



# Three Rivers

PARK DISTRICT

**DRAFT**

**For public comment**

**February 9 - March 12, 2018**

Written comments may be submitted to:

**[MissRT@threeriversparks.org](mailto:MissRT@threeriversparks.org)**

-or-

**Three Rivers Park District**

c/o Ann Rexine

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## West Mississippi River Regional Trail master plan

February 8, 2018

# The **mission** of Three Rivers Park District is to **promote environmental stewardship through recreation and education** in a natural resources-based park system.

Three Rivers Park District was established in 1957 after legislation was enacted in 1955 allowing for the activation of park districts whose primary duties are “acquisition, development and maintenance of large parks, wildlife sanctuaries, forest and other reservations, and means for public access to historic sites and to lakes, rivers and streams and to other natural phenomena” (Minnesota State Statutes, Chapter 398.07).

There are more than 10 million annual visits to more than 26,500 acres of park reserves, regional parks and special-use areas in Hennepin and five adjoining counties and 140 miles of regional trails. Current outdoor-recreation activities in regional parks and trails include camping, hiking, cross-country and downhill skiing, tubing, bicycling, in-line skating, horseback riding, nature interpretation, golfing, fishing and swimming. Three Rivers Park District also operates a natural resources management program, which administers the restoration and perpetuation of both native wildlife and plants in order to provide park and trail visitors opportunities for high-quality recreational experiences.

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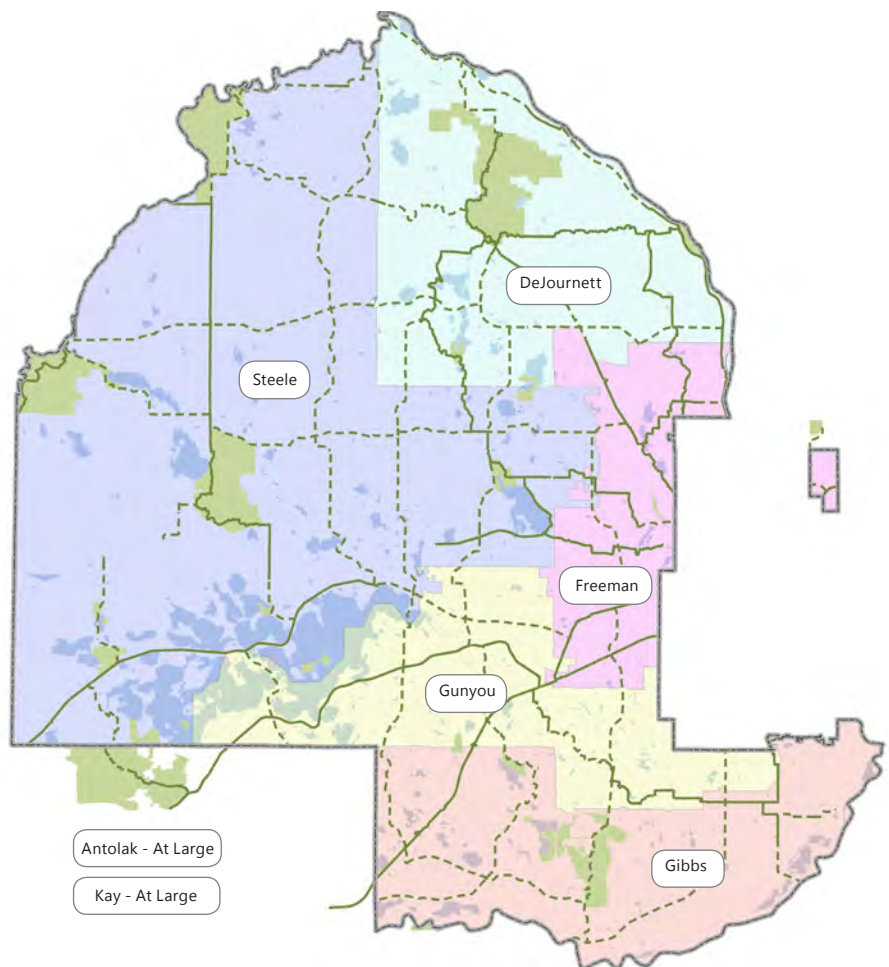
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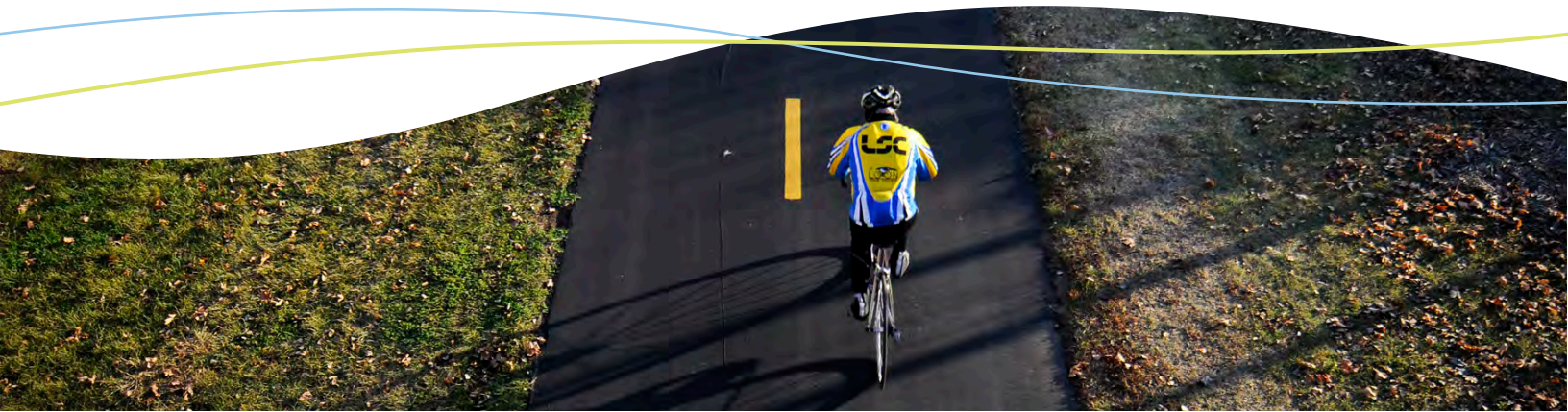
Hennepin County Appointee - serves at large



### Cover Photo Cover Photo

West Mississippi River Regional Trail users near TH 169 underpass.

Photo Credit: Three Rivers Park District



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## RECOGNIZING CONTRIBUTORS

Three Rivers Park District (Park District) gratefully acknowledges the staff, elected officials, community members and other participants who contributed to the West Mississippi River Regional Trail Master Plan. The Park District extends a special thank you to the individuals listed below who provided guidance, time, questions and critical insight throughout the process.

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Mississippi River at North Mississippi River Regional Park | Brooklyn Center, MN  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CELEBRATING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

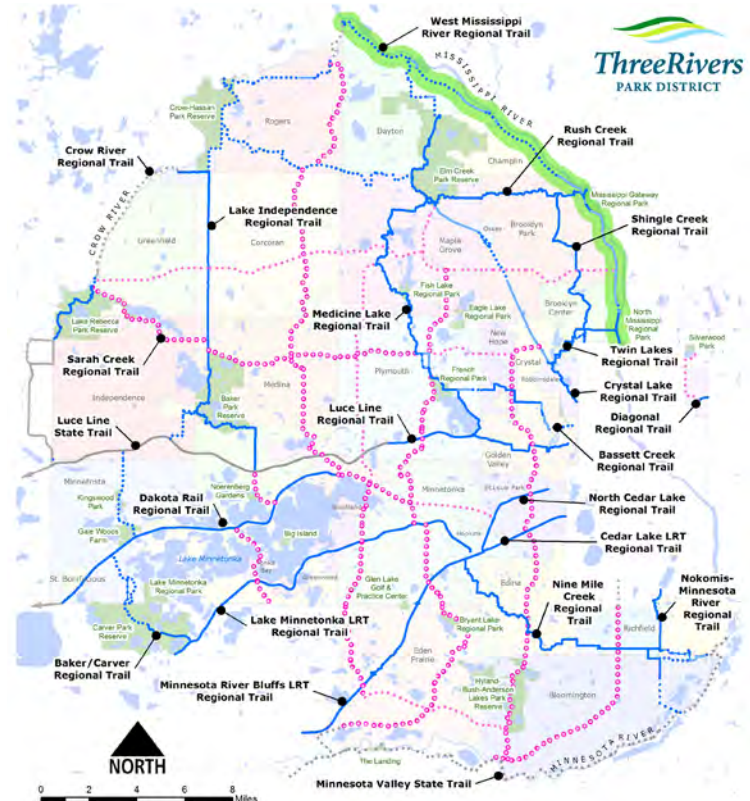
The Mississippi River is the chief river of the second largest North American drainage system. Flowing entirely in the United States, it rises in northern Minnesota and meanders southward for 2,320 miles. With its many tributaries, the Mississippi River's watershed drains all or part of 31 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains. The river has an important cultural, environmental and economic place within its watershed fabric. As the central river artery of a highly industrialized nation, the Mississippi River has become one of the busiest commercial waterways in the world, and, as the unpredictable neighbor of some of the continent's richest farmland, it has been subjected to a remarkable degree of human control and modification. Celebrating the river's significance within the American landscape - specifically within Hennepin County - is the focus of the proposed West Mississippi River Regional Trail (WMRRT).

The proposed WMRRT will expand recreational access to the Mississippi River - providing multiple opportunities along its 20-mile corridor to 'touch the river.' The WMRRT's proposed route stretches from the Crow River Regional Trail in Dayton to the Grand Rounds in Minneapolis, connecting the communities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center (**Image 1**).

