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# **Parks and Trails Fund Grant Program Legislative Report: Expanding Tribal Government Eligibility and Nonprofit Cooperation**

Submitted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in Cooperation with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Report Date: January 31, 2025

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## Legislative Charge

Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 40, Article 3, Section 11:

*By January 15, 2024, the commissioner of natural resources, in cooperation with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, must submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over the parks and trails fund with recommendations for expanding eligibility of parks and trails fund grants under Minnesota Statutes, section 85.536, to Tribal governments and for expanding cooperation with nonprofit organizations, including any necessary statutory changes.*

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

500 Lafayette Road

St. Paul, MN 55155

(651) 296-6157

[info.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:info.dnr@state.mn.us)

[mndnr.gov](http://mndnr.gov)

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

3601 Trinity Road

Duluth, MN 55811

218-310-2627

[renee.mattson@gmrptcommission.org](mailto:renee.mattson@gmrptcommission.org)

[www.gmrptcommission.org](http://www.gmrptcommission.org)

As requested by Minnesota Statute 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1,000 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, Braille, or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

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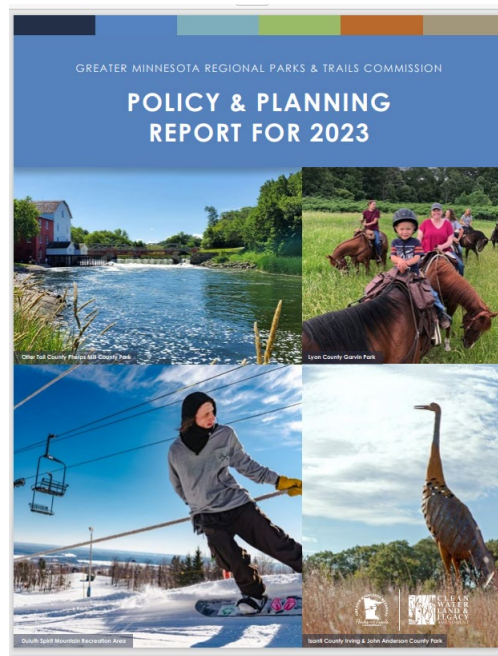
## Introduction

[Minnesota Statutes, section 85.536](#) governs the purpose, membership and operations of the [Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission \(GMRPTC\)](#). The GMRPTC was established in 2013 to undertake system planning and provide recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature for grants funded by the Parks and Trails Fund for parks and trails of regional significance outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Since the GMRPTC was established, the system of parks and trails designated by the GMRPTC as regionally significant has grown to 80 parks, trails, and facilities across 80 counties (see [GMRPTC - Regional System - Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission](#)).

Parks and trails designated by the GMRPTC as regionally significant are eligible for funding via the Parks and Trails Grant Program established by [Minnesota Statutes, 85.535](#). GMRPTC guides the overall grant award processes and the DNR administers the fiscal aspects of the grant program.

When Minnesota Statutes, section 85.536 was originally enacted, only counties and cities outside the seven-county metropolitan area were eligible for grant funding. Legislation passed in 2023 directed the DNR to collaborate with the GMRPTC to develop and submit a report to the legislature with recommendations for expanding eligibility of Parks and Trails Fund grants to Tribal governments and for expanding cooperation with nonprofit organizations, including any necessary statutory changes (Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 40, Article 3, section 11).

This report fulfills that legislative directive. It was developed jointly by the DNR and GMRPTC, and draws from information included in the [GMRPTC Policy & Planning Report for 2023](#), which was submitted to the Minnesota Legislature in January 2024.



## Tribal Government Eligibility for Parks and Trails Fund Grants

As noted in the Introduction, one of the two objectives for this report was to provide recommendations regarding expanding the eligibility of Parks and Trails Fund grants to Tribal governments. During the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota Statutes, section 85.536, subdivision 1 was amended to add Tribal governments to the list of entities eligible for Parks and Trails Fund grants.

