oaks West in Burnsville and Alimagnet Park (nice walking paths, water, and natural spaces), Kelley Park in Apple Valley (feels safe), and Hidden Valley (obstacle course, feels safe, river, optimal sledding hill).
- One person was underwhelmed with her visit to Spring Lake Park Reserve because she felt there wasn't much to do, and she would have appreciated more trails.
- One frequent Lebanon Hills visitor expressed frustration with the Holland Lake Picnic Shelter because families tend to come early and take up all the tables. She would love to see a reservation system and more benches throughout the park.

Tables

Map Board Results			
Location	Flag color – comment topic	Count	Comments
Lebanon Hills	Green – favorite place	11	Appreciates ease of access, bathrooms, and playgrounds. “Lebanon offers a lot for everyone.”
			Loves the beautiful landscaping, wood bridge, and good wildlife viewing.
	Loves paths, markers, and wild nature.		
	Red – needs work/concern	1	Invasive buckthorn.
Thompson County Park	Green – favorite place	1	Enjoys the many places to sit and relax, the water fountains for drinking, and the overall cleanliness.
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	Red – needs work/concern	1	Water quality concern (e. Coli).
Big Rivers Regional Trail	Green – favorite place	2	
Spring Lake Park Reserve	Green – favorite place	2	
	Blue - idea	1	More trails and activities to get visitors to stay longer.

Vision Board Responses
Spaces to sit and enjoy nature.
More accessibility throughout.
Big playgrounds.
Slides and fun!
Something for everyone.

Something to get older kids to keep coming.
Community events.
Easier to access.
Swimming in lake.
Kid-friendly spaces.
Signage and information on how current trails connect to broader systems.
A trail system that connects the parks like the Grand Rounds trail in Minneapolis.
Bridges that allow you to walk over water and view wildlife.
Monkey bars!
Private/serene.
More benches.
Interaction with water.

Notes (staff notes from conversations)
More accessibility
Loves Lebanon Hills for its paths, helpful markers, wild nature. Frustrated by families that can take over the Holland Trail Pavilion by getting there early in the morning and spreading their stuff over every table. Would love to see a reservation system and more benches throughout.
Loves Thompson Park because it has places to sit and relax, water fountains for drinking, less trash which makes it look cleaner.
Loves Lebanon Hills because it is easy to get to, has bathrooms, playgrounds, a lot for everyone.
Would love more organized activities, social events that could help with isolation at parks.
Loves the waterfall and trail at Hastings. Would love more hiking trails, more education on what you can do at each park, and cleaner parks overall.
Doesn't live close to park, wants more social events to draw them to the parks.
A mom with her three young boys- Wants more playground structures like obstacle courses, initiatives that keep older kids interested because oldest son used to use parks a lot and now doesn't as much. Mom loves when parks have bathrooms and water fountains.
Loves live music at Whitetail and cross country skiing and biking.
Loves playgrounds.
Prioritizes recreation activities.
Likes slides.
Likes walkways, puppets (activities?), pretty/well-kept spaces. Lebanon Hills or another park nearby is gated or appears gated and this feels restrictive.
Likes Nine Mile because it feels enclosed by nature, very serene.
Alimagnet, Terrace Oaks, Crystal Lake, Sunset Lake and Early (?) are awesome parks because they've got walking paths, water. Would love to see more natural areas in Dakota County parks.
Had been to Spring Lake but didn't find much to do. Would love more trails here or activities.
Horse trails at Lebanon are awesome.
Loves the walking trails in Lebanon, and it is close to home. But it could use more signage, be easier to get to, and have more paths that get you to the park.
Loves the walking paths, hiking, camping, wildlife and nature at Lebanon Hills.

Likes clean and organized events at the parks like Party on the Plaza.
Lebanon needs more signage. Kelley is a great park because it's safe. Safety is #1.
Cleanliness is #1.
Loves biking in Lebanon, as well as fishing, camping, the bathrooms, hiking, water fountains. Hidden Valley Park has an awesome obstacle course, river, safety, sledding hill.
Loves walking trails.
Loves the community that can be found at parks, grew up near one.
Spring Lake trails are great.
Spring Lakes running, biking, group bikes are fun. Whitetail is great for skiing, has easy and challenging hills (something for everyone) but could use more connecting trails. Lebanon has a variety of trails which is good.
Paved paths are nice.
Possible improvements to parks in general: zipline system, bike black dog trail, bike systems with better signage, better connections of Dakota County trails to broader system.
More interactions w/ water.
Bathrooms/accessibility.
Bike trails that connect to the whole system.
Lebanon Hills is very clean.
Trails and lake access are important.
There's an underdeveloped trail by Cannon River. Rural, outdoorsy trails are awesome.
Crystal Beach could be cleaned up.
Quiet views are good. Trails as well.
Lebanon Hills has invasive buckthorn.
Mountain biking in Lebanon.
Lebanon has awesome mountain biking off road trails.

Photos



Party on the Plaza visitors shared their favorite places and ideas for improvement within the Dakota County Parks System with us.



Bubbles, handouts, and big boards attracted visitors.

Eagan Market Fest, Community Night

Event date: August 28, 2024

Event location: City Center Park, Eagan

Event leader: Lil Leatham, Dakota County

Event format: Pop up

Key questions and information shared: Map based pin up board and idea board

How many people attended the event: Community event

How many people we interacted with: 30

Demographic information: Not collected

Common themes

- Favorite Places:
 - Lebanon Hills Regional Park (13)
 - Whitetail Woods Regional Park (1)
 - Dakota Woods Dog Park (1)
 - Spring Lake Park Reserve (1)
 - Thompson County Park (1)
 - Blackhawk Park (city park, 1)
 - Minnesota Zoo (1)
 - Minnesota River Greenway (1)
 - Big Rivers Regional Trail (1)
 - Mississippi River Greenway/Kaposia Landing (1)
- Ideas/Concerns
 - Veterans Memorial Greenway (1) - Keep parking lot on Dodd Blvd, do not build one on Atlantic Drive.
 - Complete the Rosemount segment of the Mississippi River Greenway (1)
 - River to River Greenway (2) - Add wayfinding signage, repave the Lillydale to Marie trail that connects to the River to River Greenway
 - Minnesota River Greenway (1)- Finish the Fort Snelling segment

- If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways and Natural Areas Look Like in 2050?
 - Charging for electric bikes at all trailheads
 - More zip lines
 - Volunteer trail ambassadors who can identify and call in maintenance issues
 - Re-energize buckthorn removal
 - Do not build a 6-mile paved trail through Lebanon Hills Regional Park
 - More places for dogs
 - More safety lighting
 - Water fountains with foot activation
 - As much natural space with unpaved hiking access as possible. Limit paved trails to a few for ADA access.
 - More long bike trails, finish the connections to on the Mississippi River Greenway and Minnesota River Greenway
 - More bike trails
 - The more trails the better
 - Geolocators on trail signage. If you need to ask for help, there is no way to tell someone where you are. Also, the signage should be lit. Hiking trails in Lebanon Hills Regional Park need this.
 - Lebanon Hills Regional Park signage is too complex. Would like a few color-coded loops. It is really easy to get lost, and the park is scary when you don't know where to go.
 - Invasive species control and information on volunteering
 - More wildlife viewing – all kinds birds to chipmunks
 - More accessible features
 - Walking access to parks
 - New parks along waterways
 - Restored natural areas

Key takeaways

- Eagan residents are aware of Dakota County Parks and visit many. Visits to Lebanon Hills Regional Park are by far the most frequent. Most had not visited further away parks like Miesville Ravine Park Reserve and Lake Byllesby Regional Park.
- Passionate trail bicyclists and support for more trails

- Many appreciated hiking in natural settings
- Support for natural resource management
- Several comments about making parks and greenways safer/more comfortable with better wayfinding, lighting, and accessibility.

Public Art and Policy in the Park

Event date: Sept 22, 2024

Event location: Lebanon Hills Regional Park, 860 Cliff Road, Eagan, MN 55123

Event leader: Dakota County

Event format: Pop-Up

Key questions and information shared:

- Vision board with Post-It notes:
 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?
- Map board with flags:
 - What is your favorite place (in Dakota County parks system)?
 - What needs improvement?
 - Do you have a great idea?
- Handout with information and QR code to Social Pinpoint site.

How many people attended the event: ~150

How many people we interacted with: ~60

Demographic information: N/A

Common themes

- People appreciate the parks and appreciate that they are free, clean, and well maintained.
- Many people would like to see the parks remain natural resource based and a focus on natural resource restoration.
- Many people would like to see more playgrounds in the parks and specifically at the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center. Some specifically asked for nature play.
- Several people mentioned interest in bike trails.
- Several people mentioned interest in more volunteer opportunities, particularly for older adults.
- Several people expressed interest in seeing more animals. Birdwatching, butterfly gardens, and partnership with Como Zoo and the Raptor Center were mentioned.
- Several people mentioned interest in outdoor education and interpretation. History, science, and Indigenous culture were mentioned specifically.

Other Comments

- One person mentioned that they would like to see greater collaboration with cities on Natural Resource restoration and management in city parks.

- One person expressed that they really like hiking trails but do not feel comfortable in the more remote areas of the park. Worried about falling, other people who may cause personal harm, or a wild animal. Would really like some sort of trail patrol.

Tables

Map Board Results			
Location	Flag color – comment topic	Count	Comments
Lebanon Hills	Green – favorite place	16	Love Jensen Lake.
	Red – needs work/concern	2	New maintenance shop construction. Lots of dust in the air from the project. There needs to be better communication with neighbors before a construction project starts.
	Blue- idea	1	Nature center.
Thompson County Park	Green – favorite place	1	Love the restoration, pollinator plantings in the parking lot.
	Red – needs work/concern	1	Boardwalk needs repair.
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	Green – favorite place	1	
Big Rivers Regional Trail	Green – favorite place	1	Like the Dakota plant names in the garden and the Indigenous culture interpretation. This acknowledgement is so important.
	Blue- idea	2	More native flowers and restored nature at Cedar.
Spring Lake Park Reserve	Green – favorite place	5	Bison. Love the bike trail.
	Blue - idea	2	Nature center.
	Red – needs work/concern	1	
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	Green – favorite place	3	The prairie plants are amazing.
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Green – favorite place	2	Love the nature playground.
Minnesota River Greenway	Green – favorite place	1	
	Blue - idea	2	Nature center.
St. Croix River	Green – favorite place	1	

Vision Board Responses
Love all the parks, love the bike trails. Love the electric bike rentals in Hastings. Electric bikes are increasing trail congestion, would like to see separated walking and biking paths.