The WMRRT's route aims to provide an exclusively off-road trail experience, which in turn provides a safe and enjoyable recreation and non-motorized transportation option for users regardless of ability.

**Image 1: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Context**

Source: Three Rivers Park District



### THE BOTTOM LINE

key message

The WMRRT route celebrates the Mississippi River's significance within Hennepin County. The WMRRT's travels approximately 20 miles adjacent to or near the Mississippi River through northeastern Hennepin County. The regional trail connects the communities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center - with the confluence of the Crow/Mississippi Rivers and the Minneapolis Grand Rounds acting as bookends.

The WMRRT will expand recreational access to park and trail facilities, residential neighborhoods, commercial nodes, which in turn supports bicycle and pedestrian mobility and economic development. Ancillary trail opportunities are created by the WMRRT corridor for further connections to the cities of Anoka, Coon Rapids, Fridley and Minneapolis.

The proposed regional trail will directly connect recreational destinations such as Mississippi Gateway (formerly Coon Rapids Dam) and North Mississippi Regional Parks, in addition to the Crow River, Medicine Lake (Elm Creek Park Reserve trail connector), Rush Creek and Twin Lakes Regional Trails. Some segments of the proposed WMRRT already exist, or are planned for construction funding in the future.

The total acquisition and development costs to complete proposed and upgrade existing WMRRT segments are summarized in **Image 2**. The estimated master planning level acquisition and construction cost estimate for the unbuilt trail sections and upgrades to existing segments is estimated at \$15.3 million.

When the 20-mile WMRRT corridor is fully realized, routine maintenance operation costs including additional staffing are estimated to increase by \$48,180/year (2018 dollars). Additional costs for trail surface preservation and rehabilitation (trail surface repairs, striping requirements, and pavement requirements) are anticipated to increase by \$67,360/year assuming a 30 year pavement life. The combined annual maintenance operation estimated cost for both route and trail surface preventative maintenance is \$115,540/year.

**Image 2: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Segments**

Source: Three Rivers Park District



SEGMENT A   DAYTON				
Existing Mileage	Future Construction Mileage	Acquisition Costs	Construction Cost	Total Cost
0.6 miles	5.5 miles	\$177,700	\$6,467,300	<b>\$6,645,000</b>

Subtotal 6.1 miles

SEGMENT B   CHAMPLIN				
Existing Mileage	Future Construction Mileage	Acquisition Costs	Construction Cost	Total Cost
1.9 miles	3.9 miles	\$227,000	\$6,457,000	<b>\$6,684,000</b>

Subtotal 5.8 miles

SEGMENT C   BROOKLYN PARK				
Existing Mileage	Future Construction Mileage	Acquisition Costs	Construction Cost	Total Cost
5.55 miles	0.03 miles	--	\$638,000	<b>\$638,000</b>

Subtotal 5.6 miles

SEGMENT D   BROOKLYN CENTER				
Existing Mileage	Future Construction Mileage	Acquisition Costs	Construction Cost	Total Cost
2.34 miles	0.35 miles	\$96,000	\$1,200,000	<b>\$1,296,000</b>

Subtotal 2.7 miles

**Total 20.2 miles \$15,263,000**



Mississippi River overlook at Susan McLean Park | Dayton, MN  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION   Planning Framework</b> . . . . .	<b>1 - 4</b>	<b>5. OPERATIONS &amp; MAINTENANCE   Plans &amp; Details</b> . . . . .	<b>43 - 46</b>
Planning Framework . . . . .	1	General Operations . . . . .	43
Metropolitan Council . . . . .	3	Public Safety . . . . .	43 - 44
Three Rivers Park District . . . . .	3 - 4	Maintenance . . . . .	44 - 45
Precedent Planning Documents . . . . .	4	Natural & Cultural Resources . . . . .	45 - 46
<b>2. PROCESS   Planning &amp; Public Input</b> . . . . .	<b>5 - 10</b>	Public Awareness . . . . .	46
Engagement Plan . . . . .	5 - 7	<b>6. IMPLEMENTATION   Estimated Costs &amp; Funding</b> . . . . .	<b>47 - 50</b>
Master Plan Review at Various Levels . . . . .	8 - 10	Existing Trail Segments . . . . .	47
<b>3. RESEARCH   Trends, Demands &amp; Forecasts</b> . . . . .	<b>11 - 16</b>	Future Trail Segments . . . . .	47
National Recreation Trends . . . . .	11	Operations & Maintenance Costs . . . . .	48
Minnesota Recreation Trends . . . . .	11 - 12	Funding Plan . . . . .	49 - 50
Twin Cities Regional Recreation Trends . . . . .	12		
Generational Recreation Trends . . . . .	12 - 13		
Creating Health Equity . . . . .	14		
Park District Regional Trail Trends . . . . .	14 - 16		
<b>4. DESIGN GUIDANCE   Development Concept</b> . . . . .	<b>17 - 42</b>		
Route Evaluation . . . . .	17 - 18		
Permitted Uses . . . . .	18		
Access to All . . . . .	18 - 19		
Design Guidelines . . . . .	19 - 21		
Additional Trail Elements . . . . .	22		
Segment Descriptions . . . . .	23 - 42		
Segment A   Dayton . . . . .	23 - 28		
Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector . . . . .	28 - 29		
Segment B   Champlin . . . . .	30 - 33		
Segment C   Brooklyn Park . . . . .	34 - 37		
Segment D   Brooklyn Center . . . . .	38 - 42		

**MAPS**

1 WMRRT | Hennepin County Context ..... 2  
2 2040 Regional Park System ..... 3  
3 WMRRT Service Area ..... 16  
4 WMRRT Segments ..... 18  
5 Segment A | Dayton Context ..... 23  
6 Segment A | Dayton Overview ..... 23  
7 Segment A1 ..... 24  
8 Segment A2 ..... 24  
9 Segment A3 ..... 25  
10 Segments A4 & A5 ..... 26  
11 Segment A6 ..... 27  
12 Segment A7 ..... 27  
13 MLCCS | Segment A ..... 28  
14 Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector ..... 28  
15 Segment B | Champlin Context ..... 30  
16 Segment B | Champlin Overview ..... 30  
17 Segment B1 ..... 31  
18 Segment B2 ..... 31  
19 Segment B3 ..... 31  
20 Segment B4 ..... 32  
21 Segment B5 ..... 32  
22 Segment B6 ..... 33  
23 Segment B7 ..... 33  
24 MLCCS | Segment B ..... 33  
25 Segment C | Brooklyn Park Context ..... 34  
26 Segment C | Brooklyn Park Overview ..... 34  
27 Segment C1 ..... 35  
28 Segment C2, C3 & C4 ..... 35  
29 Segment C5 ..... 36  
30 Segment C6 ..... 36  
31 Segment C7 ..... 37  
32 MLCCS | Segment C ..... 37  
33 Segment D | Brooklyn Center Context ..... 38  
34 Segment D | Brooklyn Center Overview ..... 38  
35 Segment D1 ..... 39  
36 Segment D2 ..... 39  
37 Segment D3 ..... 40  
38 Segment D4 ..... 40  
39 MLCCS | Segment D ..... 41

**TABLES**

1 Community Outreach Methods, Audiences & Recommendations ..... 7  
2 Generational Recreation Theory ..... 13  
3 WMRRT | Segment Descriptions ..... 18  
4 Regional Trail Typical Descriptions ..... 19  
5 Trailhead & Mississippi River Touchpoint Descriptions ..... 21  
6 Wayfinding Signage Components ..... 22  
7 Wayfinding Signage Configurations ..... 23  
8 Segment A | Dayton Subsegments ..... 23  
9 Trail Connector Segments ..... 29  
10 Segment B | Champlin Subsegments ..... 30  
11 Segment C | Brooklyn Park Subsegments ..... 34  
12 Segment D | Brooklyn Center Subsegments ..... 38  
13 Routine Trail Maintenance Calendar ..... 44  
14 Existing WMRRT Segments for Future Inclusion in Park District Regional Trail System ..... 47  
15 Future WMRRT Segments ..... 48  
16 Acquisition Needs for Future WMRRT Segments ..... 48  
17 Operations & Maintenance Costs Summary ..... 48

**GRAPHS**

1 Determinants of Health ..... 14  
2 Regional Trail Use by Activity & Season ..... 15

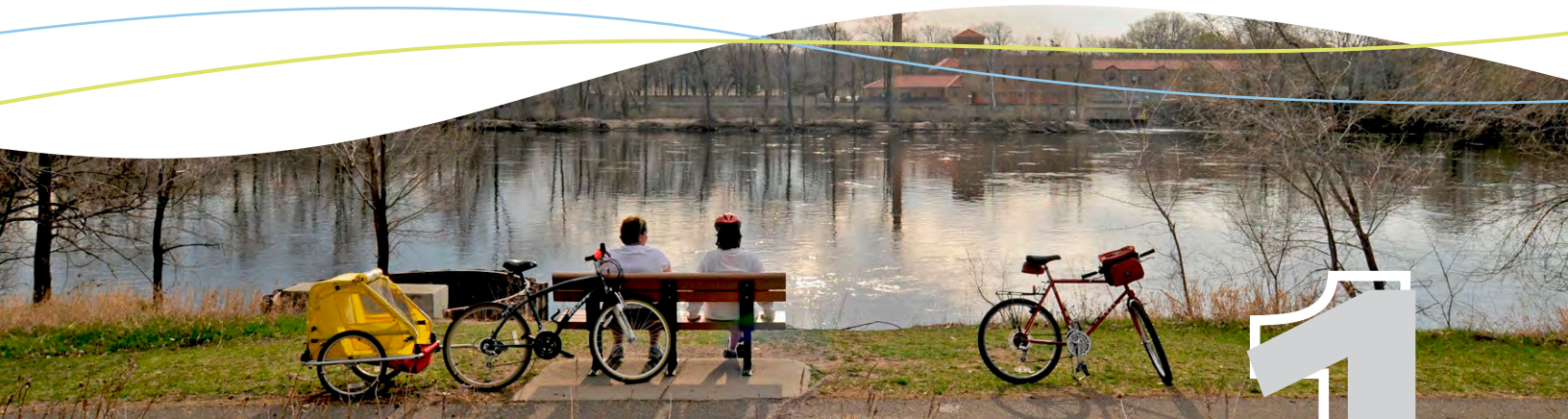
**FIGURES**

1 Urban and/or Curbed Rural Trail Section ..... 19  
2 Rural and/or Park Trail Section ..... 19  
3 Stephens Farm Park Concept ..... 26  
4 Segment A5 Conceptual Layout ..... 26

