



# MINNESOTA STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN, 2026-2030

December 2025

A report submitted in fulfillment of requirements for Minnesota's continued eligibility for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)



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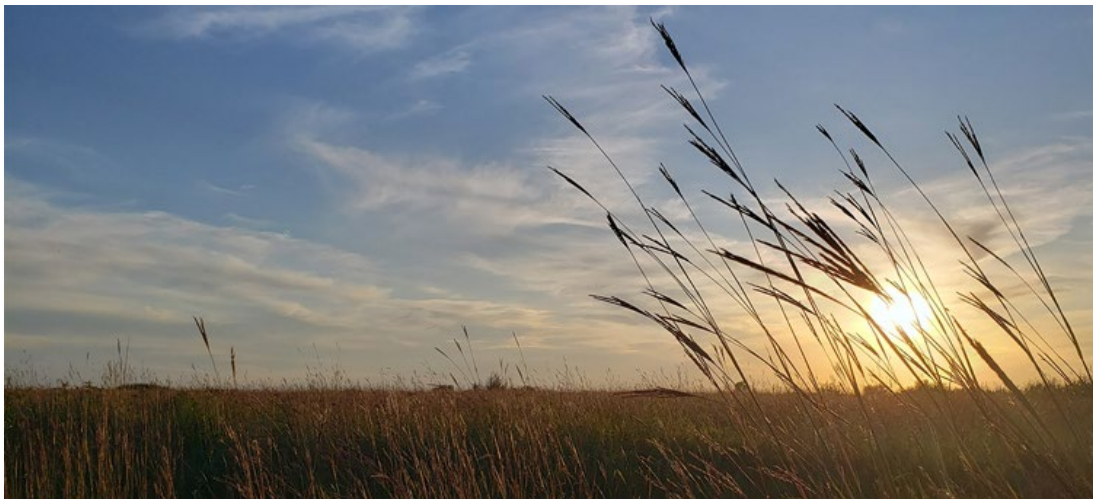
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2026-2030 (SCORP) provides guidance and direction to outdoor recreation providers across the state. It supports their work to protect, maintain and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for the state’s residents and visitors. This SCORP is intended to meet the requirements for continued eligibility to receive matching funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Minnesota’s natural resources, public lands, and outdoor recreation areas are critically important to the state’s economy and quality of life. An economic study completed by the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership in 2025 found these resources to generate an estimated \$13.5 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), support 96,000 jobs, and promote health, equity and community well-being. These outdoor spaces also attract tourism and serve as a foundation for many communities.

Minnesota’s outdoor recreation system offers diverse, year-round experiences. The system is supported through a broad network of public agencies and partners, including federal and state governments, regional organizations, counties, municipalities, and non-profit organizations. Additionally, private sector partners and the outdoor recreation industry also contribute essential roles in preserving natural lands and driving economic growth tied to outdoor recreation.

The SCORP 2026-2030 continues to build upon the foundation of the four Strategic Directions set forth in Minnesota’s *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan (2011)* and previous SCORPs. To develop the SCORP 2026-2030, a Steering Committee evaluated and revised strategies under each Strategic Direction to reflect evolving priorities and needs, and highlighted strategies to emphasize over the next five years.

### SCORP 2026-2030 Strategic Directions

- *Connect People and the Outdoors*
- *Acquire Land Create Opportunities*
- *Take Care of What We Have*
- *Coordinate Among Partners*

Public and stakeholder input, engagement, and research also contributed to the development of this SCORP. Multiple efforts -- including State Parks and Trails visitor surveys, a Local Recreation Providers Survey, and efforts by the Metropolitan Council (Met Council) and the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership (ORIP)— provided valuable insights into visitor experiences, access priorities, funding needs, and demographic trends.

Key findings regarding Minnesota’s outdoor recreation system from these recent statewide surveys and studies highlight strong visitor satisfaction, increased use of parks and trails, growing economic impact, and the need to maintain existing infrastructure while improving access for all. These efforts have informed priorities for current and future outdoor recreation needs in Minnesota, including development of this SCORP.