Suggest adding places to wash feet off after a hike. Would like to see this especially at LHRP, Jensen Lake Trailhead.
Easier access to playgrounds and more accessible playgrounds.
Keeping the playgrounds well maintained is essential.
Parks are an oasis for people and habitat. They are an oasis for blundings turtles and rusty patch bumblebee.
More public access to undeveloped open space with hiking trails. Not everything needs to be developed and connected.
Organize events to encourage people to get out in the parks. The Great Park Pursuit is a scavenger hunt that other communities have put on. There are prizes for the winners.
Love Lebanon Hills Regional Park because it is clean and well cared for, love the swimming beach in particular. Love the camping gear swap at Thompson County Park.
Have wider shoulders on roads.
Get the North Creek Greenway completed. Better, more complete information on the website about current/future projects.
A playground in Lebanon Hills Regional Park near the visitor center, especially now that there is a safe trail connection.
Greater collaboration with cities on Natural Resource restoration and management in city parks.
I like the direction things are going.
The Twin Cities has the best park system I have ever lived by and I love that it is all free.
Keep up the restoration, keep parks healthy with native plants and free of invasive species.
Someone is doing a great job marketing the Mountain Bike facilities, my friends who live across the country know about mountain biking in LHRP. The BMX course in Eagan in awesome too.
I want hiking, biking, foraging, outdoor education (nature education and outdoor recreation classes).
Less recreation development in the parks, prioritize land protection in the future.
Centralized area on the county website for information about accessible spaces.
Really love Halls Farm Park and would like to see something similar in Dakota County Parks. It is a traditional farm and is a great place to spend the day. There is also a harvest festival.
Climate action.
Move biking and walking trails away from roads.
I wish for great water quality.
Provide easier access to hiking trails in the southern part of Lebanon Hills Regional Park in the Star Pond area near the equestrian trailhead.
My main interest is natural systems. Establish a volunteer docent program to education public about the importance of natural systems. There are a lot of older adults who would love to share their knowledge.
Winter sledding hills.
Combine art and nature programing – more events like this one!
Mini golf in the park
Some playgrounds with sand surface, my kids prefer playing in the sand.
Keep volunteer programs strong, they are a great community resource.
Love the volunteer programs.
A lot more animals all around.
Reduced rate camping for bicycle camping at Lake Byllesby Regional Park.

We like the beach at Lebanon Hills Regional Park the best.
Love bird watching in Lebanon Hills Regional Park because of the variety of plants that go to seed in the fall.
Shorter trail loops near trailheads.
Nature play at visitor center at Lebanon Hills Regional Park.
Access to seeing animals. Partner with the Raptor Center, Como Zoo to have events with animals.
Todos los parques nos encantan. <i>We love all the parks.</i>
Keep nature oriented. Less concrete, more native plants and user friendly yet NATURAL.
Make it easier for all people to reduce carbon – climate equity. Nature will save us.
Public art.
Being close to nature and opportunities to learn about issues! Great Parks!
Climbing rocks, waterfalls, natural paths (not paved), butterfly garden, beach.
More nature play like at Whitetail Woods at Jensen. Love the nature play at Patrick Eagan Park.
Amplifying resilient experiences with art. Address science and food security.
More nature.
Love the lake loop trails (Shulze Lake, McDonough Lake Lake, Holland Lake). Like that Three Rivers Park District has both biking and hiking trails.
Nature center at Lebanon Hills Regional Park.
Nature center at Whitetail Woods Regional Park.
More self guided interpretation. Historic, science, link to website for more information on the topic.
Focus on maintaining prairies and dealing with the weeds.
More Indigenous history at parks.
Permaculture.

Notes (staff notes from conversations)
Really likes hiking trails but does not feel comfortable in the more remote areas of the park. Worried about falling, other people who may cause personal harm, or a wild animal. Would really like some sort of trail patrol.

Residents of Color Collective (ROCC)

Event date: Sept 27, 2024

Event location: Thompson County Park

Event leader: Dakota County

Event format: Pop-Up

Key questions and information shared:

- Vision board with Post-It notes:
 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?
- Map board with flags:
 - What is your favorite place (in Dakota County parks system)?
 - What needs improvement?
 - Do you have a great idea?
- Handout with information and QR code to Social Pinpoint site.

How many people attended the event: ~4

How many people we interacted with: ~8

Demographic information: Residents of Color, Families

Tables

Map Board Results			
Location	Flag color – comment topic	Count	Comments
Thompson County Park	Green – favorite place	6	
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Green – favorite place	1	
Dakota Woods Dog Park	Green – favorite place	1	

Vision Board Responses
Wish there were more kids/more things for kids to do
I love waterfalls in parks
I love navigating the trails with a map. I'd like more trail intersections to keep it interesting.

Galaxie Library

Event date: Sept 10 - 24, 2024

Event location: Galaxie Library, Apple Valley, MN

Event leader: Dakota County

Event format: Unstaffed

Key questions and information shared:

- Vision board with Post-It notes:
 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?
- Map board with flags:
 - What is your favorite place (in Dakota County parks system)?
 - What needs improvement?
 - Do you have a great idea?
- Poster with information and QR code to Social Pinpoint site.

How many people attended the event: NA

How many people we interacted with: NA

Demographic information: N/A

Common themes

- Many people expressed desire for more and better walking and biking trails both to parks and on local roads.
- Many people mentioned desire for more to do, playgrounds, kids activities, fat tire biking, beaches.
- A couple people suggested making equipment available – hammocks and supplies for fishing.
- One person expressed desire for restored natural areas.
- One person requested more diverse staff.
- On person requested some playgrounds be fenced for greater accessibility.

Tables

Map Board Results			
Location	Flag color – comment topic	Count	Comments
Lebanon Hills	Green – favorite place	4	Love the visitor center. Lots to see and do. Try a community greenhouse and garden.

Dakota Woods Dog Park	Green – favorite place	1	Awesome job.
Mississippi River Greenway	Green – favorite place	1	
Spring Lake Park Reserve	Green – favorite place	1	Nice view.
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	Green – favorite place	2	Lots to see. Love, but allow fat tire bikes.
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Green – favorite place	2	Love the kids play area and trail around the lake. Quiet regional park.

Vision Board Responses
Push Button flashing yellow lights for crossing roads that connect to bike trails!!
Drivers rarely stop for bikes on walkers.
Paths following natural curves. More trees for feathered friends. Nature playgrounds incorporated.
More of those big circle swings.
Free.
More connections for bike trails.
More beach areas by lakes.
More study rooms.
More kids activities!
Hire more diverse team members.
More fat tire biking trails. Natural trails for bikes.
You spend too much.
Free hammocks to use.
Thanks!!
Thank you to all who make our parks beautiful and plentiful.
Less lawn, more prairies.
Community greenhouses and gardens. Food growing. Compost drop-offs to support food production. Circular sustainable gardening with pond harvesting for fertilizing.
Bike paths along TH3! More bike paths to bridge parks.
Better bike/walking along Diamond Path N. of 140 th to Pilot Knob
Resorted natural areas free of invasive species. Improved walking and hiking trails. Trash cans along trails.
Better connection of trails on Pilot Knob, Diamond Path, and McAndrews so you can get to Lebanon Hills Regional Park safely from the south.
Bait and tackle store in the area for the fishing community.
Fences in some play areas to make more accessible for ND kids and their families.

FOCUS GROUPS

Wilderness in the City

Event date: July 17, 2024 7:30-8:30 pm

Event location: Lebanon Hills Visitor Center – Discovery Room

Event leader: TLÂL-LI, Dakota County

Event format: Listening Session

Overview

Bruce Chamberlain, TLÂL-LI, Niki Geisler, Dakota County Parks Director, and Lil Leatham, Dakota County Principal Planner gave an overview of the Parks, Greenways and Natural Systems 2050 Vision Plan, followed by discussion with Wilderness in the City Board members. Key questions were given to the organization, who filled them out in writing and returned them via email. Wilderness in the City responses to the questions are below.

Discussion Questions

1. **What is one aspect of another park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County could emulate?**
 - What is it?
 - Authentic nature-based experiences and opportunities for all ages and abilities is one aspect of another park system that Dakota County could emulate.
 - What park system?
 - Minnesota State Parks and Trails System
 - How is it important to them?
 - This important aspect provides the MN State Parks system guidance throughout the decision-making process, and consistently offers visitors unique opportunities not found elsewhere.
 - Why could it be important to Dakota County?
 - Ongoing support of the ‘Forever Wild’ Parks System is prudent both environmentally and fiscally, which meets priorities of residents. Dakota County would expand their draw of visitors from the metro and beyond by promoting their unique “forever wild” opportunities.
2. **What is an asset of Dakota County that could be taken greater advantage of for the future of the system?**
 - What is it?

- To preserve Dakota County’s highest quality natural areas, which is the greatest asset of Forever Wild Parks, the relatively new Natural Resource department should be taken greater advantage of by allowing their input to have greater influence throughout all park planning phases.
- How is it not leveraged today?
 - Although the Natural Resource staff’s input is often requested, their input is given lower priority and influence in the final decision.
 - The recent draft CIP (PDC, July) shows the natural resource base funding severely cut to levels we haven’t seen in nearly 10 years. If this is implemented, or worse, implemented and carried forward, the lack of commitment is counter to what the county has touted in recent years.
- What could be the benefits of better leveraging it in the future?
 - Better leveraging of the Natural Resources department would provide consistent high-quality visitor experiences, with lowered ongoing associated costs.
 - An added benefit would be the decrease in ongoing but unfunded maintenance expense for built infrastructure.

3. What are 3 threats to the Dakota County system, why, and what are your ideas for addressing them?

- Striving to be “all things to all people” - in each county park - threatens to decrease the full enrichment offered by negatively impacting a limited resource. Increased collaboration with city and private parks and rec systems would provide the public with greater information on what opportunities exist, thereby providing all things for all people throughout the entire system, while maintaining the integrity of a county-wide nature based parks system.
- The lack of a dedicated source of funding for restoration and ongoing management of natural areas is a threat that reduces the viability of a healthy and sustainable Nature-based parks system. This can be somewhat alleviated by reducing the built environment throughout Dakota County Parks to only that which is necessary for a natural experience. On a broader scale, the funding distribution formula for the regional parks policy plan should be revised to incorporate restored acres of land being actively managed, rather than focused on park visitation numbers alone.
- Lack of awareness/marketing of our Forever Wild parks is a threat. Having people visit these amazing parks will continue to build public support for what we have. This could be addressed with a strategic marketing effort showcasing the unique experiences Forever Wild Parks offer so close to home.

4. What will be the 5 most important services provided by Dakota County public open spaces in 2050 and why?

- Educational Services specific to a natural system and environment within a highly developed metro environment.
 - Volunteer services and opportunities.
 - Meeting and event space should be offered to community groups at a greatly reduced cost, like services provided by Dakota county libraries but in a natural setting.
 - Providing access for underserved communities by utilizing greenways, shuttles, and inner city partnerships.
5. **If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County parks, greenways and natural systems be like in 2050?**
- Provide visitors of all abilities access to the “experience” of natural areas that offer respite from an ever-increasing hustle and bustle of life.
 - Be fiscally and environmentally responsible.
 - Build the reputation of a destination experience that becomes the standard that other regional parks strive to emulate.