**APPENDICES**

A Public & Agency Comments ..... 51 - 60  
B Resolutions of Support ..... 61 - 74  
C Visitation Methodology ..... 75 - 76  
D Physical Challenge Areas ..... 77 - 92  
E Cost Estimate ..... 93 - 100





Mississippi River overlook at North Mississippi Regional Park | Brooklyn Center, MN  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

# INTRODUCTION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Mississippi River is the chief river of the second largest drainage system on the North American continent. Flowing entirely in the United States, it rises in northern Minnesota and meanders slowly southwards for 2,320 miles to the Mississippi River Delta at the Gulf of Mexico. With its many tributaries, the Mississippi's watershed drains all or parts of 31 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains. The Mississippi River ranks as the fourth longest and fifteenth largest river in the world by discharge. The river either borders or passes through the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

More than 1.8 million people live in the Twin Cities Mississippi River watershed, which contains portions of Hennepin, Anoka, Ramsey, Washington, Dakota, Carver and Sherburne counties, 99 cities and 14 watershed management organizations (WMOs). The National Park Service operates a 72 mile segment of the Mississippi River as a national park in the Twin Cities from Dayton to Hastings (Mississippi National River Recreation Area) - recognizing some of the most diverse landscapes along the entire 2,320 mile corridor.

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail (WMRRT) Master Plan recognizes the importance of the river's regional and national draw within Hennepin County and offers trail users 'touchpoints' to view and experience the river.

## THE QUICK TAKE-AWAY key message

The WMRRT's principle **goals are to provide a trail route that gives users multiple opportunities to experience the Mississippi River and connect to local destinations.** Since this region has a significant number of private properties abutting the Mississippi River, a trail route that achieved an acceptable level of river proximity - coupled with capitalization of river touchpoints - provided the route's primary planning framework.

## PLANNING SCOPE

Extending over 20 miles, the WMRRT expounds upon complementary planning and tourism initiatives happening concurrently within the Mississippi River corridor such as the National Park Service's Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NRRRA), the Great River Road, a national scenic byway, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) U.S. Bicycle Route 45 (also named the Mississippi River Trail, MRT). This Hennepin County segment of the much larger, multi-state trail network adjacent to the Mississippi River, aims to provide an exclusively off-road trail experience, which in turn provides a safe and enjoyable recreation and non-motorized transportation option for users regardless of ability.

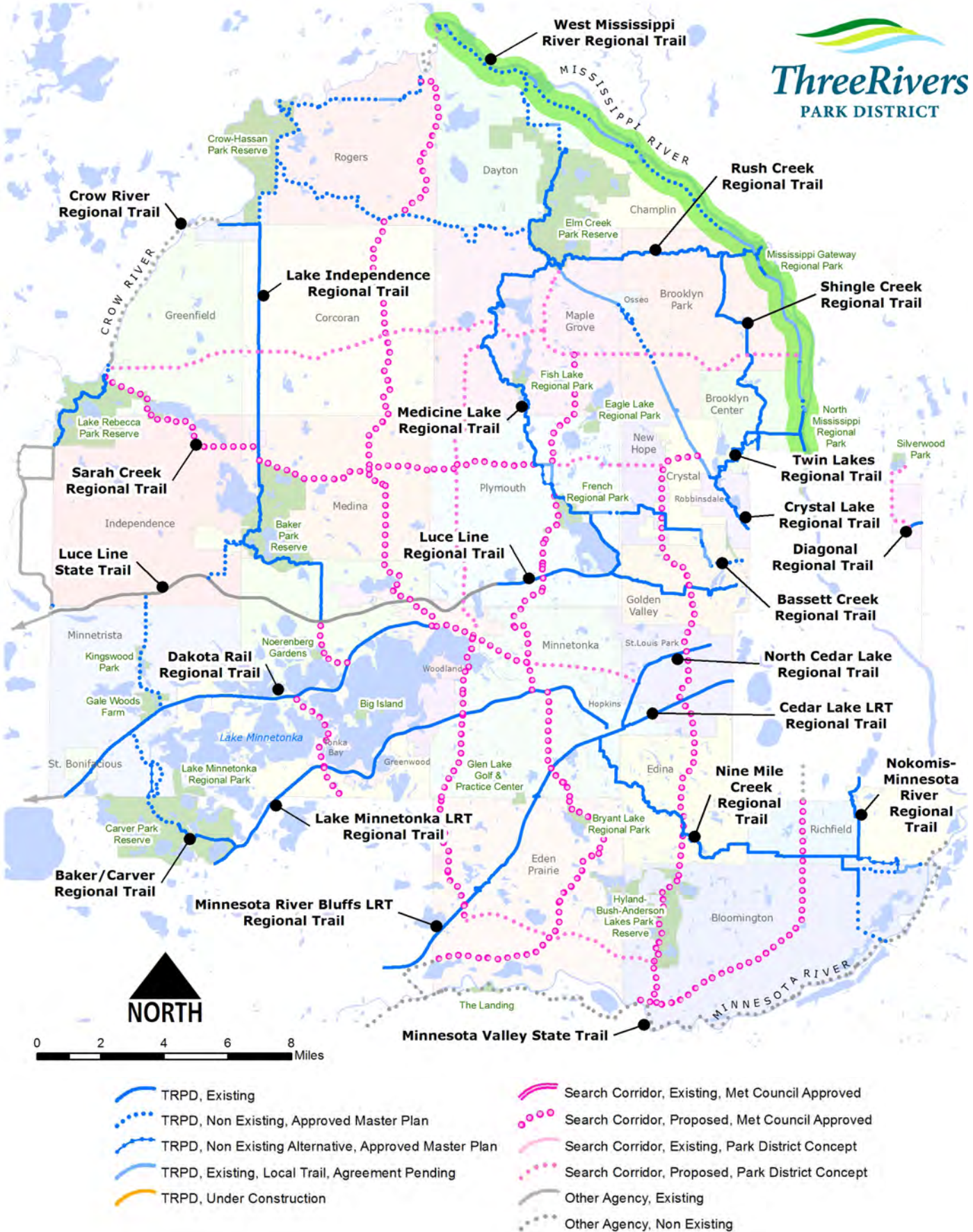
This proposed portion of the WMRRT traverses the western banks of the river - from Dayton to Brooklyn Center through the cities of Champlin and Brooklyn Park (**Map 1, following page**). The WMRRT will expand recreational access to park and trail facilities, residential neighborhoods and commercial nodes - which in turn supports bicycle and pedestrian mobility and economic development.

The proposed regional trail will directly connect recreational destinations such as Mississippi Gateway and North Mississippi Regional Parks, in addition to Rush Creek and Twin Lakes Regional Trails and the planned Crow River Regional Trail. Indirectly, the WMRRT is planned to connect to Elm Creek Park Reserve via a planned extension of Medicine Lake Regional Trail which this master plan includes as part of the planning process.

Portions of the WMRRT currently exist. Specifically, a 6.5-mile stretch at the southern end traveling through Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park, connecting North Mississippi and Mississippi Gateway Regional Parks. Additionally small stretches exist in Champlin and Dayton. These segments will be accepted as-is with detailed plans for improvements and new construction outlined in Chapter 4.

**Map 1: West Mississippi River Regional Trail | Hennepin County Context**

Source: Three Rivers Park District



## METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

The Twin Cities' nationally renowned Metropolitan Regional Parks System significantly contributes to the area's high quality of life. Establishing green space for recreation and resource protection enhances the region's livability and economic strength. The Metropolitan Regional Parks System, includes 62 regional parks, park reserves and special recreation features - plus 340 miles of regional trail open to the public. Currently, there are 54,286 acres of protected land open for public use, with planned acquisition of an additional 70,000 parkland acres and 760 regional trail miles over the next 25 years to meet the region's growth expectations. The Metropolitan Regional Parks System is made up of 10 park implementing agencies consisting of six county park departments, three city park departments and the Park District.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning agency that oversees and provides partial funding of the acquisition, development and operation of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. The Metropolitan Council and park implementing agencies also develop regional park policies to protect the region's water quality; promote best management practices; and help integrate the parks system with housing, transportation and other regional priorities.

The Metropolitan Council provides guidance in the development of regional park and trail master plans. The WMRRT reflects that guidance. Each regional park or trail must have a master plan approved by the Metropolitan Council prior to receiving Metropolitan Council funding. The master plan must address boundaries and acquisition, demand, development concept, implementation schedule, development and operational costs and natural resources. Public input is encouraged throughout the master planning process. The Metropolitan Council's planning requirements help ensure consistency between the implementing agencies' and their own regional plans. The WMRRT search corridor is identified in Metropolitan Council's 2040 Regional Parks System Plan (**Map 2**).