Students in nature-based learning outdoor classroom. (Photo Credit: Wright County)

This plan also identifies key trends that are expected to shape outdoor recreation in the coming years, including growing interest in the public health benefits of outdoor recreation, increased emphasis on providing access and opportunities for all, demographic and population changes, and changing long-term weather patterns.

Taken together, these trends, and the strategies within the four Strategic Directions, highlight both challenges and opportunities for Minnesota’s outdoor recreation providers for the next five years.

# INTRODUCTION

## FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2026 – 2030 STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

Minnesota’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2026-2030 (SCORP) is based on a consistent framework to address the state’s outdoor recreation needs. The SCORP 2026-2030 gives outdoor recreation decision-makers and managers a set of priorities and suggested actions to guide them as they make decisions about outdoor recreation. The National Park Service (NPS) requires completion of the SCORP to maintain Minnesota’s eligibility to receive funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (also known as LWCF, or “LAWCON”).

This plan builds on the direction set out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and Minnesota’s previous two SCORP documents (2014-2018 and 2020-2024). As with previous SCORP efforts, the planning process for the SCORP 2026-2030 built on the foundation laid out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* and relied on available surveys, studies, and input from a Steering Committee to identify strategies to guide the next five years of outdoor recreation efforts in Minnesota. The goals and strategies in the SCORP 2026-2030 continue to reinforce the vision and four Strategic Directions of the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

### BACKGROUND ON THE PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY PLAN

In 2008, voters approved raising the state sales tax by 3/8 of 1% (from 6.5% to 6.875%) for 25 years, to contribute to a dedicated fund. Often called the Legacy Fund, this dedicated fund is divided into four parts that receive the proceeds from the sales tax increase, with 33% of the revenue going to the Outdoor Heritage Fund, 33% of the revenue going to the Clean Water Fund, 19.75% to the Arts and Culture Fund, and 14.25% to the Parks and Trails Fund.

The Parks and Trails Fund supports three outdoor recreation systems: state parks and trails, regional parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, and regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota. The funds are distributed among three implementing agencies: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Metropolitan Council (Met Council), and Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). The existence of the Parks and Trails Fund has resulted in more sustained dialog and coordination among the three implementing agencies. This ongoing coordination contributes to the shared understanding of the needs and priorities for outdoor recreation in Minnesota and builds a foundation for the SCORP.

This coordination is also sustained through the existence of the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee (PTLAC). The PTLAC was established to provide recommendations to enhance promotion, coordination, and accountability throughout the implementation of

#### How To Read This SCORP

Text boxes are used to highlight the following throughout this plan:

#### “Resources / What do we mean”

Green shaded call-out boxes provide context for Strategic Directions or links to more information.

#### “Addressing the Trends”

Blue shaded call-out boxes provide context for trends related to the Strategic Directions. ([Current and Future Trends](#) discussed on pages 29-36.)

#### “Highlighting Progress”

Brown shaded call-out boxes identify projects accomplished since the last SCORP that illustrate the kind of work envisioned to continue under this SCORP 2026-2030.

#### Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Vision Statement

“A Parks and Trails Vision for Minnesotans: In 2035, our world-class parks and trails connect everyone to the outdoors. They create experiences that inspire a legacy of stewardship for the natural world, and they provide fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, health, and spirit, now and into the future. Minnesotans experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, reinforcing our identity as an outdoor culture.”

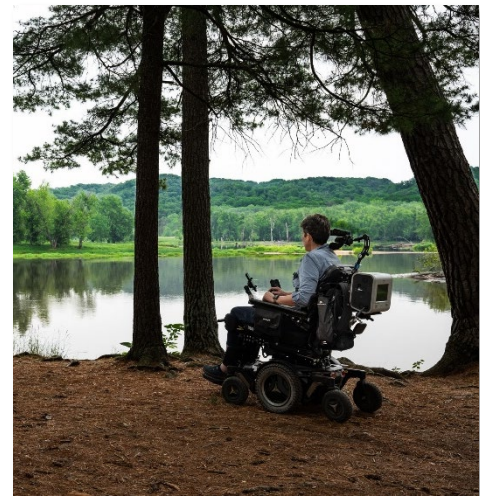
the 25-year *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. This advisory committee is composed of private citizens appointed by the three implementing agencies involved with the distribution of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds (DNR, Met Council and GMRPTC). The PTLAC was engaged during the SCORP process to review current planning efforts and provide input on future coordination.