Huellas Latinas Focus Group

Event date: Sept. 14, 2024

Event location: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center

Event leader: Zan Associates/Dakota County

Event format: Focus group

Key questions and information shared: The focus group was introduced by Luisiana Mendez (Huellas Latinas) and Lil Leatham (Dakota County). Linda Spohr (Zan Associates) led the focus group with interpretation by All in One Translations.

The focus group covered two topics:

- What do you love most about the Dakota County parks system? What would you like to see more of?
- Do you feel that you belong in Dakota County Parks? What could improve your sense of belonging?

Supporting materials available:

- Vision board with Post-It notes
- Map board with flags
- Project handout in Spanish (English and Somali also available)

How many people attended the event: ~25

Demographic information: Most participants Hispanic/Latinx

Key takeaways

What people love about parks/park system

Place to experience nature and enjoy scenic views – People appreciate the connection to nature, scenic views, and recreational opportunities. One person mentioned the seasonality and ability to enjoy nature all year long in the parks. Two people mentioned how they loved that parks and connecting with nature is very normalized culturally in Minnesota.

Connection to home – Several people alluded to how the parks connect them to their childhood or their home. The Mississippi River connects one person to their home in Venezuela. Another person mentioned that park space reminds her of her childhood home. Another person stressed the universality of nature and how our connection to it transcends our differences: “We are nature.” Another person mentioned that the Adirondak chairs in Lebanon Hills Regional Park made it feel homey and welcoming and made them want to return to the park with their parents.

Connection to people – Several people mentioned that being in the parks is a way to meet other people. This includes family and friends, but several people also alluded to the fact that you can talk with others

that you may not know in the park. One person mentioned he can talk to other people about the greenways.

Clean and well maintained (4+ mentions) – People appreciate the care for the parks and cleanliness of park facilities. Several people mentioned this, and several others nodded along in agreement.

Park buildings and shelters, amenities and rentals (5 mentions) – Building and shelter rental is appreciated in order for people to bring family events to the parks. People appreciate that buildings are clean and that amenities (even showers) are available.

Accessible (5 mentions) – Accessible trails and children’s activities. Many parks and many areas of the parks are accessible.

Free parking (6 mentions) – Free parking makes the park more accessible, both by making it easy to get to as well as affordable for all.

Signage – Maps within the parks are good. Digital maps have been updated.

Overall access – Many parks are close by and easy to access overall.

Areas for improvement / What people would like to see more of

History of the land; connection to the indigenous history – One person mentioned (with others agreeing) that there should be a stronger effort to communicate Dakota County history and the indigenous connection to this land. The parks are the perfect place to do this.

Marketing/Communications – People desire better communication about what is available. People don’t know about all of the park amenities, especially about things to do beyond hiking. More information about what there is for children and grandparents to do in parks. Better communication would help them to feel more invited in and that these are spaces for everyone. People do not know where to find information.

Signage - While there were positive comments are signage within the parks, there were several mentions of a desire for better directional signage overall as well as translation of signage. Signs in other languages not only communicates literally, it also communicates that you are welcome here.

Partnerships – More partnerships with community organizations that serve people of different cultures to bring more people to the parks system. There is a desire for more diversity in the parks.

Connection to the school system – By incorporating park visits into school curriculum you teach children about the parks and encourage them to visit.

Transit access – “I don’t drive.” What is the transit access? Could it be better?

Sense of belonging

Representation – People expressed that they would experience a stronger sense of belonging if they saw more people that looked like them. The park system is not as diverse as the general population. In part this is racial (“I would like to see more melanin”), but also economic, referencing the economic demographic of the surrounding community nearest to Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

“I feel a sense of belonging in this room,” but not necessarily in the park overall.

“It helps when you see yourself out here.”

“I want to see us in every space.”

The importance of community partnerships – Organizations are a key connection to the parks system. “Huellas Latinas creates belonging.” Several attendees were at Lebanon Hills for the first time; mentioning that were only there because of the Huellas Latinas event. Many mentioned their connection to Anna Ferris and her key role in connecting Dakota County Parks to many people. One person said that organizations can help to communicate that “this is a safe space.”

Diversity – While links to organizations that reach out to specific people of many cultures is desired, events that are designed to bring a *variety* of people should be encouraged (and better advertised). Anyone can come to a Huellas Latinas event. How was it advertised? There should be more opportunity for diversity; not just events for one group of people.

Dakota County staff representation – Several people expressed a desire for more people of color in leadership at Dakota County. More people leading events. “More people in leadership relating to me.” Many people expressed appreciation for Anna Ferris specifically, but there was concern that Dakota County was “putting it all on her.” There is a desire for more staff similar to Anna.

Communication – It is more than translation. Translation is the minimum, and Dakota County could be doing more with signage and programs in Spanish language. It is culture, tradition, vision. Is the event/amenity/communication/marketing relevant and appropriate to different cultures?

Park-specific notes

Lebanon Hills Regional Park

- Favorite park for many. Lots to do here. The building is great. The amenities are great — can swim in the lake and have access to a shower afterward.
- Free parking
- Accessible
- Nice park buildings. Appreciate the ability to rent spaces for meetings or events.
- Winding entry road is very beautiful
- Chairs and firepits make it feel very homey
- Entry markings and maps are good throughout the park
- Like the Jensen Lake trailhead and trail

Thompson County Park

- Very clean and cared for
- Accessibility
- Easy to access
- Love the phase 1 updates
- Ample chairs and tables for everyone to use

Lake Byllesby Regional Park

- Arrival is difficult. It is easy to get lost. Sometimes the GPS does not send you to the right place, especially when there is road construction.
- Camping is great

- Buildings and picnic shelters are great

Greenways

- Greenway connections – improvement of the greenway system over the last five years is greatly appreciated

Virtual Focus Group 1

Event date: Sept. 17, 2024

Event location: Zoom

Event leader: Zan Associates/Dakota County

Event format: Focus group

Key questions and information shared: The focus group was led by Lil Leatham (Dakota County).

The focus group answered these questions:

- What do you love most about the Dakota County parks system? What would you like to see more of?
- What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?
- Do you feel that you belong in Dakota County Parks? What could improve your sense of belonging?

Supporting materials:

- Presentation

How many people attended the event: 5

Demographic information: Groups represented: HACER (Latino), Isuroon (Somali women), Corazón Caminante (Latino), ROCC (People of color), and a post-secondary student.

Key takeaways

What people love about parks and park system

Easy to access: Several participants emphasized how easy the parks are to get to and reserve for group events. One group noted that they use ~20+ vehicles to get to and from the park, so they appreciate ample parking.

Wonderful scenery and facilities: Participants love the scenery within Dakota County Parks and the trails that allow them to enjoy it. One participant also shared that these spaces were “some of the most wonderful facilities in the metro.”

Positive interactions: One participant noted how often their community shared stories of positive social interactions within the parks. Being able to meet and connect with strangers is an exciting opportunity that cannot be found just anywhere.

Parks staff: Every participant repeatedly expressed their appreciation for Anna Ferris, noting how welcome she makes each community feel and how helpful she has been in connecting these communities with the parks. Participants were pleased with this opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences. They also mentioned that the process for planning outreach events is very easy, thanks to Anna. Anna has been responsive and addressed past concerns, for example, streamlining the participant waiver forms. She has also been instrumental in making sure outreach partners are aware of resources available – such as connecting groups with pre-approved food truck vendors.

Social media presence: A participant shared that members of their community get most of their information and updates on what is happening in Dakota County Parks through social media. Another mentioned that Dakota County does a great job with social media, but not everyone uses it. Communicating on WhatsApp and program information in grocery stores are good ways to reach more people.

Amenity accessibility: A participant shared that they notice a lot of children playing in the parks that are more accessible and love seeing children of all abilities enjoy time outside.

Areas for improvement / What people would like to see more of

Communication: One participant shared that many people living in West St. Paul are unfamiliar with the parks available to them and all the great resources offered through them, noting that members have told her “I didn’t come to [this event] because I didn’t know about it.” There is a large Latino community, and many people don’t know about all of the park amenities or think about hosting events like quinceañeras at parks.

More parks in West St. Paul: Proximity to parks is key to many Dakota County residents and visitors. A participant shared that many of his family members living in West St. Paul are older in age and don’t want to go to Lebanon Hills because it is too far. Though they appreciate Thompson County Park, it is not as immersive; an opportunity to experience the same sort of activities offered at Lebanon Hills in more areas throughout the county would be exciting.

More opportunities to see wildlife: A participant shared how much he loved the chance to learn about animals and experience wildlife at Como Park Zoo. Other participants agreed that seeing more wildlife in the parks would be cool.

Study areas: A post-secondary student said that she would love it if the parks catered to post-secondary students like herself with things like outdoor study spaces.

More activities: Other parks/groups run initiatives like step challenges that Dakota County should adopt to get more people outside and interacting. One participant mentioned that Center

Park in Roseville has great activities. Activities desired are senior citizen walk days and book club events in parks, similar to the ones Three Rivers Park District hosts.

A unique space for cats: A participant shared that she would love a cat-specific enclosed space outside for cats and their owners to enjoy.

The importance of community partnerships: Community organizations are a key connection to the parks system, and current partners would like to see partnership with more organizations that create programs for a variety of activities. Partnering with Charter Schools is particularly important. Sometimes these schools get left out.

Sense of belonging

Community-centered activities create welcome spaces: One participant noted that Thompson County Park was not well visited by the Black community before grills were added to the park. Now, they feel less afraid and more invited to the park. This participant noted that community-specific/directed activities make certain groups feel welcome and included. Another participant wanted to see designated walk days for specific minority groups, including senior citizens.

Supervision: Participants were divided on their opinions surrounding security and supervision within the parks. One participant shared a story of what had happened to a woman of color that had circulated well beyond their community: a dog had started coming after her and neither the owner nor anyone else around reacted to help her. Both the incident and how far it had spread by word of mouth made that community feel uneasy and unwelcome. The size of Lebanon Hills can cause fear, with one participant noting that “if you scream, no one will hear.” While participants expressed the importance of feeling safe, not all participants agreed that increasing security/police presence would make them feel safer. One participant shared that the Latino community, in particular, doesn’t want to feel as though they are being followed. Some participants suggested including surveillance cameras or other security measures near the parking lots or entrances to the parks so at least there is a way of tracking attendance if something happens.

Friendly conversations: One participant shared that she has many warm interactions with strangers in the parks which boost her self-esteem, mood, and sense of belonging.

Park-specific notes

Lebanon Hills Regional Park

- Its size and the privacy it offers can be scary for minority communities.

Thompson County Park

- Adding another grill would be of interest to the Black community.