Since this amendment was enacted, the GMRPTC website and all grant-related documents have been updated to reflect that Tribal governments have been added to the list of entities eligible for Parks and Trails Fund grants. The change in eligibility to include Tribal Governments was highlighted in the GMRPTC Policy & Planning Report for 2023. GMRPTC staff have also reached out to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council to help ensure Tribal governments are aware of this opportunity.

**Recommendation:** No additional action or statutory changes is needed to facilitate tribal government eligibility for Parks and Trails Fund grants under Minnesota Statutes, section 85.536. The GMRPTC will continue to share information with Tribal governments in Minnesota about the regional significance designation and grant application processes.

## Expanding Cooperation with Nonprofit Organizations

The second objective of this report was to provide recommendations for expanding cooperation with nonprofit organizations, including any necessary statutory changes. The governmental entities responsible for the parks and trails in the GMRPTC system often work with nonprofit organizations on public engagement, research, planning, and facility management. Examples of this work include programming and related activities to connect people to the outdoors, which is one of the strategic priorities of the [25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan](#).

In its Policy & Planning Report for 2023, the GMRPTC highlighted the value of partnering with nonprofits and committed to continue to identify and document best practices in nonprofit partnerships and share those practices with others. In 2024, the GMRPTC designated the first facility in a new classification called “Supportive Partnership,” which is described in the [GMRPTC Strategic Plan](#) as relating to “regional-quality city and county facilities that support large, diverse key recreation resources that are owned or controlled by non-eligible entities or units of government, such as federal, state, or **nonprofit** organizations” (page 31, emphasis added).

Also, in Fiscal Year 2024 the GMRPTC expanded support for this work by prioritizing unique grant opportunities focused on programming, accessibility, and other initiatives. These Connecting People with the Outdoors (CPO) small grants have become prototype projects for many communities and are often in cooperation with nonprofit organizations. There are also nonprofit organizations that work closely with governmental entities in the GMRPTC system to assist with fundraising, staffing and specific activities related to an event or promotion.

## Recent Examples of Grant Projects that Involved Work with Nonprofits:

### Duluth Traverse Trail Mobile Mountain Bike Fleet and Programming

This 2023-funded project involves purchasing mountain biking equipment (bikes, helmets, shoes, socks, trailers, vehicles, bike maintenance supplies, and bike storage mounts), certifying bike instructors, and providing mobile mountain bike instructional programming to underserved communities. The City of Duluth partners with area nonprofits to transport the bike fleet and instructors to locations to provide instruction to youth who primarily do not have the access or resources to try a new recreational offering. These organizations include Valley Youth Center, Myers-Wilkins Community Schools Collaborative, Gary New Duluth Boys & Girls Club, Lincoln Park Boys & Girls Club, Denfeld High School Summer Transitions Program, and an Afterschool MTB Club at Lincoln Park Middle School. To date, this funding has provided biking opportunities to 742 youth, conducted 74 separate instructional sessions, and 130 hours of program time.

### Track Wheelchair Grants

These 2022-funded grants allowed three facilities to provide inclusive enjoyment of parks and trails for individuals with mobility limitations. Lyon County Garvin Park, City of Duluth Hartley Park, and Wright County Bertram Chain of Lakes Park are now able to offer track chairs at no cost to their visitors, who can now utilize Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible trails. The grantees partner with local human service agencies and other community organizations to promote and coordinate use of the chairs.



**Recommendation:** Additional legislation is not needed to continue expanding cooperation with nonprofit organizations for Parks and Trails Fund grants. The recreation providers in the GMRPTC system will continue partnering with nonprofit organizations.

## Conclusion

In sum, the GMRPTC has followed the legislative direction to expand eligibility for Parks and Trails Fund grants to Tribal governments and has been highlighting and facilitating cooperation with nonprofits. The GMRPTC will continue to work with Tribal governments and nonprofit organizations to communicate and enhance these opportunities for funding and connecting people to the outdoors. The DNR will also support these efforts as it administers the fiscal aspects of the grant program. No further statutory changes are needed to continue to build on and expand this work.