### **BUILDING ON THE PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY PLAN AND PAST SCORPS**

With the passing of the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, the Minnesota State Legislature directed the DNR commissioner to develop a 25-year, long-range plan to guide the use of the Parks and Trails Fund. In response, DNR coordinated a collaborative planning process that relied heavily on public involvement to create the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* is organized around four Strategic Directions that provide a framework for the strategies and actions identified in the plan. The four Strategic Directions are:

- **Connect People and the Outdoors:** develop Minnesota’s stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in outdoor recreation and appreciation for our natural heritage.
- **Acquire Land, Create Opportunities:** expand and create new park and trail opportunities to satisfy current customers as well as to reach out to new ones.
- **Take Care of What We Have:** provide safe, high-quality park and trail experiences by regular reinvestment in park and trail infrastructure, and natural resource management.
- **Coordinate Among Partners:** enhance coordination across the large and complex network of public, private and non-profit partners that support Minnesota’s parks and trails to ensure seamless, enjoyable park and trail experiences for Minnesotans.



*Visitor at William O’Brien State Park. (Photo Credit: Minnesota Council on Disability)*

This SCORP 2026-2030 continues the four Strategic Directions approach originated in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* and employed in the previous two SCORPs. While the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* is focused primarily on parks and trails of state and regional significance, the Strategic Directions identified in that plan are also relevant to local parks and trails and other outdoor recreation facilities and lands.

Some recreation uses and facilities, such as athletic fields and playgrounds, are important elements for local park systems but are not as common in regional or state parks. To make sure that a broad range of recreational uses and needs are reflected in the SCORP 2026-2030, local park providers were specifically asked for additional information to complement the more regional and state-focused perspectives in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

# NOTABLE CHANGES SINCE THE COMPLETION OF THE PREVIOUS SCORP (2020-2024)

## RESPONDING TO A CHANGING OUTDOOR RECREATION ENVIRONMENT

Since completion of the previous Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in 2019, Minnesota has experienced significant changes in its outdoor recreation environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization in March 2020, led to widespread shifts in recreation behaviors due to health and safety concerns and government restrictions. One of the immediate impacts was a sharp increase in visitation and changes in use patterns at parks and trails statewide. Many parks and trails near population centers, especially in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, saw significant increases in day-use visits as people sought out recreational opportunities near their homes. Outdoor recreation providers also reported more visits happening at different times of day than before the pandemic – likely the result of the greater flexibility in people’s daily schedule brought on by remote work. Since the end of the pandemic, visits to parks and trails have remained significantly higher than before 2020, although some visitation patterns continue to change.

Coinciding with these behavioral shifts, there has been a growing emphasis on a more wholistic understanding of well-being – not just about a person’s physical health, but also their emotional and mental health and how their social and physical environments contribute to their well-being. Access to and participation in outdoor recreation plays an important role in supporting all aspects of well-being. Outdoor recreation providers need to seek to understand how their efforts to create a welcoming environment, offer inclusive programming, and expand outreach to all Minnesotans can strengthen community health and connection.

Within this changing environment, several broader trends continue to shape outdoor recreation participation in Minnesota. A number of these trends are highlighted in this document:

- Public health and well-being (beyond the COVID-19 pandemic response)
- Access and opportunities for all
- Minnesota’s changing population
- Accessibility
- Long-term changes in Minnesota’s weather patterns

These trends are further described in [Current and Future Trends](#).