Somali Women Focus Group

Event date: September 18, 2024

Event location: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center

Event leader: Linda Spohr, Zan; Lil Leatham Dakota County, Kadra Warsame, Dakota County Parks Outreach Partner

Event format: Focus Group

Key questions and information shared:

1. What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

- *What do you love about it? Where would you like to see more of this? How could this benefit the greater community?*

2. What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

- *What do you love about it? How is it beneficial to their community? Why could it be beneficial to your community?*

3. How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

- *What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces? What hinders belonging?*

4. What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

5. How do you envision your community organization being a connector to the park system?

- *How can your organization increase a sense of belonging in the parks?*
- *Could your organization help make people feel that the parks system is a safe space for them?*

6. If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

How many people attended the event: ~ 15

Demographic information: Somali women

Key takeaways

What people love about parks/park system

Many participants did not have much experience in Dakota County parks, so the question covered parks in general.

Place to experience nature and enjoy scenic views – Many participants expressed that they love the parks for walking, picnicking, hiking, and being in parks with their families and kids. One participant

shared strong memories of sitting under a tree for a picnic or climbing trees as a kid. One participant expressed that winter was their favorite time in the park and that they loved learning to cross country ski, playing winter games, and the bonfire/s' mores.

Place to be active with family – Several participants mentioned that sports are big draw. Many mentions of basketball, particularly to attract teenagers to the park. Volleyball and tennis were also mentioned.

Connection to people – Several people mentioned the importance of coming to the park as part as an outreach program and that they enjoyed being in the park with friends and family. Bringing their families, coming with friends as part of 'ladies night out' events.

Clean and well maintained– People appreciate the care for the parks and cleanliness of park facilities. Several people mentioned this, and several others nodded along in agreement. One participant mentioned that cleaner grills would be appreciated.

Accessible – Accessible children's activities. One person has a child with autism and would appreciate enclosed spaces where they can be confident their child will not run off. Kids with special needs need to be outside more than anyone, and it isn't fair when spaces are not accessible to them.

Low cost or free – **Participants appreciate that visiting the parks is low cost.** One participant said that she takes her kids to the Mall of America in winter, but it is expensive.

Areas for improvement / What people would like to see more of

More activities at one destination – More spaces built for multiple generations that can serve the whole family.

- **More to do for older kids** – Several expressed that there is not enough for teenagers to do in the park. They would like to come to the park with both their older and younger children, but the older kids are more interested in active sports like basketball, volleyball, and tennis. Not everyone is interested in walking.
- **More to do for the whole family** – several parks were mentioned as desirable because they have activities for the whole family so everyone can enjoy being together. Playgrounds, picnic areas, basketball, climbing. For example, a basketball court, playground and walking path in one space. The children can play, adults can walk and visit while still keeping an eye on the kids.

Programming that is both educational and social – Participants liked the Somali Ladies only classes that were done through Dakota County. They would like to see more opportunities to learn and socialize.

Expanded senior programming, particularly walking clubs – For many seniors, Somali seniors in particular, walking was always a part of life. It is cultural to walk. The parks department could provide more opportunities to encourage walking and building community connections.

More events in the winter – Families need a place to go in the winter indoors where they can spend a large part of the day. Outdoor events are good, but it is too cold to stay a whole day.

Places for washing and prayer – Muslims pray 5 times a day and clean for prayer. Participants requested restrooms with running water and a place for washing as well as a safe place for prayer. When

praying, you are vulnerable, your head is down and you are not looking around at your surroundings. Several participants mentioned being harassed while praying in a public place.

More programs with equipment provided – canoeing, snow tubing, bike lessons

Free rental of indoor space for events and parties.

Large destination playground – Desire for a large destination playground in Dakota County (Three Rivers Park example).

Outdoor cat area – We have dog parks – what about a cat area?

Marketing/Communications – People desire better communication about what is available. Better communication would help them to feel more invited in and that these are spaces for everyone. People do not know where to find information. Dakota County’s outreach programs are really important to introduce people to the parks. Many people are unaware that these programs are free/low cost. They assume that the programs will cost a lot and don’t look into it.

Outreach to charter schools – Dakota County has partnerships with public schools; many children in Dakota County also attend charter schools.

Ideas from other parks

Kelly Park, Apple Valley – Several people mentioned that they live near Kelly Park. Their kids love the splash pad, the music events, and the place to connect with friends and neighbors. Living in close proximity makes it easier to visit frequently.

Trees – One person shared that one of her happiest memories is of a park in Africa with a big tree that she sat under and had a meal and kids were climbing the tree.

French Park, Three Rivers Park District – One person mentioned they liked to take their kids to the large playground at French Park. The playground has a walking trail around it and they can walk while watching their kids. They would like to see a destination playground in one of Dakota County’s parks.

Sense of belonging

Representation – People expressed that they would experience a stronger sense of belonging if they saw more people that looked like them both in the park and in the park’s marketing materials. Show families or children playing to normalize their presence. This will make Somali people feel more welcome and will also communicate to others that it is normal for Somalis (women in particular) to participate in every activity that others do.

The importance of community partnerships – Organizations are a key connection to the parks system. Several attendees were at Lebanon Hills for the first time. Many mentioned their connection to Anna Ferris and her key role in connecting Dakota County Parks to many people. The connection with Shannon Bailey in Public Health, who has retired, was mentioned; the participant was curious who was now doing the work she had done.

Culture – Facilities that support visitor’s cultural needs would improve belonging. Spaces for prayer, washing areas, signs in Somali language would increase the sense of belonging.

Safety

Water Safety - Many participants expressed that they are uncomfortable around open water. They requested walking paths or parks away from lakes and the desire for lifeguards at swimming beaches. They were interested in parks without lakes.

Personal safety in remote areas – Some participants reported being uncomfortable walking alone in the woods. Wearing a hijab draws unwanted attention. In the remote areas of Lebanon Hills Regional Park, there is nobody around who can help if you need it.

Word of mouth – Many participants expressed that hearing about other people’s experiences can make them feel safe or unsafe, depending on the experience. When people have negative experiences, such as being harassed by teenagers or scary experiences with off leash dogs is a major deterrent to spending time in that place.

Being in a park with friends and family – Many expressed that they love to visit parks other people but were afraid to go alone, especially to more remote areas.

Park patrol and security cameras – Participants expressed that the presence of park patrol made them feel safe, that there is someone in the park to help if needed. Some participants thought that more security cameras would make them feel safer, others feel that cameras are useless unless there is someone who is monitoring them and can help if needed.

Finding the park – Some participants mentioned being unsure they were in the right place because of the long entry road with minimal signage. Some also mentioned that map direction apps don’t always direct you to the correct location within a park.

Virtual Focus Group 2

Event date: Sept. 19, 2024

Event location: Zoom

Event leader: Zan Associates/Dakota County

Event format: Focus group

Key questions and information shared: The focus group was led by Lil Leatham (Dakota County) and Anna Ferris.

The focus group answered these questions:

- What do you love most about the Dakota County parks system? What would you like to see more of?
- What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?
- Do you feel that you belong in Dakota County Parks? What could improve your sense of belonging?
- What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
- How do you envision your community organization being a connector to the park system?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Supporting materials:

- Presentation

How many people attended the event:

Demographic information: Representatives from the South St. Paul CDLU program (Latino/youth), Esperanza United (Latino), CLUES (Latino), SEWA-AIFW (South Asian) and Corazón Caminante (Latino).

Key takeaways

What people love about parks and park system

Variety of activities: Participants were pleased with the variety of activities available in the Dakota County Parks and natural spaces. Kayaking and fishing were cited as favorites.

Cleanliness: Participants repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the cleanliness of the parks, especially the bathrooms.

Parking: One participant noted that having available parking is not only convenient but makes them feel welcome at the parks.

Areas for improvement / What people would like to see more of

Mental health focus: A participant expressed the desire to see spaces/resources/opportunities outside the usual classroom to discuss and advocate for mental health.

Winter events and activities: One participant said that they would like to see more events and activities in the winter, since there seem to be more opportunities to get involved at the parks in the summer. A participant shared that they would like to see more events like Fiesta en la Nieve.

Informational videos: A participant suggested that informational videos on the parks/spaces/activities available would be helpful to post and share with their organization.

Opportunities for connection: One participant wondered if the parks could help connect organizations not only internally, but with other organizations and communities.

Lighted trails: A participant shared that Three Rivers Park District parks have lights on their trails that turn on each evening, which would be a nice addition to Dakota County so that people can enjoy these spaces and feel safe for longer.

Outdoor gym: Highland Park in Three Rivers has an outdoor gym at the end of one of their trails. It is great to see accessible equipment and people staying active.

Sense of belonging

Staff that are welcoming and representative of the community: The Dakota Parks Staff are helpful, making participants feel welcome and included. A participant noted that the Staff can always be more representative of the community, however, by hiring people that look like the community, are bilingual, and understand different community members' experiences. Another participant agreed that having liaisons that speak their language is important.

Translations: Multiple participants noted that seeing signs in different languages makes them and their communities feel welcome at the parks. If it is difficult to include multiple languages on signs, can they be included in literature/programs?

School of Environmental Studies workshop with senior class

Event date: Sept. 20, 2024

Event location: School of Environmental Studies (SES), 12155 Johnny Cake Ridge Rd, Apple Valley, MN 55124

Event leader: Dakota County/SES

Event format: Workshop

How many people attended the event: Approx 180 total, over two sessions.

Demographic information: High School Seniors, primarily Dakota County residents.

Overview

The focus group was led by Lil Leatham (Dakota County) and Brooks Autry (SES). Following an introductory presentation, students divided into groups of 8-10 to discuss the focus group questions. Discussion was recorded by students/teachers. Students then spent some time providing their individual thoughts on the project social pinpoint site (questionnaire, idea board, map). A poster of the idea board and map were also left at school for other students to participate through 9/26.

The groups answered these questions:

- What do you love most about the Dakota County parks system? What would you like to see more of?
- What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?
- Do you feel that you belong in Dakota County Parks? What could improve your sense of belonging?
- What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?
- How do you envision your community organization being a connector to the park system?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Supporting materials:

- Presentation

Key takeaways

What people love about parks and park system

Park access: Participants were pleased with the variety of parks to explore and proximity.

Connection to nature: Most participants Love opportunity to connect with nature in less in natural settings that are not heavily impacted by development. Participants mentioned a lot of variety in ways they enjoy connecting with nature: hiking, photography, swimming, hanging out, mountain biking, biking on bike paths, fishing, Nordic skiing, and others.

Variety of experiences: A strong theme with the students is that there is not a singular way to be in a park. Many students mentioned appreciating that there are both social and contemplative spaces, the variety of scenery such as woods, prairies, and being near water. They appreciate the variety of trail experiences with some being accessible, some trails longer and more challenging. They also appreciated the parks being large enough to explore and discover less visited areas while still having spaces that are easy to get to from park entrances and parking areas.

Areas for improvement / What people would like to see more of

Ecological health and clean water. Most participants expressed appreciation for restoration efforts and would like to see more of it. More native plants, less invasive species, clean water for swimming and fishing, connected ecological corridors were mentioned.

