

Regional Park Grant Program

Program Manual



MN Department of Natural Resources

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REGIONAL PARK CRITERIA

The Regional Park Grant Program is available for parks located outside the seven county metropolitan area. The following criteria were developed based on an evaluation completed by the Association of Minnesota Counties in consultation with an advisory committee. These criteria were submitted to the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) in 2005 in response to the LCMR Park Study Group Report. These criteria are used to determine eligibility for the Regional Park Grant Program.

- 1) Size: 100+ acres (with exceptions based on use characteristics, special features, etc.)
- 2) Use: Evidence that the park serves at least a regional clientele (as opposed to mostly local). Other related factors may include evidence that the facility draws tourists from outside the local area.
- 3) Recreation Activities Offered: The park should provide outdoor recreation facilities and activities that are primarily natural resource based (camping, picnicking, hiking, swimming, boating, canoeing, fishing, nature study). A related measure is the range of these activities accommodated within the park (e.g., a park with a beach, campground and boat launch facilities is more likely to attract a regional clientele than a park with only one of these facilities).
- 4) Special Features: Unique or unusual geologic features, historically significant sites, zoos, or parks containing characteristics that are of statewide significance.
- 5) Scarcity of Recreational Resources: The park provides public natural resource based recreational opportunities that are not otherwise available within a reasonable distance. These might include water-based activities, such as swimming, fishing and boating; interpretive nature trails; public campgrounds; etc.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The Regional Park Grant Program assists public regional park organizations outside of the seven county metropolitan area in acquiring parkland and developing or redeveloping outdoor recreation facilities. Applications must be submitted by **March 31** to be eligible for funding assistance for the current year. Applicants are eligible to receive more than one grant.

FUNDING

The program finances projects using state dollars authorized by the Minnesota State Legislature. Typically, the state dollars available are either state bond dollars or Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund dollars recommended by the Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). In addition to state funds, federal funds may be available through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON).

GRANT AWARDS AND MATCH REQUIREMENTS

Grant awards are typically for 60 percent of the total eligible project costs. The remaining 40 percent "local share" can consist of cash or the value of materials, labor and equipment usage provided by the local sponsor or by local donations or any combination thereof. The total project cost must be at least \$40,000. Grant agreements generally expire within 24 months and projects must be completed by then.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS:

Public regional park organizations outside the seven county metropolitan area.

Note: The applicant must be the current or intended owner and manager of the property to be acquired or developed. Multi-organization collaboration is not required for this program.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS:

1. Acquisition of land for future development of outdoor recreation facilities. Lands acquired with this grant program must be open and available for public use within one year from the date of acquisition. Recreation facilities must be developed within three years from the date of acquisition.
2. Development, redevelopment or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation facilities on land already owned by the applicant.
3. A combination of land acquisition and development, redevelopment or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation facilities.

ELIGIBLE RECREATION FACILITIES:

One or more of the following facilities must be included in a proposed project.

- Boat/Canoe Access Sites
- Campgrounds
- Fishing Piers/Shore Fishing Areas
- Ice/In-Line Skating Rinks/Parks
- Nature Study/Observation Areas
- Picnic Shelters
- Playgrounds
- Swimming Beaches and Outdoor Pools
- Trails (non-motorized internal park trails)

ELIGIBLE RECREATION SUPPORT FACILITIES:

The following facilities are also eligible for funding as part of a grant application that contains at least one facility from the eligible recreation facilities list above.

- Change Houses, Restrooms, Shower Buildings and Warming Houses
- Fencing, Lighting and Signs
- Landscaping and Natural Area Restoration
- Park Roads and Parking Areas (**may not** exceed 40% of the total project cost)
- Permanent Benches, Seats, Drinking Fountains, Grills, Picnic Tables,
- Trash Receptacles and Fire Pits
- Walkways

INELIGIBLE FACILITIES AND COSTS:

Ineligible facilities or costs are those items that cannot be funded with an Outdoor Recreation Grant or included as part of the local match requirement. The following list includes common types of ineligible facilities. A determination of eligibility will be made by the Department of Natural Resources with final approval by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources.

- Administrative Expenses
- Design and Engineering in excess of 10%
- Concession-only Buildings
- Decorative Fountains, Statues and Plaques
- Dredging, Water Impoundments and Dams
- Facilities not available for general public use
- Golf Courses
- Indoor Recreational Facilities (ie: ice arenas, enclosed swimming pools, etc.)
- Acquisition of land already in public ownership
- Legal Fees
- Motorized Trails
- Non Permanent Skate Park Ramps and Equipment
- Press Boxes
- Sewer to Campsites
- Shooting Ranges

II. The Application Process

To receive an application, complete and return an [Application Request Form](#). This can be completed online or you can submit by mail or e-mail. We urge applicants to submit the request form no later January 31st to ensure adequate time to complete your grant application. This will allow adequate time to meet certain application requirements, such as holding a public hearing, having the project reviewed for any needed permits, completion of an appraisal, etc.