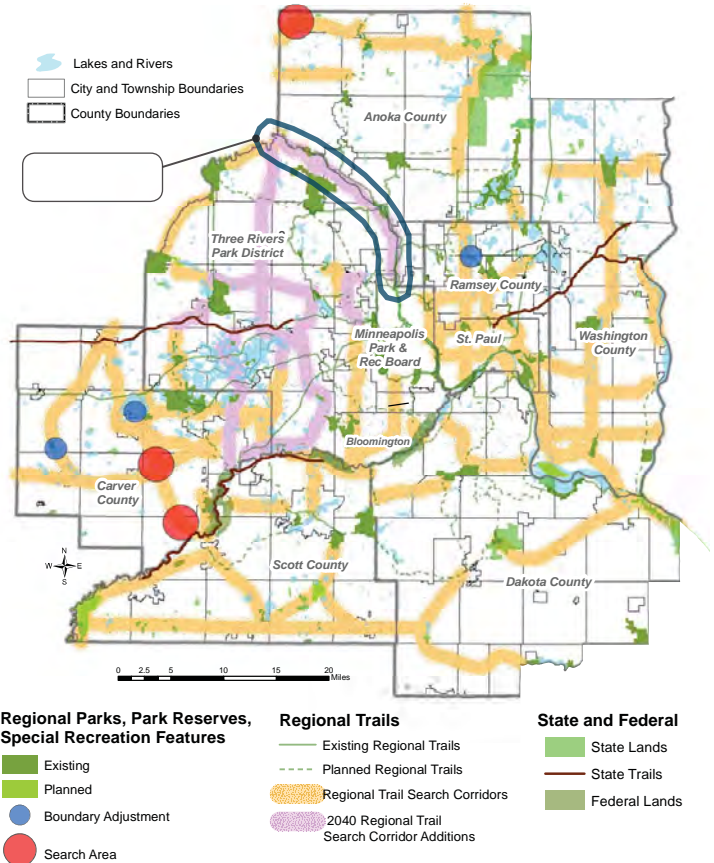
## THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

The Park District is an independent, special park district charged with the responsibilities of acquisition, development and maintenance of regional parks and trails for the benefit and use of the citizens of suburban Hennepin County, the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area and the State of Minnesota. The Park District works cooperatively with local communities, counties, public agencies, the Metropolitan Council and the State Legislature.



## Map 2: 2040 Regional Park System

Source: Metropolitan Council



The Park District's mission is to promote environmental stewardship through recreation and education in a natural resources-based park system. The Park District was established in 1957 by the Minnesota State Legislature when prominent members of the community promoted the benefits of parks in the outlying areas of Hennepin County.

## Regional Trail Planning Guidelines

The Park District manages its lands under four categories of regional open space: regional park reserves, regional parks, regional special recreation features, and regional trail corridors.

Regional trail corridors, such as the WMRRT are intended to provide recreational travel along linear pathways that transcend multiple jurisdictions and may, or may not, also serve a transportation component. In addition, regional trails follow criteria established by the Metropolitan Council and Park District:

"Regional trail corridors are carefully selected to follow natural or cultural linear features with scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural and developmental interest, connect people with places, help create a sense of place amongst the greater community, intersect with local trail, sidewalk and bicycle networks, provide access to mass transit and link components of the regional park system together."

Regional trails may function as a destination or linking regional trail or both. For either regional trail type, adjacent land with significant natural or cultural resources may be acquired as part of the trail corridor.

- **Destination regional trails** are developed as greenways or linear parks, and are distinct in that the trail itself is a destination. This type of regional trail typically is an independent facility and includes a wide corridor providing opportunities for improving wildlife habitat, protecting natural/cultural resources and providing recreational opportunities.
- **Linking regional trails** serve a greater transportation function and act as the back bone to the regional trail system by connecting the regional park system to itself and the people it serves in a logical and efficient manner.

The WMRRT will serve both a destination and linking function; however, its primary function is that of a destination trail, and as such the Park District may acquire additional land to support its destination purpose. The primary goal of the WMRRT is to celebrate the Mississippi River - a major natural and cultural resource asset to this part of the Twin Cities region. The WMRRT route was developed in a manner to offer opportunities to experience the river through viewsheds, touch points and access points where the user can physically touch the Mississippi River.

**PRECEDENT PLANNING DOCUMENTS**

The WMRRT is consistent with the vision of several agencies. This master plan serves to solidify those independent visions into one documented trail route - agreed upon by all. The WMRRT concept, generally aligned adjacent to the Mississippi River, is identified and defined by the following plans:

- Metropolitan Council 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan as a 'regional trail search corridor.'
- Hennepin County 2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan as a 'planned off-street bikeway' (Hennepin County planned bikeway system, April 2015) and as a 'proposed/ planned regional trail corridor' (Three Rivers Park District conceptual regional trail system, 2014).

In addition, the WMRRT corridor has been identified in local comprehensive plans - directed by the Metropolitan Council.

With approval and adoption of this master plan, the WMRRT ceases to simply exist as a search corridor and becomes, by Metropolitan Council terms, a planned regional trail. With this change in status, eligibility for implementation with funding partners and various stakeholders is realized.



The WMRRT will serve both a destination and linking function; however, its primary function is that of a destination trail, and as such the Park District may acquire additional land to support its destination purpose.

Source: Three Rivers Park District

**2040 REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN**  
February 2015

**Hennepin County 2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan: Making bicycling safe and comfortable**  
April 14, 2015

The WMRRT complements various previous planning documents.  
Source: Metropolitan Council & Hennepin County



Gathering WMRRT public input | Brooklyn Center, MN  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

## PROCESS PLANNING & PUBLIC INPUT

Current planning for the WMRRT began in 2015, however the notion of a regional trail alignment along the western bank of the Mississippi River has long been a desire of the Park District to incorporate into the regional system. Earlier WMRRT route planning was dependent on significant private property acquisition to construct the trail. This proposal however, was not politically or publicly palatable and consequently, the preferred WMRRT route included in this master plan concedes to allow segments of the trail within adjacent road right-of-way. This preferred WMRRT route is the most implementable option moving forward, while providing touchpoints for trail users to feel and experience the Mississippi River and its natural beauty.

### ENGAGEMENT PLAN

As part of the master plan scoping phase, a process was defined to engage the public and involve affected agencies, local units of government and local, state and federal recreation providers. As directed by the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, that engagement process must seek to mitigate existing racial, cultural or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse races, ethnic groups, classes, ages, abilities and national origin.

#### Agency Stakeholder Committee

Comprised of various local and state agencies, the Agency Stakeholder Committee ensured consistency across various complementary planning work. Participating agencies were invited during the master plan's early planning stage to discuss opportunities to coordinate the WMRRT with current trail, bikeway, recreation plans, development projects and capital improvement projects along the corridor. Invited agencies included; Anoka County, Hennepin County Department of Transportation, National Park Service, West Mississippi Watershed Commission, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

#### Advisory Committee

To understand local municipality issues and provide opportunities and avenues for comprehensive community outreach, an Advisory Committee was assembled. The committee was comprised of staff representatives from each community along the WMRRT route including the cities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center.

#### Community Outreach

Other community stakeholders within the WMRRT corridor were identified in an effort to extend engagement across boundaries. The Park District was interested in a genuine, inclusive, innovative and flexible process that allowed stakeholders a way to explore options and issues, identify partnerships and discuss concurrent projects. Alternative venues for community outreach, other than the traditional open house, were explored to try and capture members of the public who may not attend a traditional engagement open house due to work, family and child care obligations, transportation issues or other barriers. The community outreach strategy included the following directives - each described in detail regarding objectives, outcomes, successes and areas for improvement (**Table 1, following page**).

- **Build relationships with local jurisdictions and community member groups.**
- **Go to where the people are.**
- **Provide various participation mediums.**

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### THE BOTTOM LINE key message

Each planning project is unique and requires a tailored community engagement plan depending on the local social and economic demographics of the trail's service area. **Building authentic relationships and making opportunities to participate easy and convenient remains key for successful community engagement.**

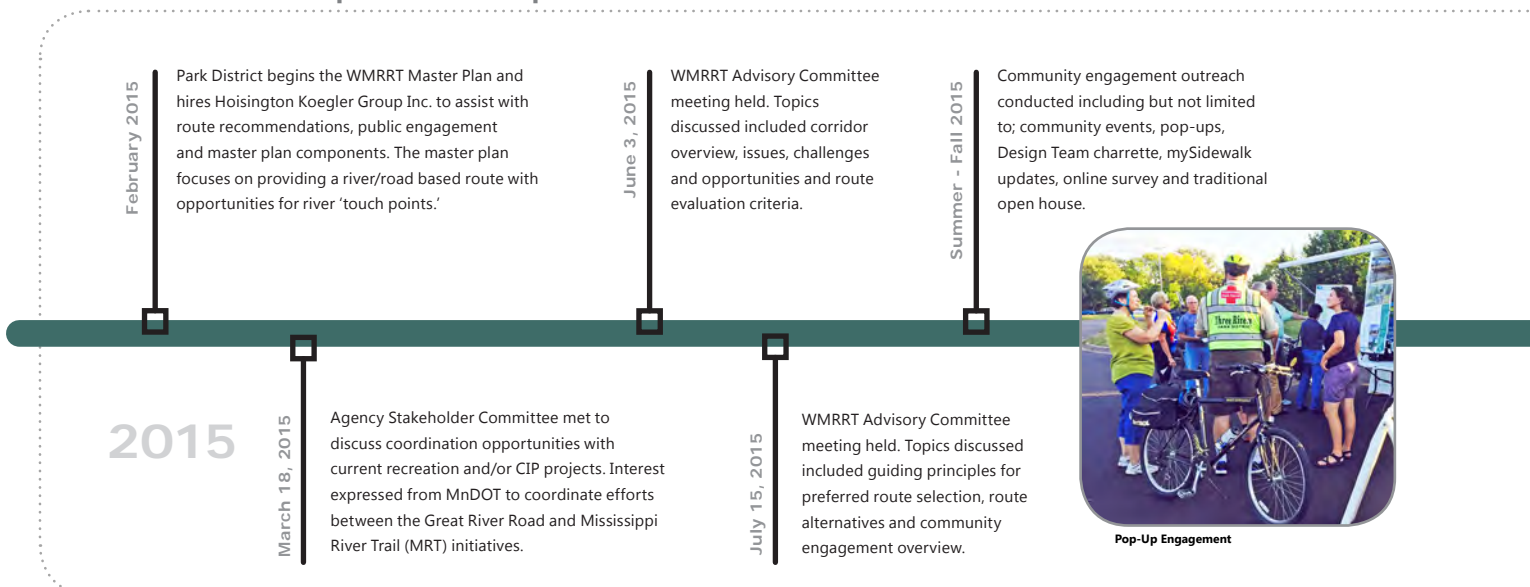
Various participation mediums were deployed to garner public feedback including the following:

1. **A project website** was established as an information clearinghouse including project background, schedule and maps, frequently asked questions, alerts for in-person participation opportunities, survey results and committee meeting agendas and minutes. Over the course of ten months (June 2015 - March 2016), over 4,200 unique website visits were recorded.
2. **A mySidewalk web page** was established to provide an online civic engagement forum. The mySidewalk framework provided opportunity to publish posts that could include; the title and text, one image and tagging capabilities including up to three locations and up to three topic categories. Collectively over the course of one year, the WMRRT mySidewalk page received over 8,450 views to various posts including alerts for in-person and online participation opportunities and results. However, the number of responses and interactions was low (9), when compared to the number of total views.
3. **An online survey**, established through Survey Monkey, was broadcast to solicit feedback regarding route evaluation principles and proposed routes. Responders could comment on each question posed, in addition to several open-ended questions regarding additional destinations and river touchpoints for consideration. The survey was posted from August to November 2015 and was available through direct and referral links through the project website and mySidewalk page. Advisory Committee members also published the survey link on their own respective city websites, listservs, newsletters and Facebook pages. In total, the survey received 19

responses. Responders generally voiced their support, expressing that this type of trail facility adjacent to the Mississippi River is desired. A full report of the online survey is provided in **Appendix A**.

4. **Traditional open house.** Determining the preferred and publicly supported WMRRT route through Dayton and Champlin required additional community outreach due to the number of routes proposed. A traditional open house was held to garner input regarding the WMRRT route and the Medicine Lake Regional Trail extension between WMRRT and Elm Creek Park Reserve. Postcard invites were mailed to each property owner adjacent to the route alternatives with approximately 45 open house attendees attending to provide input. Attendees were generally supportive of the WMRRT route along Dayton/West River Road (CR 12) - however, the trail connector to Elm Creek Park Reserve received much attention. As Dayton continues to expand and develop, the desire for off-street trails increases. This request for more trails has been corroborated by several Dayton planning efforts including the Minnesota Design Team charrette and Comprehensive Plan surveys. Inevitably conflict arises when growing communities evolve - which often times reveals itself by distrusting the proposed change. The Park District heeded the direction from Dayton staff, elected officials and city parks committee members to continue the Elm Creek Park Reserve trail connector route selection process and ultimately recommended the preferred route expressed in Chapter 4 through group consensus.

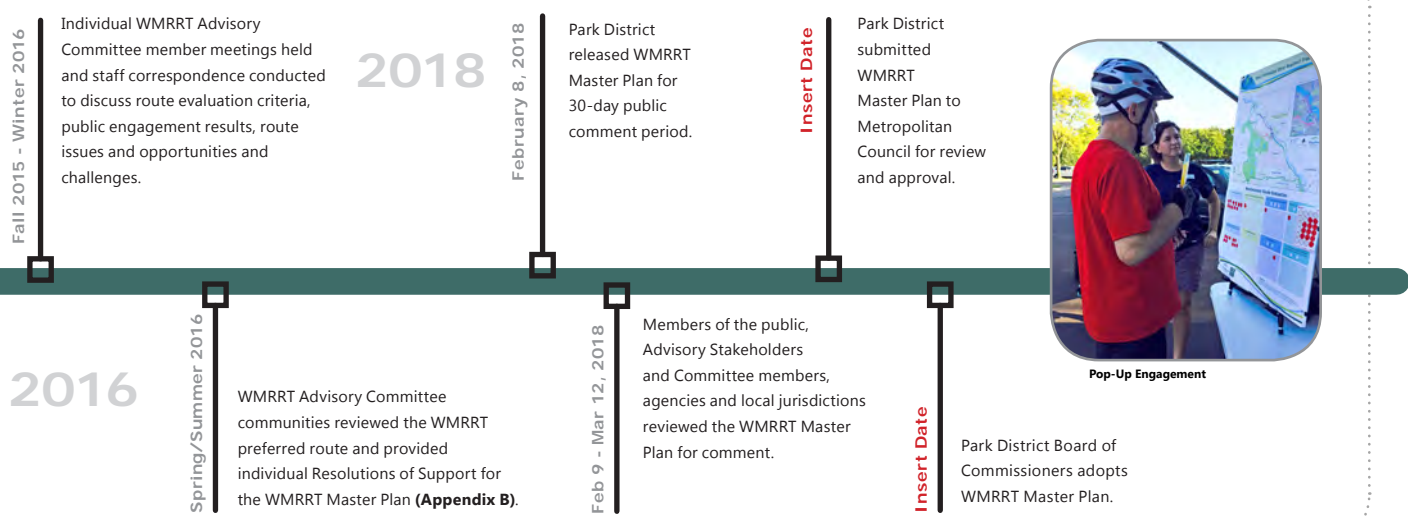
## Master Plan Timeline milestones that shaped the master plan



**Table 1: Community Outreach Methods, Audiences & Recommendations**

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Strategy	Audiences Contacted	Results	Recommendations
<b>Build relationships with local jurisdictions and community member groups</b>	<b>Affiliated Groups</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black Girls Do Bike Twin Cities</li> <li>Major Taylor Bicycling Club</li> <li>Capable Partners</li> <li>Izaak Walton League</li> <li>Create Community Church</li> <li>Riverway Church</li> <li>Riverview Apartments</li> <li>Riverwood Estate Apartments</li> <li>Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council</li> </ul>	Genuine and inclusive relationship building takes time and most importantly - trust. When responses were obtained from community member groups, participation varied across groups. Most groups were supportive of the WMRRT, but many provided noncommittal response regarding outreach participation. In working these groups, it became apparent that awareness was a key barrier to active participation within the public engagement process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Continue to pursue and foster relationships with local jurisdictions and interested community groups.</b></li> </ul> <p>Oftentimes, the length of time between a master plan and an actual trail construction project can span years. Staff and elected official turnover naturally occurs and those that reviewed and approved the plan may not necessarily be those who implement actual construction plans. To ensure continued momentum with local jurisdictions and community member groups, Park District staff check-ins and/or listening sessions should be planned and coordinated as-needed to discuss the WMRRT progress and implementation schedule.</p>
<b>Go to where the people are</b>	<b>Community Events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brooklyn Park's Tater Daze</li> <li>Brooklyn Center's Earle Brown Days</li> <li>Dayton Design Team Visit</li> </ul> <b>Pop-Up Events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mississippi Gateway (formerly Coon Rapids Dam) Regional Park</li> <li>Champlin Farmers Market</li> <li>Riverview Apartments</li> <li>Coon Rapids Dam Reopening</li> </ul>	During these events, the public was asked to vote for their preferred WMRRT route and to give feedback on trailhead amenities. This method of engagement provide to be effective because participants could give feedback quickly and in a low-pressure environment. Avenues for continued participation were advertised including feedback loops to the project website. Participation included people from various genders, ages, social statuses and ethnic groups. Over 150 participants provided feedback at these events, and most responders had similar findings regarding route preference and trailhead amenities information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Continue to go to where people are already congregating.</b></li> </ul> <p>Careful and deliberate feedback planning can produce effective results when existing events are analyzed in advance to understand the prospective audience, message and requested feedback. Not all events are successful platforms for every project - however even an event that did not produce much feedback content builds relationships that may become invaluable at a future date.</p>
<b>Provide various participation mediums</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project website</li> <li>mySidewalk webpage</li> <li>Online survey</li> <li>Traditional open house</li> </ul>	While traditional methods of feedback were offered, including opportunities to contact master plan staff and submit comments via phone and US mail, the WMRRT Master Plan explored several web-based platforms for community outreach. The WMRRT Master Plan acknowledges that while web-based participation does not capture all of the targeted user groups due to technology limitations, it does offer an opportunity to provided feedback 7 days a week, 24 hours a day for responders who otherwise may have barriers to in-person participation. In addition, those who received information or participated via online mediums exceed the reaches of the immediate trail service area - meaning a larger regional context could be accessed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Plan and design the master plan project website to be a one-stop shop.</b></li> </ul> <p>The project website, mySidewalk web page and online survey aided the master plan by providing and collecting information and creating a two-way feedback loop for event and survey results. However, directing local jurisdictions and the interested public to three different web locations proved to be confusing. Providing meaningful feedback needs to be seamless and easy. A one-stop website is recommended, with multi-faceted capabilities of providing a stopping place to glean all the information needed to understand the project and provide feedback.</p>



## MASTER PLAN REVIEW AT VARIOUS LEVELS

Elements of the WMRRT Master Plan have been reviewed by the public, multiple agency stakeholders, advisory committees and local jurisdictions at specified intervals throughout the course of the planning process. By nature of a 20-mile regional trail, which crosses 4 local jurisdictions, the WMRRT Master Plan review process was complex. However, this complexity provided a sound foundation for a viable and implementable regional trail route. Having the WMRRT Master Plan reviewed and supported by so many individuals and organizations means that it can be utilized as a tool for seeking assistance for construction and ongoing operations and maintenance.