Cleanliness: Participants expressed their gratitude for the cleanliness of the parks and many wished that the parks were cleaner. Many stressed the importance of clean parks and park facilities and many suggested more trash cans and education about recycling and composting.

Trails: Many commented on the trails wanting to ensure that there are accessible experiences and natural surface trails. They expressed concern about trail sustainability, run-off and and erosion. A few mentioned better walking and biking connectivity to parks and requested separated walking and biking trails to reduce conflicts.

Signage: Many people mentioned appreciation for the wayfinding signage and requested more if it in more places.

More to do: There were many comments about providing more to do in parks. Diverse activities were suggested: zip line, more geocaching, hammocking, disc golf, more docks for lake access, more camper cabins, more tent camping, more climbing opportunities, paddle boats, splash pad, more ways to bring your dog to the park, fire pits, basketball , grills, open fields for more active play, overlooks and views, longer hiking experiences, picnic shelters, winter activities, community gardens, special events, volunteer opportunities, and more.

Outdoor Education - nature and Indigenous culture: Participants wanted more guided and self-guided education opportunities to learn about nature in the park. Several mentioned wanting to learn about the natural environment and several mentioned wanting to learn more about Indigenous culture. As one commenter requested *“A park that’s approved by and works with indigenous peoples...A park where I don’t need to question the legitimacy of its history.”*

Basics and visitor services: Students are very interested in ensuring the basics are present- bathrooms, drinking water, signage, benches, and trash receptacles. They also are interested in equipment rental, food for purchase (restaurant, food trucks, and vending). One group hoped for gift shops and another for more staffed visitor centers.

Wildlife: Several participants expressed desire for more wildlife and to interact with animals.

Sense of belonging

Most, but not all, participants said they feel they belong in Dakota County Parks. Overall, participants are comfortable in nature and natural settings. Many expressed the importance of providing accessible trails and recreation experiences. Some groups mentioned that those who are BIPOC, non-English speaking, have limited physical mobility, or not comfortable in nature probably would feel less belonging.

Fee based activities vs general park use: One group mentioned that because they enter Lebanon Hills Regional Park through the campground area, they felt that they were intruding and did not have as much of a right to be there as those camping, who pay a fee.

Improving belonging and awareness: Though almost all participants had been to Lebanon Hills Regional Park through school, and about half to other Dakota County Parks, some mentioned that they were unaware of the park system or didn't utilize the park system. Representation of all demographic groups in advertising, directing engagement with organizations and groups that represent more diversity, more partnerships with schools, active community partnerships, and more information about accessibility, multilingual signage, staff available to help and answer questions were mentioned as ways to improve awareness and belonging.

Suggestions to improve safety: More lighting, benches for resting, drinking water, ability to find people to help when help is needed, familiarity, cell service, being knowledgeable about available ways to get out of a space, clear signage, emergency call buttons at key locations, keeping things clean and well maintained improve safety. *Though many mentioned wanting more lighting, they suggested ways to reduce negative impacts of lighting such as solar lighting, strategic placement, and bollard lighting.*

Things and situations that feel unsafe: Feeling trapped, not knowing where to go, other people who are perceived as threatening, vandalism, wildlife, off-leash dogs all detract from a sense of safety.

Narrow, natural surface trails: Many participants appreciate natural surface trails but several mentioned that narrow, natural surface trails are uncomfortable and do not feel welcoming because they are so cramped.

Other people: Many participants mentioned that they feel safe when in the park with other people they know, when other people are present, or when they know that help is available if needed. A few mentioned that they feel more comfortable when they are alone or in areas of the park without other people. Others mentioned specific interactions that have felt unsafe, such as being followed by a group of college boys and interactions with aggressive older adults.

Group discussion note

GROUP 1A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

Access to different parks, more flowers and get rid of invasives like buckthorn and replace with prettier things that are native.

Better access in winter, doesn't feel like its open in the winter. Better info on winter activities.

No camping fees.

Great that trying to put more native species in the park.

Not many trees, open fields with burnt areas.

More things to learn, opportunities to learn about things (like birds), better info to learn.

More info stands and more interactive things.

Zipline!

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Spring Adventure in WI (big maps of the park were nice).

Geocaching, or more of it.

Better information about programs and opportunities in the parks (talks, crafts, activities).

State Parks: have good programs and events, fun things to do.

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

I don't know anything about DCP.

Feels like it;s closed in the winter.

I don't go to them.

When we go as a school in big groups, it feels like we're intruding (other users like campers, walking). We aren't paying to be there like campers. Fee payers: it feels like they have more of a right to be there.

Trails are narrow in some places, cramped. Doesn't feel as belonging or welcoming. Especially after it has rained and the trails are slippery.

Value in going off the trails, but it's hard to get to.

No crosswalk across Johnny Cake from SES. There's not great access to the Wheaton area, just a big gate. Not welcoming (referencing to students who did Wheaton for Pond Profile).

There's a sense like we should pay to be there--user fee.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

More lights. Even solar powered lights. Some lights along the trails like at Lac Lavon (not many, just a few).

Docks.

More places to sit, benches.

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Not polluted (trash in water, visual pollution, trash on ground).

More native flowers, no buckthorn.

For hills or steep areas, supports for getting up (rope, steps).

Better drainage on trails especially after it rains (like ropes, stakes).

Hammock rentals.

More seating areas that don't disrupt the natural environment, made of natural materials like wood.

More trash cans for clean-up. Trash cans and dog poop bags every-so-often on trails so there isn't

as much trash or poop around.

GROUP 2A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

Love the the nature, photography

Natural areas that don't need to be reserved

Love dirt hiking trails -visiting in nature, not taking over nature

Free, Nature should be accessible to every one

Choose between more rigorous trails and easy trails

There is a park for everything, social and contemplative spaces

Lots of variety in experiences

Trash cans, dog walking clean up

Places to explore, places that are obvious

Like that people are more aware, love the interpretive signs. Love that that the signs are short and sweet, not a lot of reading is needed

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Hastings park, beach, path you can walk through, along the path statues of books, all the books were talking about the environment. Silent spring, poetry, less about the scientific aspects of the environment, but more about the human relationship. More interpretation, so impactful.

Whitebear lake, rainwater garden signs, really explained the benefits of the rainwater garden, benefits of nature

Not a lot of benches, shouldn't overwhelm with structure, but really need to keep people who

need to rest

Benches at Jensen lake are not functional, angles that are not usable. Using nature to create seating (rocks and logs).

Wisconsin Ice Age Trail, 25 miles, started in a park went in to rural areas/natural areas

Nice views, but that still look natural, but not a giant platform. Love a look out spots.

Gift shop could be so fun; sweatshirts, little pins, environmental nature pins, competition

Stickers, water bottles,

Junior rangers at national parks - get kids into nature

Get kids outside ipad kids, really need to get out side

Indigenous made products, Dakota language

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

Scott county, so things are a little far.

Better, but could improve.

Overall feel like belong

Peace and in nature

Thinking about indigenous people, make sure that they are acknowledged in the parks, is crucial to recognize that.

There is no land acknowledgement , there should be one, what did the Indigenous cultures about

More accessible information

Have a person at the visitor center to answer questions (Indigenous); volunteers to teach the kids

Field trips, we don't want to go to the mall,

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Also makes you feel safe,

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

GROUP 3A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- Like climbing trees
- Like that I can train my dog in the natural enviro
- For the most part, pretty clean! Don't have to worry about clearing off benches or other things
- How well they're made, especially the mtn bike trails
- Like how calm it can be; wide open, you can have your own space, don't feel crowded, not a lot of things lying around everywhere
- Like having a forested area in the city that we can hike around, that trails connect different parts of the city, I can get from one palace to another on trails (another student: it feels like teleporytation!)
- Yeah, I like that around this area you can have both! Restaurants, houses, but then nearby be in the woods
- Like the feeling of wilderness/more natural, where there's less pavement
- Love how it mimics the backcountry feeling without having to travel a whole day to get there or be far from civilization - nice and less nerve-wracking
- Really great signage and maps - so much better than any other park

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- Really like places that have dog waste disposal bags and signs available
- Sometimes DC parks have a lot of litter especially cigarette butts
- Wish there was less paved trails! Roots push up the concrete which makes them hard to walk on
 - I disagree, pavement makes it more handicapped accessible
 - But they're not maintained well enough!

- Need better maintained handicapped accessible trails
- More barefoot trails!! (not everyone knew what that meant)
- More benches
- More pollinator gardens around the parking lots
- Most parks are pretty good at this, but actual bathrooms - would help for people with medical needs who need a clean indoor private space. Also porta potties get super hot inside in the summer
- More functional drinking fountains - a lot of them don't work
- More handicapped accessible bathrooms (bars on the walls in the stalls)
- Instead of just more benches, leaning bars for resting on along the trails could be nice (and take up less space)
- For each park, updated bike racks - some of them are not as good (Holland Lake has a good bike rack in their new front area)
- Would be nice to add more lower drinking fountains to get water for dogs

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- All of the benches in Lebanon Parks, i can't sit on, because they don't have backs or bars or anything around them to help me stand back up. Benches are not always accessible to me.
- I have more of the feeling of belonging in DC Parks than in any other park because it has more of that nature/wilderness feeling to it. It doesn't feel like it's here for "money."
- I really do like the parks and feel like I belong in them. I have the most memories in my life in the parks. It feels like home.
- I don't feel like I belong as much because I don't like nature as much.
- Surveyed the whole group, mix of 3-5 (mostly 4-5, 5 is most belonging)

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

- Map system helps me feel very safe and always know where I am
- Proximity to civilization, never too far from help
- Once I tripped and fell and had nothing to pull myself up
- Once a group of college boys followed me and my dog through the dog park

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

- Greenway area accomplishes all parts of sustainability and land preservation
- Honestly, relatively the same (just with updated facilities)
- Several students chimed in to agree,
- More pollinator-friendly and native plants
- More walking trails, I like the feeling of dirt, plus barefoot trails (they have these in

- Germany; different surfaces to walk on for your feet)
- More places where dogs can be off leash and more places for dogs to swim and get water

GROUP 4A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?
 Where would you like to see more of this?
 How could this benefit the greater community?

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?
 How is it beneficial to their community?
 Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?
 What hinders belonging?