After submitting the Application Request Form, the application forms will be sent to you. Completed applications must be postmarked by **March 31st**. This program is very competitive. Staff members are available to discuss your project or review application materials. You are encouraged to submit any draft application or materials by March 1st if you would like staff to provide comments.

APPRAISAL REQUIREMENTS

The application must include a self-contained appraisal report for land to be acquired. Appraisals must be performed by a qualified licensed appraiser and meet the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP). The appraisal must include the DNR as an intended user and the landowner or designated representative must be given an opportunity to accompany the appraiser during the inspection of the property. Appraisals must have an effective date within 13 months of the application deadline.

Appraisals will be reviewed by the state to ensure that they meet applicable standards. If the appraisal is not accepted, the applicant will be contacted for additional clarification or modification. If you or the appraiser has any questions, please contact the program staff assigned to your area prior to completing the appraisal assignment.

If the grant award includes federal funding from the Land & Water Conservation Fund, the recipient must provide an appraisal report conforming to the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA). You might want to ask your appraiser if the USPAP report submitted with the application could be modified, if necessary, to conform to the UASFLA.

THE COMPETITIVE REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

The program is competitive and requires a review and selection process to make funding determinations and awards. The review and selection process will take place after March 31, and funding announcements will be made in summer. Completed applications received after the deadline will not be eligible for funding consideration. Program staff will review applications and, if necessary, a site visit will be conducted.

Minnesota's 2008-2012 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

The 2008-2012 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is Minnesota's outdoor recreation policy plan. This plan was developed with the input of Minnesota outdoor and natural resource leaders. It establishes outdoor recreation priorities for Minnesota to assist outdoor recreation and natural resource managers, the state legislature, and the executive branch in decision-making about the state's outdoor recreation system and sets out criteria for awarding grants consistent with these identified priorities. A majority of the review and selection process will focus on guidelines outlined in the 2008-2012 SCORP. Applications are assessed to ensure that the proposed project is consistent with priorities established in the SCORP document.

The SCORP priorities for Minnesota outdoor recreation selection guidelines are focused on three of the four strategies addressed in the *Minnesota's 2008-2012 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*. These strategies support the overall goal to increase participation in outdoor recreation by all Minnesotans and visitors.

Strategy 1: Acquire, protect and restore Minnesota's natural resource base on which outdoor recreation depends. This includes obtaining prime outdoor recreation areas throughout the state prior to anticipated land use changes.

Focus areas: Acquisition, protection or restoration of land or other natural resources that will provide or enhance public outdoor recreation opportunities and/or located in an area of rapid population growth; acquisition of potential prime outdoor recreation areas that may otherwise be threatened by anticipated land use changes; acquisition of land in areas that protect water quality; and/or acquisition of land in areas that protect key threatened habitats. Also considered will be whether the applicant has adopted programs to evaluate, regulate, fund and provide incentives for land and natural resource protection.

Strategy 2: Develop and maintain a sustainable and resilient outdoor recreation infrastructure.

Focus areas: Redevelopment, renovation or rehabilitation of current infrastructure, including improvements for safety, accessibility and energy efficiency. In addition, projects that result in sustaining the environmental infrastructure, such as water resources, native habitat, plants, animals, etc.

Strategy 3: Promote increased outdoor recreation participation through targeted programming and outreach.

Focus areas: Projects that result in more opportunities to participate with peers and family in nature-based outdoor recreation experiences through schools, youth programs, etc., for young people, people from diverse cultural communities or new immigrant communities and seniors. In addition, projects that help support nature education initiatives to ensure "no child left inside" address constraints to outdoor recreation such as economic issues, facility design, public awareness, safety or security issues and/or provide better access to outdoor recreation areas for people for whom limited mobility, cost, distance from recreation areas or other factors restrict participation.

The complete SCORP document is available in the Grants category of the DNR website at www.mndnr.gov.

Additional review components:

The review will then assess the design of the proposed project and existing park facilities. Project design should be compatible with the physical characteristics of the site, consistent with generally accepted engineering and architectural design standards, in accordance with accessibility standards and minimize risk to the health and safety of users. In addition to the design, the review will look at the commitment of the applicant to accomplish the proposed project and to protect and preserve the funded recreation facility. This commitment is assessed through measures such as whether adequate operation and maintenance costs have been developed for the proposed project and if the applicant has committed some of its own resources to the project.