### Public Review

Community outreach conducted throughout 2015 produced a publicly preferred WMRRT route, in addition to a comprehensive list of various items for continued consideration. Over 350 individuals have personally been involved in some type of planning feedback prior to any official agency or local jurisdictional review approvals.

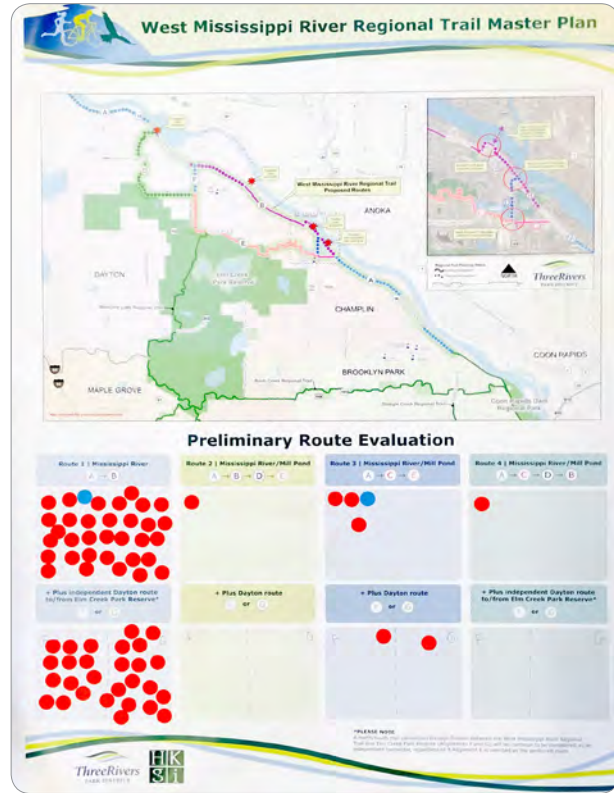
The feedback provided conclusive public support for a WMRRT route that provides Mississippi River touch points, connections to local destinations and ancillary trail amenities at critical points. Proximity to the Mississippi River proved to be an important deciding factor in route preference, as the public reacted unfavorably to proposed WMRRT routes that diverged excessively from the Mississippi River corridor. It was also exemplified that a WMRRT route with large tracts of private property impacts was unacceptable. WMRRT routes that were proposed adjacent to roadways, but separate from lanes of traffic, were reacted to favorably. Many commenters noted the lack of off-road trails along the proposed WMRRT corridor in Dayton and Champlin, and were excited about the prospect of safely being able to access the Mississippi River, commercial nodes, local and regional parks and neighborhoods.

The full public comment summary report can be found in **Appendix A. The formal public 30-day review process took place from February 9 - March 12, 2018, after the release of the WMRRT Master Plan draft by the Park District Board of Commissioners.**

### Agency Stakeholder Review

The WMRRT Master Plan review process included collaboration among multiple jurisdictions. The magnitude of the Mississippi River's iconic status crosses national, state, regional and local levels - and subsequently, this master plan sought to provide consistency between all agency stakeholders and their complementary planning efforts.

- National Park Service.** The entire WMRRT route follows the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NRRRA), operated by the National Park Service (NPS). The Mississippi NRRRA also was recently named as the nation's second National Water Trail, established by the U.S. Department of the Interior and administered by the NPS. Park District staff ensured consistency between planning efforts through review of the 2017 Mississippi NRRRA Water Trail Plan and continued involvement with the Trails and



Route preference 'voting' occurred at various events throughout the WMRRT Master Plan process, solidifying popular routes.

Source: Three Rivers Park District

### WEST MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL TRAIL

**Dear Riverwood Estates Resident,**

Three Rivers Park District (Park District) is a park system in the west suburban Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. We manage almost 27,000 acres of parks throughout the metro - including the Twin Lakes and Shingle Creek Regional Trails within Brooklyn Center.

A new 15 mile regional trail, named **West Mississippi River Regional Trail (WMRRT)**, is being master planned from Brooklyn Center to Dayton through the cities of Brooklyn Park and Champlin (see map at right). The proposed WMRRT will fill a gap in the multimodal recreation and transportation system with a safe, accessible and enjoyable off-road trail option. The WMRRT will expand access to the Mississippi River - providing multiple opportunities to 'touch the river.'

Trail users will have access via the proposed regional trail to North Mississippi River and Coon Rapids Dam Regional Parks, Elm Creek Park Reserve, local parks and trails, and a series of existing trails including Twin Lakes, Shingle Creek, Rush Creek Regional Trails and proposed Crow River Regional Trail.

10 miles of the WMRRT are complete through Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park (represented by the green solid line). However, trail planners have identified a 0.33 mile missing segment of the WMRRT located in Brooklyn Center along Willow Lane North, adjacent to the Riverwood Estates apartments (represented by the green dotted line).

**West Mississippi River Regional Trail Corridor Overview & Project Location**

**What does this mean for you?**

When trails are located adjacent to residential, they can support a safe mode of non-motorized transportation in addition to a healthy recreation option. As seen in the map at right, the WMRRT is proposed adjacent to the Riverwood Estates apartment complex and will complete a 0.33 mile missing segment which will establish a continuous 10 mile stretch of the 15 mile WMRRT corridor.

Implementation of this missing trail segment is several years out. Once the approved master plan is complete and adopted, the Park District can begin to seek funds to construct. Additional opportunity to provide input will be given once financing is secured and design has begun.

Throughout the fall of 2015, the Park District will be seeking community input to inform the project. **Park District planning staff are interested to know if you have any questions or concerns that you would like known.** Please review the various ways you can participate and comment:

Project Website: [www.threeriversparkdistrict.com](http://www.threeriversparkdistrict.com)  
 Take our survey! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7Y2G533>  
 Join the discussion: <http://tiny.cc/qjpm4x>

**Still have questions?**  
 Ann Reavley, Planner & Project Manager  
 P: 763-694-1103  
 E: [areavley@threeriversparkdistrict.org](mailto:areavley@threeriversparkdistrict.org)  
 Three Rivers Park District  
 3900 Aurora Lane North  
 Plymouth, MN 55441

**West Mississippi River Regional Trail Brooklyn Center - 0.33 mile missing segment**

Detail map showing the missing Brooklyn Center segment near Elm and 252.

Localized outreach methods were developed, including informational mailers to specific target areas.

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Open Space Partnership (TOSP), a coalition of agencies and organizations working to achieve, “a continuous linear trail, open space and alternative transportation system along the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro.”

- **Metropolitan Council.** Preliminary review and check-in with Metropolitan Council staff occurred at the onset of the WMRRT Master Plan with positive indications for a successful planning initiative. Consistency with the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan’s search corridor intent was verified by Metropolitan Council staff for both the WMRRT and Medicine Lake Regional Trail extension. After the formal 30-day public comment period, and any substantial text changes made in accordance with stakeholder input, the WMRRT Master Plan was submitted to the Park District Board of Commissioners for approval to submit to Metropolitan Council for review and approval. Upon approval by Metropolitan Council on [insert date], the Park District adopted the WMRRT Master Plan on [insert date].
- **MnDNR.** In addition to the Mississippi NRRRA Water Trail national status, the Mississippi River is also recognized by the MnDNR as a State Water Trail. Also noteworthy, the portion of the Mississippi River that is adjacent to the WMRRT - north of Anoka - is designated as a state wild and scenic river. Master plan coordination was coordinated through the larger MNRAA Water Trail Plan, as MnDNR staff are also members of the TOSP and coordinate their planning initiatives with NPS.
- **MnDOT.** WMRRT crosses MnDOT jurisdiction at Highways 169, 610 and Interstate 694. MnDOT also has involvement with the Great River Road program, as the entire stretch of the WMRRT is designated as the Great River Road National Scenic Byway. MnDOT also coordinated route selection of U.S. Bicycle Route 45 (also named the Mississippi River Trail, MRT) which roughly follows the river 600 miles from its source at Itasca State Park to the Iowa border. Located largely on road shoulders, the MRT route generally aligns with the proposed WMRRT. Early coordination between the Park District and MnDOT expressed favorable coexistence within the WMRRT proposed corridor for both the Great River Road National Scenic Byway and MRT. The long-term plan is that the WMRRT fulfills/becomes the MRT route for this Hennepin County portion of the larger trail system.
- **Hennepin County Department of Transportation.** Hennepin County Department of Transportation staff provided positive WMRRT feedback as the route is consistent with the Hennepin County 2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan. As the WMRRT route moves from master plan to individual construction plans, continued coordination is required for any trail segment within Hennepin County road right-of-way. Of specific note are the unconstructed WMRRT segments through Dayton and Champlin - which through community outreach efforts, have documented public concern with the current posted traffic speed limits and driveway locations along Dayton/ West River Road/CR12.

### Advisory Committee Review

Upon staff agreement of the publicly preferred WMRRT route, Advisory Committee members - on behalf Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center - all formally presented the WMRRT route and preliminary master plan framework to their commissions and elected officials for feedback. As an integral part of the WMRRT Master Plan’s planning foundation, Advisory Committee members provided Resolutions of Support as a product of that jurisdictional review, included in **Appendix B**.

Local jurisdiction feedback opportunities extend beyond the initial Resolution of Support. As segments of the WMRRT become financially supported and programmed, local municipal input again becomes important to ensure the trail’s continued success. As referenced earlier, final implementation of the entire WMRRT corridor spans many years. It is the WMRRT Master Plan’s intent that trail construction project managers engage municipal stakeholders early and often to understand important site level issues and opportunities that present themselves. Oftentimes trail construction can occur simultaneously with local public works projects, so an ongoing understanding of local capital improvement plans is important for WMRRT implementors.



Regional trail users experience the outdoors via various conditions (i.e adjacent to roadways, through parkland etc.).