-Signage for access

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

GROUP 5A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- Biodiversity... less grass and monoculture (at least a high ratio of habitat)
- I bring my little sister to park.. Want to see species and habitats
- Features like MTB trails and dog parks
- Love mixed woods... understand going for one type of ecosystem (oak savannah), but also want diversity and wooded areas of mixed trees
- Love deer trails and small trails.. Limited pavement, but some for access and riding
- Signage for the “deer trail” type trails helps me feel safer

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- Love ways to enforce or encourage correct waste sorting
- Mixed pollinator grasses / clover instead of monoculture grass

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- 3 Rivers feels more human-centric.. Dakota County Parks feels more
- more upfront challenge levels and times listed for trails... want to match trails to our needs day to day.. Sometime more challenging, sometime easy and quick

<p>Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?</p>
<p>-Being surrounded by more nature feels more safer.. Grass and open space feels unnatural and less safe.. “exposed”</p>
<p>Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?</p>
<p>-Publishing / advertising more volunteer opportunities.. Advertise in schools! We need community service hours</p> <p>-More opportunities to volunteer instead of just clean-ups</p> <p>-More advertisements for demographic groups.. Inviting more folks in for sessions</p> <p>-Direct engagement with organizations and groups that represent more diversity</p> <p>-Have County parks come into schools and share their programming and opportunities</p>
<p>GROUP 6A</p>
<p>Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>Where would you like to see more of this?</p> <p>How could this benefit the greater community?</p>
<p>I use a lot of the trails, especially at Leb Hills. Instead of going to eat or hang out at Target, we go to the Trails as a Third Space.</p> <p>We had hiking club last year and did that.</p> <p>I end up in the parking lot of parks a lot.</p> <p>Members of my family find some of the access difficult because of steep hills.</p> <p>Maybe refurbish some of the paths.</p> <p>Schultz does a good job of accessibility– wide paths, mix of paved and gravel. Need more of that in other parks.</p> <p>White Tail Woods access is too steep</p>

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Flowers- more gardens that are aesthetically pleasing

Less grass and more prairie and wild lands

More trash cans to prevent littering. They're only in parking lots now and many people don't wait that long

More benches and seating areas, possibly more swing sets or natural playground areas

Disc golf course

Informational signs about the park that work as a self-guided tour or game, like at the zoo or the aquarium. Something that's more interactive for kids so hiking is more fun. Encourages you to explore the entire park instead of just go around the lake.

If the park has a lake, it's nice to have big docks to go out on

If there's an area that already exists that food trucks or a restaurant like Sea Salt could be accommodated, that would draw more people in.

Bike rentals, paths that are bike specific, or have electric scooter systems. Make kayak and canoe rental services more visible- I know they exist, but not sure how or where to go.

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

thumbs up

I like the parks

Sidewalks and trails help me feel this way

The diversity of scenery helps make it feel like there's not a singular way to be in a park

Accessibility is pretty good- wider trails and paved. But could be more so.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Openness for some, closed spaces for others

The paths aren't that windy, so I can see in front and behind me.

People are using the trails so I don't feel alone out there. Lots of families and dogs.

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Less polluted

More undergrowth in the treed areas. Without that, it feels too manicured.

More removal of invasive species

GROUP 7A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

Students like dirt paths, but understand accessibility needs. So, a mix is nice.

Appreciate the dog waste bags that are provided

Like the porta-potties and trashes throughout

LOVE the maps/stations/markers

Appreciate the variety- SO many trails!

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Maybe more benches and rest places for resting (park in Northfield), especially at the tops of hills and by maps

Maybe more stairs on trails?

Water Bottle filling stations throughout

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

Very much!

They are very accessible- we love that they're in our neighborhoods

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Other people are there- it's secluded but well-used

Good signage so we don't get lost

Paths are navigable

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Lots of trees

Very nature-focused and well established

Accessible to all

Interconnected?

Promote them more! Have more events there to get people there

Have a variety of rigor levels on the trails

GROUP 8A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- The Trails
- The Fishing
- Appreciate how accessible everything is
- More porta potties (or actual bathrooms—that aren't locked)
- More rental opportunities (kayaks, canoes, facility, etc.)

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- Have a park with more tent camping available
- Parks that have a lot to climb on
- Baker Park-Cabins for rentals

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- I don't live in Dakota county. So, I feel like I don't know as much
- If you are white→Yes. If you are not white→ Probably not as much

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

- Being alone→I don't feel safe when there are other people around me
- Park security, workers, etc.
- Some trails that are more paved or have lights on them
- Really clear signs

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

- Lots of butterflies
- More fishing
- Cooler docks
- Less algae
- Less mosquitos
- More swimming areas

GROUP 9A

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

Maps of the trail. Simplicity and number of maps so you can move around and not get lost. Helps me feel comfortable.

Spots to sit down on the little benches and open areas to hang out.

Informational things about trees, nature, animals, etc.

More areas of trail off the road so you can get lost in nature. Trees above my head and no cars.

Accessibility ramps.

Canoe Rental, docks, snowshoe rental

Vending machines

Drinking fountains for people and dogs. Outdoor showers.

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Floating dock in the middle of the lake for swimming

Pedal-boats

<p>Frisbee golf course within the woods. Fun to have things to do other than just walking.</p> <p>North shore - more off trail hiking</p> <p>Designated splash pad for kids</p>
<p>Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?</p> <p>What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?</p> <p>What hinders belonging?</p>
<p>Agree overall they belong.</p> <p>Connected to the areas that are more surrounded by nature, less connected to areas near roads and houses.</p> <p>Really like the friendliness of others in the park.</p> <p>Close to "civilization" makes us feel less belonging.</p> <p>Put more little kid things in nature to make little people feel more connected early in life.</p> <p>Vandalism</p>
<p>Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?</p>
<p>Lights at the beginning of trails and parking lots.</p> <p>Bathrooms in more public areas.</p> <p>Informational spots in parking lots.</p> <p>Wide paths.</p> <p>Emergency panic buttons at check-points</p>
<p>Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?</p>
<p>Clear and healthy lakes for swimming!</p> <p>Less invasive species (buckthorn)</p> <p>More learning opportunities about nature and history (informational signs)</p> <p>Valuing and acknowledging indigenous culture</p> <p>No graffiti (maybe a specified place for it)</p>

GROUP 10A
<p>Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>Where would you like to see more of this?</p> <p>How could this benefit the greater community?</p>
<p>What do you love about it? Nordic ski trails bike paths, can rent kayak or canoes, can bring own canoe and not carry it to far, well kept trails, bridges, mtn bike trails & shelter.</p>
<p>Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>How is it beneficial to their community?</p> <p>Why could it be beneficial to your community?</p>
<p>Pretty accessible by all. Add water stations, food, community food truck, restaurant like Minnehaha, more picnic tables, bike rental, swim park for dogs</p>
<p>Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?</p> <p>What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?</p> <p>What hinders belonging?</p>
<p>Agreed yes I belong. Horses and horse people are scary, maybe more signs. More signage for hunting season and horses.</p> <p>Hinders diversity - "see to many white people", host community events,</p>
<p>Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?</p>
<p>Well lit areas, life jackets, when there is some space in the sides of the trails, maps,</p>
<p>Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?</p>

Big sledding hill, down hill skiing hill, more community events, concerts, Events not known - better marketing needed. Areas with no trails, foraging area and classes

GROUP 1B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

How private my backyard is. I get a look at what's going on, like the wildlife, lake and pine trees, not a housing development.

Free, don't have to sign up for anything to access them.

Just that we have them--it helps.

I like flowers.

The streams and ponds, agreed, also lakes and any water source--the gurgle sounds.

Things are in their natural states, here's the path but the rest is left alone.

It's free and that's nice, unlike having to pay for the MN Zoo.

Near my house there are woods and that's nice.

A lot isn't paved so there aren't issues with run-off.

Not totally developed, a lot is left alone but taken care of.

I like the controlled burns and how much they take care of it.

I don't like them because they remove so much wildlife, also the harm for the people who live in the area (smoke, people with asthma), also as the wildlife shift in an area makes it more crowded in other parts.

I'm sure they do it in an educated way.

There's a concern about it spiraling out of control and burning down houses. Counter: there has to be person from the fire department.

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

There are little cabins at Baker, like at Whitetail, to stay at.

Big Bog SP has informative signage along the boardwalks about plants and animals that live there. That would be nice to have at Lebanon.

Trails around Split Rock that get you down to the water.

Accessible beaches. Regulate beaches better--especially trash.

Schulze Lake is FULL of trash, also Crystal Lake. Nasty.

Local ponds and water management is important (talk of local run-off ponds issues with trash, goldfish, etc.)

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

Ehh, I don't know what that means.

You belong anywhere you feel like you do.

It's a public place, so I don't feel a strong thing, but it's nice that we have it.

Belonging to the area isn't about feeling included, just that it's accessible to the area.

When people decide to have parties late at night, not good for people who live in the area.

I tend to feel like I don't belong if there's a lot of pavement, I like it a little natural at least.

There aren't specific things that don't make me feel like I belong, it's more of a neutral.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

No people.

Lights, I like them even though it's bad pollution. You don't feel like you're going to get killed in the woods.

Unsafe: coyotes, you can hear them at night calling. Coyotes and foxes sound like people when they scream. We've heard coyotes attack small dogs.

Need to update the lighting in the parking lots (example given is from a city park). The lighting is too dim, and shady stuff is happening in the cars that are parked there at night. It doesn't feel OK that they're there.

Information on how to deal with dangerous wildlife. Signs warning not to touch wildlife (baby

animals like deer).

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Completely eradicated of invasive species.
 More animal info.
 Completely clean lakes and ponds.
 Get rid of the trash in the woods and along the trails.
 Make the geese and swans a lot quieter! They are so annoying.

GROUP 2B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?
 Where would you like to see more of this?
 How could this benefit the greater community?

I like being outside,
 I like busy parks, don't see streets. Like the diversity of things you can do at the parks,
 I love the kayaks
 Lebanon Hills Specifically
 Parks separated from trails, get out from trails
 Love that you can explore parks, hidden areas
 Wheaton Pond needs a dock, specifically
 I love whitetail, the path and the boardwalk along the lake
 Shultz lake trails got flooded this year, it is OK , but really muddy, would be nicer not to be muddy
 Like trails that are shaded, less heat, and sun protection.

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Area in the woods that you can walk your dogs off-leash

Love Murphy Hanrahan because it is big, don't have to buy x-country pass (unlike Dakota county).
I don't ski in Dakota county

need you are here signs or you get lost

map is so confusing, the numbers, too much information.

I go camping up north a lot, the trails here Lebanon and Spring Lake Park have nice trails.

Like parks with shade,

Love where there are dog poop dispenser bags.

Groom and mark trails in the winter, markers on trees

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

Making us pay to go skiing - doesn't support belonging.

Parking lot at Shultz is scary, can't see very well, very crowded, pull through spots, tight curves, open it up.

Love to kayak, fishing, paddle board, good trails, easy trails

Love the variety of difficulty.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Yes, feel safe, If you stay on the trails, you shouldn't get lost. Most places you have cell service, so it would be hard to get really lost - disoriented but not lost

Cell service makes us feel safe. We plan ahead to make sure our phones are charged, don't add charging, makes it feel like a screenager place.

Mostly take photos with phones in parks. Could charge by bathroom.

I feel familiar with parks, and they are not huge.

Well marked and maintained trails make us feel safe

Being in a familiar area makes me feel safe

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

They would look beautify,

Add little things like a dock

No buckthorn.

SES students would want to remove buckthorn - great earth day activity.