AWARD OF FUNDS

Announcement of funding approvals will take place after the review and selection process is complete. All applicants will receive official written notification regarding their request for funding. If your proposed project has received preliminary approval for funding, you will be contacted regarding additional information requirements needed before an agreement can be processed. These requirements may include Minnesota Historical Society review, a deed restriction and other details.

If the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) determines that there is a potential for the site to yield historical or archeological information, you will be contacted and provided instructions on hiring an archeological consultant to perform an on-site survey and to coordinates with the MHS to ensure the project will have no adverse effects on these resources. These surveys are to be funded by the applicant and must be completed before grant funds can be reimbursed.

Projects cannot begin until all final documentation has been submitted and a grant agreement has been completed. This process can take three months to complete. Most projects can expect to begin in the fall. Any project costs incurred prior to the start date of the grant agreement will not be eligible for reimbursement. Nor can they be considered as part of the required local match.

Payment of grant funds to the local sponsor is on a reimbursement basis. The grant recipient must initially expend monies that are then reimbursed under the terms of the grant agreement. Ten percent of the grant funds will be retained until a final inspection has been completed.

GRANTS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Under [MN Statute 13.599](#), responses to a request for proposal are nonpublic until the application deadline is reached. At that time, the name and address of the grantee, and the amount requested becomes public.

After the application evaluation process is completed, data (except trade secret data) becomes public. Data created during the evaluation process is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee(s) is completed.

[MN Statute 13.44](#) categorizes estimated or appraised value of real property prior to purchase and sale as confidential data on individuals or protected nonpublic data. See also Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act for more information. This information, along with corresponding budget information, will be redacted from the applications before making them public.

III. Program Requirements

LAND RETENTION REQUIREMENTS

1) **CONVERSION OF USE:** It is the intention of the State that the property acquired under an agreement shall exist in the Grantee's ownership and be maintained and managed consistent with the purpose identified in the application. The Grantee shall not at any time convert any property acquired or developed pursuant to the agreement to uses other than the permitted uses specified in this agreement without the prior written approval of the State. The State will consider a conversion request only after the following pre-requisites have been met:

1. All practical alternatives to the conversion have been evaluated and rejected on a sound basis.
2. The Grantee has agreed to replace the converted lands with other lands of at least equal fair market value and reasonably equivalent recreational usefulness as determined by the State.

The State shall have the authority to approve or disapprove conversion requests.

2) **DEED RESTRICTION REQUIREMENT:** The Grantee will be required to record a condition with the deed of the property acquired and, if necessary, adjacent lands owned by the applicant. The condition is to ensure that the property will be permanently managed and maintained consistent with the purpose identified in the application, and that the property may not be used for any other purpose without written approval from the State. The specific language for the condition will depend on the funding source provided and will be stated in the grant agreement.

The Site Boundary Map submitted with your application will delineate and establish the property boundaries subject to the grant agreement. Therefore, it is very important that any existing public facilities and any known future public facilities (e.g., wells, lift stations, roadway improvements, etc.) are clearly identified and excluded from the boundaries of the project. The site boundaries should include only the property that the project sponsor plans on managing for outdoor recreation uses in perpetuity.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to monitor progress on state grants by requiring grantees to submit written progress reports at least annually until all grant funds have been expended and all of the terms in the grant agreement have been met. A progress report form will be provided by program staff. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless program staff have given the grantee a written extension.

MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to conduct at least one monitoring visit per grant period on all state grants of over \$50,000 and to conduct at least annual monitoring visits on grants of over \$250,000.

CLOSEOUT PROCEDURES

Upon completion of your project, a final billing must be submitted to our office no later than 30 days after the expiration date on your agreement. Program staff will complete a final inspection of the project. The inspection will focus on ensuring that the project was completed in accordance with the grant agreement, that facilities developed are accessible and a funding acknowledgment sign is installed. If any problems are revealed during the inspection, they will need to be corrected before you receive final reimbursement for your grant and the official closeout notification for your project.

All expenditures are subject to verification by an independent state audit and, therefore, you must retain all project records for a period of at least six years after you receive the official closeout notification letter.

Periodic post-completion inspections will be conducted to ensure that the site is being properly operated and maintained and that no conversion of use has occurred.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT SIGN

All projects acquired or developed with assistance from this program must display a state approved funding acknowledgment sign at the main entrance to the park. The grant program staff will provide the specific sign information.

AVAILABILITY TO USERS

Public property, facilities & programs that receive state assistance and future development of a site that has received state assistance shall be open to entry by all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion or sex. No person shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in any program or activity receiving state assistance. Finally, discrimination on the basis of residence, including preferential reservation, membership or annual permit systems is prohibited except to the extent that reasonable differences in admission and other fees may be maintained on the basis of residence. Fees charged to non-residents cannot exceed twice that charged to residents and must be comparable to fees charged at other state or local facilities.

IV. Contact Information

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