Source: Three Rivers Park District

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Crossing the Mississippi River at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park | Brooklyn Park, MN  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

# 3

## RESEARCH TRENDS, DEMANDS & FORECASTS

WMRRT is anticipated to become a significant regional trail destination due to its connectivity with recreational amenities including existing and proposed regional trails, regional park reserves and to various retail and commercial nodes. National, state, regional and Park District recreational use trend studies support continued expansion, improvement and implementation of trails. Recreational studies also indicate that of the wide varieties of recreation activities, trails appear to be the common thread across most demographics groups.



### THE BOTTOM LINE key message

Parks and trails support an active, healthy lifestyle for all who use them. Parks and **trails build strong families and communities, nourish bodies and minds, attract economic development and growth and preserve and protect the natural environment.**

### NATIONAL RECREATION TRENDS

According to the Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report (2016), nearly half of all Americans - 48.4 percent - participated in at least one outdoor activity in 2015. That equates to 142.4 million participants, who went on a collective 11.7 billion outdoor outings. While the actual number of outdoor participants increased by one million over the one-year period, the overall participation rate remained the same due to population increase. Aspirational participation, which measures the physical activities that interest non-participants, showed that Americans are often drawn to outdoor recreation over sports, fitness and leisure activities. In fact all aspirational participants, regardless of age, reported bicycling in their top three most appealing activities. The report details youth, young adult and adult participation rates and frequencies for popular types of recreation. Running, jogging and trail running topped each age cohorts recreation participation list, followed closely by bicycling.

The Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures technical document (2010) has reported that the number and percentage of people ages 16 and older participating in walking and bicycling continue to increase nation-wide, giving a positive outlook for regional trail development. Walking for pleasure and bicycling report in at over 200 and 88.3 million participants respectively (2005-2009) - numbers that have been steadily increasing since the report's first recorded numbers in 1982.

The Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures document further investigates recreational participation by ethnic populations, concluding that minority populations nation-wide are still underrepresented in outdoor recreation overall - which is also consistent with Minnesota data. However, of those minority populations that were surveyed who did participate in outdoor activities (the largest minority groups in the United States being African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanics), running/jogging and trail running ranked highest as their top selection (ages 6 and older).



The number and percentage of people ages 16 and older who walk and bike continue to increase nation-wide.

Source: Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures (2010)

### MINNESOTA RECREATION TRENDS

The Minnesota's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), published by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), provides goals and strategies that reinforce the vision and strategic directions of that comprise the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. It further defines the geographic

pattern of high growth continues to focus on greater Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. This new growth will fuel demands for near-home recreation opportunities in these areas. Two-thirds of all recreation use occurs within a half-hour drive from home; creating the need for outdoor recreation lands near areas of higher population density and growth. Sustaining existing outdoor recreation facilities for future generations remains a key issue.

The primary goal of the SCORP is to increase participation in outdoor recreation by all Minnesotans and visitors. By increasing recreation facilities and increasing them in or near populated areas and populated areas with increasing diverse populations, the WMRRT will help meet this goal and start to respond to some of the trends and issues identified in the SCORP.

The SCORP cites several studies showing that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. The relative participation of different segments of the population in nature-based outdoor recreation, together with their respective population growth rates, create significant challenges ahead in terms of park and trail utilization, as well as maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments.

### TWIN CITIES REGIONAL RECREATION TRENDS

The Metropolitan Council notes that the Twin Cities metropolitan area is projected to be home to almost 3.7 million people by 2040, a gain of 824,000 residents from 2010. With this growth will come new jobs, greater racial and ethnic diversity, expanded economic opportunities and increased tax revenues. In addition, the Twin Cities populations is changing in ways that will influence park and trail decision making:

- Our region is aging rapidly. More than one in five residents will be age 65 and older in 2040, compared to one in nine in 2010.
- The region will gain 391,000 households by 2040.
- By 2040, 40% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of people of color is greater among younger age groups; 54% of residents under age 18 will be people of color in 2040.
- Broad-based trends consistently indicate that recreation participation is far greater for white and/or non-Hispanic populations within the state and nation than for people of color, according to the SCORP.

Metropolitan Council demographers have identified that about half of the total increase in population for the region from 1990 to 2000 was contributed to immigration of first-generation U.S. citizens and the births of their children. This trend was expected to continue through 2010, if not longer. Within the region, there are several prevalent immigrant groups: Hmong/Southeast Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Somali and West Africans.

To date, this influx of new immigrant groups are generally not participating in regional trail use at the same rates as non-immigrant populations. The Park District is committed to better understanding this phenomenon and will continue to study this further with the ultimate goal of attracting regional trail users which mirror the demographics of the region. Once this

is understood, this will be reviewed to consider steps to better serve those community groups which may include signage in multiple languages, learn to bike/commute classes, bike rental/ bike share or similar.

### GENERATIONAL RECREATION TRENDS

In the U.S., there are six living generations, which are six distinct groups of people. They have had collective experiences as they aged and therefore have similar ideals and stereotypes. Social generational theory provides an opportunity to help understand current and projected generational tendencies related to outdoor recreational trends. Regional trails appeal in some form to all six generations for various reasons - whether that be healthy living objectives or quality of life factors.

The Park District continues to explore how to retain existing regional trail users and remain relevant to the changing needs of future generations. This may be in the form of more identified vehicle parking for users with ambulatory needs or more pet-waste stations for young adults that use Park District trails with dogs. These generational recreation trends require occasional review - because as trail users age, so do their desires and needs for a robust regional trail system (**Table 2, following page**).



Photo credits (this page and next): Sixty and Me, Quikbyke, MnDNR, Bike Bandit, Ann Rexine & Momentum Magazine

**Table 2: Generational Recreation Theory**

Source: Three Rivers Park District & various sources

Generation Class	Collective Experiences	Recreation Trends	Design Recommendations
<b>Greatest Generation</b> • 1901-1926 • Ages 90+ • 4 million population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffered and persevered through Great Depression and then fought in WWII</li> <li>Known for personal responsibility, humble nature, work ethic, prudent saving and faithful commitment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mature adults who are interested and able, connect with outdoor recreation through walking, hiking and light exercise.</li> <li>Interest in biking has increased, as mature adults look to keep muscles and joints healthy and strong. Biking also maintains range of motion, movement and balance. This does decline however, as this cohort ages.</li> <li>Spending time outdoors and staying physically active can have significant health benefits for older adults. Physical and mental benefits include increased vitamin D levels, improved immunity, reduced feelings of anxiety and depression, increased energy, more restful sleep, better attention levels and better recovery rates from injury and illness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-use trails are important for aging adults - however they feel more safe when bicyclists and pedestrians are separated.</li> <li>Trail intersections and crossings must have truncated dome treatments with adequate crossing times.</li> <li>Pavement must be well-maintained, free of obstructions, non-slip and wide enough for wheelchairs.</li> <li>Seating at predictable intervals is imperative.</li> </ul>
<b>Silent Generation/ Traditionalists</b> • 1927-1945 • Ages 72-90 • 30 million population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grew up during the Great Depression and WWII and either fought in WWII or were children.</li> <li>Majority are retirees who are known for traditional family values, simplicity and comfort, demand for quality and financial security.</li> </ul>		
<b>Baby Boomers</b> • 1946-1964 • Ages 53-71 • 76 million population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born during a spike in population after WWII and was known as the largest living generation until the Millennials recently outpaced them.</li> <li>Grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War. Known for experimentalism, individualism and social cause orientation.</li> <li>Can be distrustful of government.</li> </ul>		
<b>Generation X</b> • 1965-1980 • Ages 37-52 • 66 million population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generation born between two larger generations (Boomers and Millennials).</li> <li>First generation to develop ease and comfort with technology.</li> <li>Known for informality, independence, multi-tasking, entrepreneurs and family time values.</li> <li>Can be distrustful of institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take a more lighthearted attitude than their predecessors, and approach outdoor activity more as a sport.</li> <li>Risk, challenge and adrenaline are important motivators for participating in outdoor activities. They embraced competition and particularly risk, pushing back the limits of every outdoor sport - and inventing some new ones of their own. The term "extreme sports" is associated with Generation X.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High demand for local trail access to parks, trails and destinations (library, restaurant, commercial etc.) - which complements active family lifestyles. This generation has influenced the real estate market and community planners to answer this recreational need nationwide - promoting access to parks, recreation amenities and programming.</li> </ul>
<b>Generation Y/ Millennials 1981-2000</b> • 1981-2004* • Ages 13-36 • 80 million population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grew up with technology (computers, cell phones, internet, etc.).</li> <li>Largest living generation (surpassing Boomers). Expected to continue growing until 2036 as a result of immigration.</li> <li>Known to be informal, more culturally and racially tolerant, entrepreneurs, acceptant of change, achievement oriented and financially savvy with need for instant gratification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to social media and access to the internet, Millennials are not used to feeling alone. Thus, they are not looking to spend a quiet day alone in a park.</li> <li>Readily share recreation experiences in real-time.</li> <li>As this generation delays traditional marriage and families, pet ownership has increased.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Millennials like to stay active, so parks with trails for biking, running and open fields for group activities are attractive.</li> <li>Park and trails with water access, and pet waste stations for dogs is appealing.</li> </ul>
<b>Generation Z/ Digital Natives</b> • 2004 - present • Ages 0 - 12 • 74 million population and growing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First living generation to exclusively grow up with technology (computers, cell phones, internet, etc.), which equates to true digital natives.</li> <li>Growing up in a world where options are unlimited but their time is not.</li> <li>Quick adapters to sorting and assessing large amounts of information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While this generation's recreational identity and interests are still developing, enticing them away from screen-time and into the outdoors will continue to be a challenge for park and recreation planners, practitioners and designers. Recreation planners and practitioners are currently strategizing how to incorporate quality screen-time into outdoor play, nature and exercise.</li> </ul>	

**GENERAL NOTE:** Generation classes, years, ages and populations are estimates - varying sources will all offer slightly difference estimates.