We do volunteer with the parks, garlic mustard pulling, tree planting

Don't take down trees if possible, plant more trees

Rain Gardens in parking lots, sustainable design and native plants. Rain Gardens are really nice.

Path in prairie at Schultz lake, love to walk through there without getting ticks. Dirt path, not a paved path

Boardwalks are great material

GROUP 3B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- Love the trails in the parks, really nice to walk around on
- Love the signs on the different trail routes, like that there are a lot of signs
- Love the locations, like being near water, like the recreation facilities and having so many rentals available (like paddleboards etc)
- Like that you can just go, don't cost anything
- It's green
- Put in effort to maintain wildlife
- Like the size of it and how much stuff they have
- Big trees
- Like that there are always at least one paved trail, good for accessibility
- Good accessibility for people who aren't able to walk
- Like when there's a big map that shows everything. Nice when it shows distances of trails.
- Like it when the trails are built around a pond

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- Could be some newer benches, a lot of the benches are covered in moss or bending over
- Adding more water bottle stations on longer trails
- More places to rent bikes or other things like that
- More places to make it easy to hammock or hang your hammocks (in some parks but not all)

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- Almost everyone in this group gave a 5 (fully belonging), one 3 and one 4
- Don't feel like I fully belong because I'm not a nature person
- For someone who doesn't speak English, they might feel like they don't belong because the signs and maps are all only in English
- I feel like I belong because my dad works for the parks
- It has a lot of the stuff that I like - being outdoors, the trails

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

- Sometimes feel unsafe going on a walk at night, would help to add lights to the trails
 - Especially if they're designed to limit light pollution
- Could add phone boxes to call for help like they have on college campuses
- Sometimes feel nervous when I hear sounds of wild animals, but it's their home so they belong there
- There are some trails where the trail gets overgrown by grasses where it's hard to get through, more risk of ticks which makes me nervous, could keep a clear pathway through
- Asked everyone to rate 1-5 (1 is very unsafe and 5 is very safe), everyone said 4
- There's always some risk to being in nature
- Mostly it's just being there at night/after dark when it feels unsafe

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

- I like how it is now
- The parks should be bigger, with more trails going more places
- I'm the wrong person to ask, because I prefer going to the woods rather than a park
- Making the lakes more habitable, a lot of the portages are very steep or ways to access the lakes are not very accessible
- Maybe more picnic shelters that you can walk or bike to
- Some of the lakes and ponds are overgrown with algae and lake plants, could be treated to clear up the water a little

GROUP 4B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

-Love diverse habitats and color of plants across the seasons

-Like accessibility, but also want the secluded feel and some trails that are more rugged

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

-How do we enforce smoke-free zones?

-Cleaner beaches and clearer water... want to swim!

-Signage that let's folks know the distance, challenge level, and estimated time range for trails

-More diversity of species and habitats.. More unique wildlife would be so great to have

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

-I feel like I belong when I'm having fun.. Slides, sledding, features for play

<p>Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?</p>
<p> </p>
<p>Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?</p>
<p>-Gardens where we can access and harvest!</p> <p>-More challenging hiking trails and access to fun features</p>
<p>GROUP 5B</p>
<p>Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>Where would you like to see more of this?</p> <p>How could this benefit the greater community?</p>
<p>-Like the spread of Dakota parks.. Always near one!</p> <p>-More access to enter the parks... not just roads into parks, but also sidewalks / bike trails to enter the parks</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>How is it beneficial to their community?</p> <p>Why could it be beneficial to your community?</p>
<p>-Some have had really nice bathrooms.. Keeping them clean and bug free</p> <p>-Love more challenging hiking trails... how can we share / highlight which ones are more challenging?</p>

-Features that draw wildlife to the entrances and trail center areas, including small ponds

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

-centralized areas being well-lit

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

-More park rangers present would be great for connecting to parks and feeling safe

-Wildlife, diverse plants, safety

-Filter out the unhealthy items in the ponds/lakes.. Want more swimming opportunities

GROUP 6B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

Good place to have fun

They feel well-maintained, clean.

Lots of action to restore prairies

I like how many there are! A good balance between nature spaces and development. Many options
 The beaches!
 Openness– not specific way to go, you can just explore. I like the efforts to include the history of the Dakota people
 Accessible to a lot of people, and seem to be very involved in the community (the park organization)
 There’s something for everybody. Beaches, paved trails, dirt trails, longer hiking trails– lots of variety!

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?
 How is it beneficial to their community?
 Why could it be beneficial to your community?

I want bison!
 A lot of state parks have longer trails that Dakota County parks lack. Many of them are 1-2 miles.
 Adding some natural playgrounds (big mounds of grass, tree stumps, etc). Show kids that nature can be a playground
 Places to immerse self in environment without the trails and lights and signs everyone
 Paved trails can somewhat ruin the nature immersion experience. Can some parks not have them? But also understand that helps with accessibility. Maybe packed dirt/gravel instead of pavement? Can that be done without waiting over time?
 Bring more diversity into natural parks. Do more education and outreach to different communities to inform them of the park opportunities and bring more types of people into the parks

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?
 What hinders belonging?

Yeah, I guess so. But could see I maybe wouldn't if I had limited physical mobility.
 Sometimes I feel like I'm not the "right" demographic to be in the more natural park areas. Maybe more outreach would be good.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Having available exits– being to get from one area to another without feeling trapped. Many parks have one path that you feel stuck on. More short cuts.

I would never go into a park or greenway alone. I would not feel safe. Not sure what to implement to make that different. Some college campuses and greenways have those blue emergency response systems– more of those?

I would only go with friends or parents. Even a dog wouldn't make me feel that safe.

Never experienced the greenways, but in my local parks they sometimes get so overgrown that I don't know where to go or how to get out if something happens. If it's a designated path, it needs to stay clear

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

More gardens.

A park that's approved by and works with indigenous peoples. A piece of land that fits the culture and is a public space available for them to gather and tell stories and interact with nature. A park where I don't need to question the legitimacy of its history.

More signs about the histories and stories of the land the park is located on. (like at the Big Rivers Trail Overlook)

More interactive trail experiences (like fairy house exhibits and pumpkin carvings). Since it's community space, bring the community in for activities. Hold more events at the parks to bring community in.

GROUP 7B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- Love that we have the parks and are accessible
- Paved and non paved trails
- Great signage, feels safe
- Thought the goats eating buckthorn was cool.
- More Wildflowers
-

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- Most have been in the county
- Roof gardens on all the buildings
- Butterfly gardens– More bugs!
- More pollinators
- Bat boxes
- Balance between having a large number of people at parks and wanting people to have access to the parks.

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- Police in the parks hinders
- Signage in multiple languages
- Basic amenities are nice. Bathrooms and whatnot.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

- Other people
- Cleanliness, water, facilities
- Signage
- Well marked trails
- Lit parking lots

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

- More than anything feel more clean
- Reintroduction of natural species and wild life
- Compost bins, and signs for sorting trash, recycling, and compost
- More advertisement of the cool things that the parks offer– social media
- Could be good opportunities for renewable energy. Using that energy for buildings
- Community spaces
- Clean boundaries
- Dog disposal spots

- More bathrooms that are accessible for all

GROUP 8B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

- A lot of parks! Hard to not find a park
- For the most part pretty clean
- Well maintained
- Good mix of type of parks
- Good variety of walking trails

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

- More wildlife
- Like when it is by water

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

- Feel like you belong

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

- Lights
- Well maintained
- Workers present

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

- Less Pollution
- More facility rental type things

GROUP 9B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

A lot of parks have secret things. Thompson County Park: They have a lake and a path around the lake; trails and a playground. There's a park like that by my house and it leads to so many different neighborhoods OR wilderness. If I want to walk or bike ride... i have a trail that's out in the open and another trail is kind of off.

I like the variety. Different things to do like most parks... depends on which park, but most parks have different things to do: trails, visitor centers, playgrounds, different things for different people to do so there's variety, even if it's not your thing, there's something for everyone.

Diversity - like Lebanon has trails for walking and biking, a lot of trees, and you can tell the growth has been in progress for a long time and they keep up with it really good. Lake Marion is a great lake and it's so different. You get to enjoy the water aspect of it as well.

Would LIKE more of RENTALS:

Renting kayaks & paddleboards and being able to interact more with the water than swimming.

Some have it but more of that would be great.

A lot of parks are starting to do it now, but separate or painting on sidewalk for WALK vs BIKE paths. More of this.

Seating around the lakes. More lounge chairs provided by the park.

FIRE pits. Some have those janky grills, but fire pits would be fun & some families stay into the evening and when it's chilly, it would be nice to have fire pits to dry off & be around together. Some have places you can camp so in that general area without having to actually camp.

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

More bathrooms! Some have bathrooms, others don't. Young kids- it's really challenging to get them to go when they don't want to. There's maybe a porta potty but it's disgusting. Keep up with that (being cleaner), but having BATHROOMS would make a big difference.

They should normalize those trash cans & provide bags for DOGS.

Water fountains should also have a pet/dog water station/fountain.

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

They've done well at keeping up with changes & trends. Different parks are making improvements - they're constantly trying to make improvements & meet more peoples needs.

Some people have music too loud & that's too much. Enjoy your music but not everyone else around you might not enjoy your music.

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

SIGNS to know where I am and also where I might go.

MAPS that have the PIN of you are right here are VERY helpful!

MAPS with DISTANCES.

LIGHTS at night when you're trying to walk it feels unsafe. DIM lights (so we don't contribute to light pollution). Maybe lights that on the ground to light the path where you're walking... maybe SOLAR motion lights on the PATH so they don't contribute to light pollution.

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

All the things we talked about. Don't add more concrete! Humans have a thing with adding concrete to everything, it would great to keep it natural.

Add more recycling.

Eliminate all trash or littering.

Community Gardens.

Don't have factories very close to bodies of water or parks. (NO pollution.)

Charging stations for your cars. Solar powered charging stations.

No pollution in the lakes.

If there are vending machines in parks, switching to sustainable packaging (compostable or fully recyclable) to reduce litter.

Signs - what if you add QR codes to learn more on those signs/maps - learn more about the park, nature, the plant or animal life. e.g. showing what plants or species are invasive IF you want to educate people or encouraging people visiting the park to help pull out invasive species plants.

GROUP 10B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

How could this benefit the greater community?

What do you love about it? Seeing animals - squirrel feeder, trails, off trail hiking, accessibility

Where would you like to see more of this? More attention to trails, more trash cans and signs about trash,

Slow walkers with headphones - distracted, more levels for various hikers - easy-difficult, something like a basketball or play area in the park, more bathroom accessibility, more edible berries, signs about edible plants. Dog poop bags, fishing pole or bike rentals, more natural trails, water bottle filling stations.

How could this benefit the greater community?

Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?

What do you love about it?

How is it beneficial to their community?

Why could it be beneficial to your community?

Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

What hinders belonging?

What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?