Minnesota’s outdoor recreation providers continue to collect and analyze information from visitors, partners, and the public to better understand evolving recreation needs and preferences. Data gathered through recent surveys and engagement efforts informed evaluation of the previous SCORP (2019-2024), and helped refine the strategies and priorities to include in the SCORP 2026-2030. Key information sources used during this planning process include:

- *Local Recreation Providers Survey (2025)*
- *Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership Economic Study (2025)*
- *Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan (2025)*
- *State Trail Visitor Survey (2024)*
- *State Park Visitor Survey (2022)*
- *4 The Outdoors engagement efforts (2021)*

Several of these sources are further described in [Public and Partner Engagement](#).

### Resources

**Minnesota Department of Health** (MDH) provides research and resources about the positive role of nature for people’s mental health and well-being, including findings that nature’s positive effects are often most beneficial for individuals experiencing greater stress, trauma, or social inequities.

For more information, [visit MDH.](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/mentalhealth/nature.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/mentalhealth/nature.html>)

## TAKING ACTION: GET OUT MORE (MODERNIZE OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES)

The “Get Out MORE” (Modernize Outdoor Recreation Experiences) initiative adopted in 2023 is an example of action Minnesota is taking to help address the changing outdoor recreation environment and other trends that impact how visitors experience and engage with the outdoors. This one-time, \$150 million transformative investment is enabling the DNR to develop more modern and inclusive outdoor recreation experiences. As a result, Minnesota will better serve current outdoor enthusiasts, connect even more people to the outdoors, and help ensure future generations will also benefit from time spent in our unparalleled natural places.

The Get Out MORE initiative centers on five investment categories:

- Enhancing access and welcoming new users to public lands and outdoor recreation facilities - \$35.4 million
- Modernizing camping and related infrastructure - \$9.5 million
- Modernizing boating access - \$60 million
- Enhancing fisheries and fishing infrastructure - \$35 million
- Restoring streams and modernizing water-related infrastructure to support outdoor recreation - \$10 million

The DNR, with stakeholder and public input, developed a set of principles to guide allocation of Get Out MORE funds. These principles align with Strategic Directions from the previous SCORP 2020-2024 and this document including:

- Projects/programs must involve modernization of an existing facility, land or service (*Take Care of What We Have*)
- Be informed by public engagement (*Connect People and the Outdoors*)
- Prioritize underserved communities (*Connect People and the Outdoors*)
- Opportunities to take advantage of partnerships with other agencies, local units of government, tribal governments, or non-government organizations (*Coordinate Among Partners*)

The once-in-a-generation Get Out MORE investments are augmenting ongoing work supported by traditional funding structures that maintain and improve Minnesota’s state-managed outdoor recreation system. Initial Get Out MORE projects include park-wide accessibility improvements at William O’Brien State Park and expanding the track chair program to additional state parks (for more information about these projects, see the Highlighting Progress project summaries in [Strategic Directions](#)).

For more information on Get Out MORE, [visit the DNR webpage this initiative.](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/get-out-more/index.html) (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/get-out-more/index.html>).



Canoers with DNR’s I-Can Paddle! Program.

## PUBLIC AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH

Public and stakeholder input and engagement, as well as research, provided important data and context that informed the development of Minnesota’s SCORP 2026-2030. Multiple efforts — including state parks and trails visitor surveys, a local recreation providers survey, and efforts by the Met Council and the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership — offered valuable insights into visitor experiences, demographic trends, funding needs, and patterns and priorities for outdoor recreation in Minnesota. Key public engagement and research efforts considered in the development of this SCORP are summarized below.

### LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDERS SURVEY

To ensure Minnesota’s SCORP 2026-2030 is effectively comprehensive in scope, a local recreation provider questionnaire about recreation trends and priorities was distributed to city and county recreation departments throughout the state in early 2025. In total, 95 surveys were completed and analyzed to help inform this SCORP. This included 68 responses from cities, 12 from counties, and 15 from other organizations (e.g., trail clubs, regional development commissions, non-profits).