\* Pew Research Center defines Millennials as being born from 1981 onwards, with no chronological end point set yet. Demographers William Straus and Neil Howe define Millennials as born between 1982 -2004.



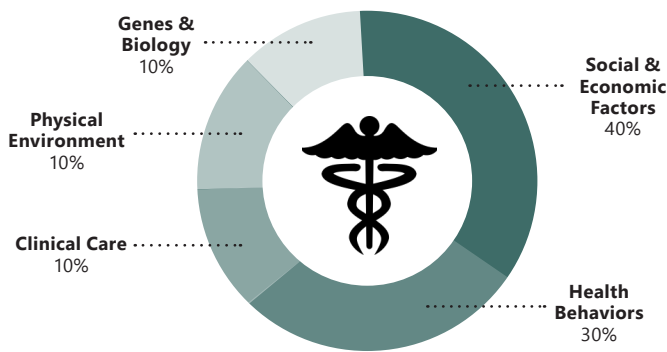
## CREATING HEALTH EQUITY

Minnesota, on average, ranks among the healthiest states in the nation. But those averages do not tell the whole story. Minnesota has some of the greatest health disparities in the country between whites and people of color. America ranks 27th among affluent nations in life expectancy and 30th in infant mortality. At the same time, our nation spent more than \$3.2 trillion dollars on health care in 2015, more than any other country.<sup>1</sup> Health care spending per person continues to grow faster than the American economy. Annual premiums for family coverage have nearly doubled from 2002 - 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as seen in **Graph 1**, clinical care only accounts for 10 percent of a person's health determinant. The largest determinants of a person's health is based upon social and economic factors (income, housing, insurance coverage, care giving) and health behaviors (activity/exercise, nutrition, smoking, obesity, substance abuse, etc.).

**Graph 1: Determinants of Health**

Source: Minnesota Department of Health



Recreation providers can have a direct and positive impact on a person's health by creating accessible and affordable access to parks and trails. Direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults. Research findings recognize the following health benefits:

- Improved physical activity
- Improved nutrition
- Reduced stress
- Enhance cognitive abilities
- Improve self discipline
- Improve academic performance
- Reduce ADD symptoms
- Improve creative problem solving
- Improve social relationships

A recent MnDOT study<sup>3</sup> has described that physical activity can prevent illness and death from chronic diseases - specifically MnDOT concludes that bicycling three times per week provides the following:

- 46% lower odds of metabolic syndrome
- 31% lower odds of obesity
- 28% lower odds of hypertension

In turn, these bicycling benefits are estimated to save Minnesota residents between \$100 - \$500 million per year in medical related costs. This study's research allows recreation planners the ability to more accurately represent the cost- benefits of

new trail projects. It also provides clear direction to promote active transportation through fostered relationships between park and trail agencies, transportation departments and health care officials.

## PARK DISTRICT REGIONAL TRAIL TRENDS

Visitation to the Park District's regional trails is now estimated at nearly 5 million visits per year. The number of trail miles has grown from 56 miles (2009) to 140 miles (2016). Use patterns within the Park District's system of parks and trails have also changed. The Boomers who used to bring their children to Park District parks are now empty-nesters, and they have flocked to the regional trails to get exercise and to get outdoors. Biking, as a form of transportation, has gained traction over the past five years throughout the metro region and more users are now bike commuting. The Park District's work with local communities and Hennepin County has resulted in a regional trail network that is better connected to the local "feeder" trail, sidewalk and bike lane networks, making the system more accessible to a larger portion of the population.

In 2011, the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail surpassed 500,000 visits - marking the first time in the Park District's history that a regional trail received a half million visits. Now 6 years later, the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail remains the most visited in the Park District's system; second only to Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail (1,548,900 visits in 2016) within the Metropolitan Regional Parks System.

Of the 16 Park District regional trails that received visitor counts in 2016, six received 400,000 or more visits. For comparison purposes, five of the 21 park reserves, regional parks and/or special recreation features received 400,000 or more visits. As of 2016, regional trail visits accounted for over 45 percent of all visits to the Park District's facilities. Trail visitation is expected to continue to increase at a rate greater than the expected increase in population, and to increase at a rate faster than expected visitation increases to the Park District's park units.

### Regional Trail | User Data

Metropolitan Council data reveals that regional trails are most heavily visited during the spring, summer, and fall seasons with summer receiving 38 percent of annual visits, spring and fall each receiving 25 percent of annual visits, and winter receiving 12 percent of annual visits (Graph 2). Winter has seen more seasonal growth, in part due to warmer winters, the increased use of trails for commuting, and the use of trails for year-round exercise regimens.

Park District research shows that summer trends continue to indicate that biking is, and will remain, the predominant regional trail activity at 72 percent, followed by walking (18 percent), and running (8 percent). In-line skating, mobility-device users and other miscellaneous uses make up the balance of trail users. However, Park District winter data reveals a different narrative. Bicycling drops significantly during the winter season, while the walking and running groups continue to utilize regional trails (**Graph 2, following page**).

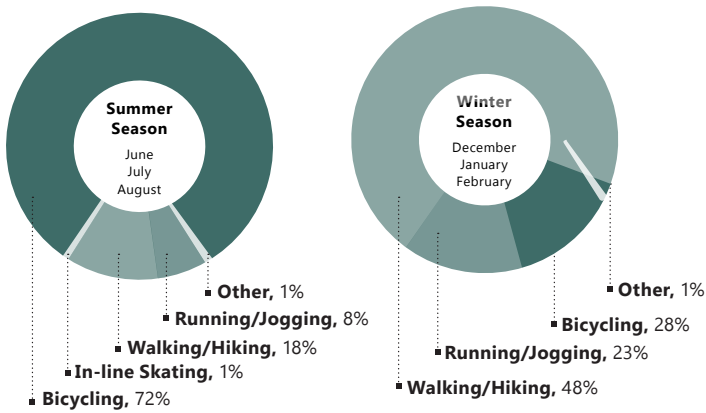
<sup>1</sup> Center for Health and Learning

<sup>2</sup> Kaiser Institute

<sup>3</sup> Assessing the Economic Impact & Health Benefits of Bicycling in Minnesota, MnDOT, 2016.

**Graph 2: Regional Trail Use by Activity & Season**

Source: Three Rivers Park District



The vast majority of regional trail visitors use trails for recreation and exercise. However, regional trail use for commuting/transportation purposes is on the rise. Recently, the Park District significantly expanded the regional trail system within urban, fully-developed communities. This increased commuting/transportation regional trail use is captured in current Park District data that shows 23 percent of all regional trail visits are now for commuting purposes (up from about 1 percent in 1998, and up from 12 percent in 2009). Regional trails that are paved, with few stop conditions, limited interactions with vehicles and with seamless connections to employment, retail and commercial centers have a greater percentage of regional trail visits attributed to commuting than regional trails without these three attributes. While these certainly are not the only factors in determining the desirability of a regional trail corridor for commuting purposes, they appear to play an important role.



**Bicycle commuting is increasing as more residential housing opportunities arise near regional trail access points.**  
Source: Cup of Jo, Joanna Goddard

**Regional Trail | Visitor Preferences**

Bicycle and pedestrian studies from across the country, and over the last twenty-five years, have come to the same general conclusions regarding user preferences - regardless of user type. Trails with these characteristics will attract visitors from greater distances, will have greater annual use, and will produce more enjoyable experiences for trail users:

- Natural settings (scenic, vegetation, limited evidence of the built environment, etc.)
- A diversity of natural settings (woodlands, wetlands, prairies, etc.)
- Visual and physical separation from vehicles.
- A continuous and contiguous route with limited stop conditions.
- A smooth surface (either paved or aggregate).
- Connectivity with destinations and other bicycle/pedestrian facilities.
- Opportunities for loops.
- Trail amenities - drinking water, mileage markers, restrooms, and wayfinding.

Some bicycle and pedestrian studies also indicate that participants are willing to spend more money and travel longer distances to utilize facilities that incorporate these preferences. In recognition of user preferences, the WMRRT route was selected to provide linkages to regional recreation destinations; balance recreation and natural resources; minimize stop conditions, provide a safe, off-road, multi-modal transportation option, and ultimately, increase the desirability of the regional trail.

**WMRRT Projected Use & Visitation**

The percentage breakdown by activity of WMRRT will generally mirror Park District regional trail activity trends. Bicycling will be the primary regional trail use, with ancillary uses such as walking, running and in-line skating capturing a smaller percentage of the total use. These expected uses remain consistent throughout the trail corridor with the exception of where the regional trail passes through commercial areas. In these locations, it is anticipated that the regional trail will receive an increased percentage of pedestrian activity associated with the sidewalk network.

Seasonal use percentages for the WMRRT are expected to be consistent with regional trail seasonal use with 88 percent of visitation occurring in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. Winter use of the WMRRT is dependent on weather conditions, available budget and the assistance of local communities to maintain the trail. At the time this master plan was written, it is anticipated that the local communities will maintain the regional trail during the winter months as resources allow and demand warrants it.

When fully constructed, the WMRRT is projected to generate 240,000 annual visits. This visitation estimate is calculated based on the following cumulative methodology: 1) connectivity to existing regional recreational amenities, 2) destination aesthetic qualities along the trail corridor and, 3) connection to commercial areas (**Appendix C, Visitation Methodology**). Park District studies indicate that 50 percent of regional trail users live within 1.6 miles from the trail (core service area) and 75 percent of users live within 3.5 miles of the trail (primary service area) (**Map 3, following page**). In addition, due to the regional trail's destination qualities, it can be expected that the regional trail will draw users from a larger Twin Cities service area.

**Map 3: West Mississippi River Regional Trail | Service Area**

Source: Three Rivers Park District