When at parks with friends, climbing trees, interacting with nature, been going since I was a kid, makes me more connected to nature, when there with people I know and like, place to explore,

What hinders belonging? Parking to far from trail, run out of water, too many old people - some are aggressive, need more benches, dogs - afraid of them

Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?

Wide trails, lights, openness, emergency buttons like at universities, flashlights, a staff member/security being present.

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Bigger. More connected parks/greenways, dogs only areas or no dog areas, more benches and accessibility for wheelchairs. Parks retired to their historic past, Wheelchairs that can go off trail, Zipline,

GROUP 11B

Question 1 - What is one thing you love about the parks system today?

What do you love about it?

Where would you like to see more of this?

<p>How could this benefit the greater community?</p>
<p>They are easily accessible</p> <p>Adds green spaces to urban areas</p> <p>Give a place for people to gather and hang out.</p>
<p>Question 2 - What is one aspect of another park or park system you are familiar with that you think Dakota County should add?</p> <p>What do you love about it?</p> <p>How is it beneficial to their community?</p> <p>Why could it be beneficial to your community?</p>
<p>Basketball courts - space for people to be active. Builds community</p> <p>Visitor centers to give information about the area.</p> <p>Big open recreational fields</p> <p>Grills</p>
<p>Question 3 - How much would you agree with the statement "I feel like I belong in Dakota County parks"?</p> <p>What are some things that help you feel that you belong in these spaces?</p> <p>What hinders belonging?</p>
<p>Close and accessible</p> <p>No restriction signs</p> <p>Well maintained</p> <p>Benches and tables for people to gather and hang out and eat</p> <p>Creepy people</p> <p>Vandalism</p> <p>Litter</p>
<p>Question 4 - What makes you feel safe when you are in a park or greenway?</p>

Lights in playgrounds, parking lots

Paved pathways, accessibility

Maps you can carry, along with posted maps on signs.

More park rangers/security people visible

Emergency/panic boxes

Question 5 - If you could wave a magic wand, what would Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas look like in 2050?

Native plant species/less invasives

Less trash/clean

Clean and usable water for swimming and fishing

Opportunities for recreation

Tribal Engagement Workshop

Event date: Sept. 28, 2024

Event location: Minneapolis American Indian Center

Event leader: Full Circle/Dakota County

Event format: Focus group consultation

Participants: Indigenous cultural knowledge bearers, language speakers, and cultural educators.

Overview

As part of the Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan, Dakota County seeks to update the vision and goals to take the county park system into the next 20 years. The new plan will respond to and mitigate critical issues facing society, such as: changing ecological conditions and trends, climate change, equity, and Indigenous Traditional Cultural Places protection and management.

To guide and inform plan development, the project team conducted in-person engagement with Indigenous cultural knowledge bearers, language speakers, and cultural educators and leaders (i.e., THPOs). The engagement approach sought to reach a variety of tribal community members and build upon existing relationships that Dakota County and its consultants have formed.

Engagement Key Takeaways

Many of the participants had limited knowledge of Dakota County Parks sites. Accordingly, conversations were focused on sites that participants were familiar with, namely: Black Dog Village, Spring Lake Park Reserve (specifically the bison), and Miesville Ravine Park Reserve. The group noted that a site tour would be helpful to better understand the range of sites and opportunities.

Participant feedback focused on three topics areas: include Dakota/Indigenous people at all levels of Dakota County Parks work, care for the land first and foremost, and support cultural practices.

Topic Area 1: Include Dakota/Indigenous people at all levels

Whether as employees, liaisons, partners, or engaged community members, including more Dakota/Indigenous people with knowledge of cultural practices at all levels of county, and specifically Parks, management and project work is critical to caring for the land, providing appropriate space for traditional practices, and creating inclusive and welcoming places for Dakota people to feel a sense of belonging and being “home.”

Topic Area 2: Care for the land

Caring for the land and water is essential. By caring for land and water first, plants and animals thrive, followed by people. Building on involvement of more Dakota people, developing co-management plans and methods that honor traditional ecological knowledge foster healthy ecosystems.

Topic Area 3: Cultural practices

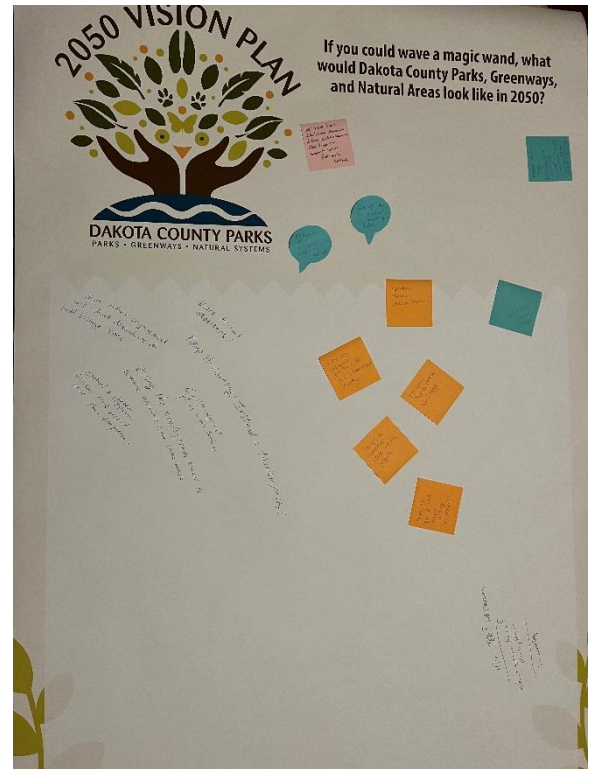
Providing appropriate spaces, managed by Indigenous people, for traditional practices such as inipi (sweat lodge), harvesting bison, gathering plant medicines, and other cultural practices is important for generating a feeling of belonging and home. Restoring Dakota names to places was also discussed as a way to express Dakota presence on the landscape since time immemorial.

Workshop Feedback

(transcribed from activity sheet)

Topic Area 1: Include Dakota/Indigenous people at all levels

- Conduct more robust engagement with descendants of old village sites
- Hire more tribal monitors
- Expand and better support liaison work (need more than one person)
- Hire people with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) at Dakota County Parks
- Work with Tribal Natural Resource Departments to develop vegetation stewardship plans for each site
- Hire Dakota people with cultural knowledge in all county/parks departments
- Bring a collective Indigenous voice to all projects
- Welcome Dakota people here as their home/homeland
- Return Indigenous presence to the landscape and county



Topic Area 2: Care for the land

- Develop co-management plans with tribes
- Heal the land and water—foster a healthy landscape
- Bring the ecosystem back to where animals can come back and thrive here (based on what grew here previously and what can support a healthy landscape considering a changing climate)
- Incorporate cultural burns into the land management/stewardship regimen
- Keep it country instead of a tourism city (specific to the bison and other “attractions”)

Topic Area 3: Cultural practices

- Interrupt the zoo narrative by harvesting buffalo (Minnesota Bison Collaborative contact: Mary Mallinger)
- Partner with an Indigenous-led organization for inipi (sweat lodge) management (see Rapid City example)
- Restore Dakota names

APPENDIX C POTENTIAL GRANT & FUNDING PROGRAMS

FEDERAL GRANTS AND PROGRAMS

Several federal grants and programs could be applied to regional metro parks for land conservation, infrastructure improvements, recreation programs, and environmental restoration. Here are some of the most relevant ones:

Federal Grants and Programs

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Education Grants	State and Local Assistance Program	X	Administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Funds projects that promote environmental awareness and education.	Park-based environmental education programs, sustainability initiatives, youth engagement.
Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program	Federal	X	Administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). Supports projects that improve pedestrian and cyclist safety.	Multi-use trails, safe crossings, park access improvements.
Healthy Places for Healthy People (HP2) Program	Federal	X	Administered by the EPA, in collaboration with federal agencies. Supports community efforts to promote outdoor recreation and healthy living.	Parks as community wellness hubs, active transportation connections, programming for public health initiatives.

TABLE 4.2 - Specific Federal Grants & Programs

NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION AREA

Federal Grants and Programs

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	State and Local Assistance Program	X	Administered by National Park Service (NPS). Provides matching grants to state and local governments for acquiring and developing public outdoor recreation areas.	Parkland acquisition, trail development, playgrounds, picnic areas, and other recreational infrastructure.
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Federal	X	Administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Supports the development and maintenance of recreational trails for hiking, biking, and other outdoor activities.	Trail construction, rehabilitation, signage, and accessibility improvements.
Urban and Community Forestry Program	Federal	X	Administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Provides grants for urban tree planting, green infrastructure, and community forestry planning.	Tree canopy expansion, stormwater management, habitat restoration in metro parks.
Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program	Federal	X	Administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Offers technical assistance for conservation and outdoor recreation projects.	Trail system planning, river and wetland restoration, community engagement in park planning.
Community Project Funding / Congressionally Directed Spending	Federal	X	Administration Varies (through Congress). Earmarked federal funding for local infrastructure, including parks and recreation projects.	Major capital improvements, land acquisition, park infrastructure.
North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Grants	Federal	X	Administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Funds wetland conservation projects that benefit waterfowl, fish, and wildlife	Wetland restoration, floodplain conservation, habitat enhancement in park lands.

STATE GRANTS AND PROGRAMS

Dakota County Parks has access to various state funding opportunities to support park development, maintenance, and programming. Here are some specific grants and funding streams available:

Legacy Amendment Funding (direct appropriation): Beyond direct Parks & Trail funding administered by the Met Council, Dakota County is eligible to receive funding from other Legacy Amendment funds:

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
Clean Water Fund	State	X	Aims to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams.	X
Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund	State	X	Promotes arts, arts education, and preservation of cultural heritage.	X
Outdoor Heritage Fund	State	X	Focuses on restoring, protecting, and enhancing wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife.	X

Outdoor Recreation Grant Program: Managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), this program offers matching grants to local governments for developing or redeveloping outdoor recreation areas. Grants cover up to 50% of project costs, with a maximum award of \$350,000. Eligible projects include park acquisition, development, and rehabilitation.

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program	State	X	Administered by the Minnesota DNR, this program provides funding for parks and trails of regional significance outside the seven-county metropolitan area. While Dakota County is within the metropolitan area, collaboration with neighboring counties could open opportunities for regional projects.	X

TABLE 4.3 - Specific State Grants & Programs

Outdoor Recreation Grant Program: Continued

Funding Source	Tool	Type	Description	Potential Use
Equity Grant Program	State	X	Offered by the Metropolitan Council, this program funds projects that strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.	X
Minnesota Recreation and Park Foundation New Initiative Grant Program	State	X	This program encourages innovation in parks and recreation services at local, regional, or statewide levels. Grants support new or innovative programs that can have a broader impact beyond the initiating agency.	X
Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program (HELP)	State	X	Focused on restoring and enhancing diverse native habitats across Minnesota, HELP provides grants for projects benefiting bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, and other wildlife. Eligible projects include habitat restoration and enhancement on conservation lands and natural areas.	X