Providers shared that use of local park and recreation systems has largely increased over the last five years. Some expressed that the changes experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have made it hard to assess long-term trends. Increase in the service expectations of visitors have come alongside increases in use. Providers prioritize maintenance of existing facilities higher than development of new facilities or acquisition of land. While some activities have emerged or grown (e.g., e-bikes and pickleball), overall trends for recreational activities have largely remained the same compared to five years ago.

Additional highlights from the 2025 local recreation providers survey can be found in [Appendix A](#).

### OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP ECONOMIC STUDY

In 2025, the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership (ORIP) completed a statewide economic study, *Minnesota’s Untamed Dividend, Outdoor Recreation Fueling Our Economy*. This study provides a comprehensive assessment of the economic contribution, public benefits, and regional dynamics of outdoor recreation in Minnesota, including activities such as hiking, camping, fishing and snow sports. It also highlights outdoor recreation’s contributions to state gross domestic product (GDP), employment, and regional development and explores the social and non-market benefits that outdoor activities provide, from improved mental health to stronger communities.

Highlights from the study include:

- \$13.5 billion (B) in state GDP, \$23.5B in economic output and 96,000 jobs are tied directly to outdoor recreation in Minnesota.
- Public lands are essential to access, economic vitality, and environmental stewardship.
- Visitor spending supports rural economies, with activities like boating, fishing, and snowmobiling leading in expenditures.
- Nonmarket values, health, community, education, are integral to long-term benefits.
- A strategic focus on year-round access, inclusive participation, and cross-sector partnerships will maintain Minnesota’s leadership in outdoor recreation.

The full report is available on [the ORIP website](https://outdoorindustrypartnership.com/resources/). (<https://outdoorindustrypartnership.com/resources/>)

## REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS POLICY PLAN

The Met Council collaborated with a wide range of partners to develop an updated policy plan for parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area that supports human health and well-being while expanding ecological benefits, building resiliency, and reducing impacts from flooding, drought and other weather-related events. In 2025, the Met Council adopted the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* to help guide tasks and projects within the Regional Parks and Trails System.

The Met Council engaged with many partners and stakeholders in the development of their policy plan. This included a visitor study and youth and parks study that are summarized below. These two studies helped inform the SCORP 2026-2030.



Nordic skiers at Battle Creek Regional Park. (Photo Credit: Met Council)

### Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study

The *Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study* was conducted in 2021 to inform planning, policy and management, as well as to measure satisfaction with the Regional Parks and Trails System. Among other goals, this information is being used to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails and inform implementation of the regional parks and trails policy plan. Highlights of the study include:

- 5,405 people participated in the survey during their visit to regional parks or trails
- 88% of visitors rated facilities as “excellent” or “very good”
- All visitors to regional parks and trails enjoyed a diverse range of activities, where hiking, walking, dog walking/dog park, jogging, relaxing, observing nature and meeting with friends were among the most popular activities
- To maintain high levels of satisfaction, parks need to be accessible and modernized with open and clean restrooms, have smooth trails, available drinking water, and clear signage

Visitation patterns explored during the study revealed that not all population groups experience the benefits of public investment in parks and trails equally. The findings reflect a wide range of demographics among parks and trails users, though patterns in visitation remain uneven.

Additional information, resources and the full report is available on the [Met Council’s website](https://metro council.org/Parks/Research/Visitor-Study.aspx). (<https://metro council.org/Parks/Research/Visitor-Study.aspx>)

### Youth and Parks

The Met Council was a lead partner in research focused on youth and teens in the metro area that culminated in the 2021 report, *Adventure Close to Home, Connecting Youth to the Regional Park System*. Connecting teens with the outdoors has important implications for creating a healthy, equitable region with future support for the regional park system. Project researchers used qualitative methods that included field experience, interview data, analysis of photos taken by youth, conversations with youth to validate the data, focus groups, and youth-led discussion groups.

The research findings and recommendations cover a broad range of issues and preferences of youth and other community members, including interests in outdoor skill-building, preferred park activities, experiences when visiting parks, and challenges related to time constraints and lack of transportation.



Snow-tubing at Theodore Wirth Regional Park. (Photo Credit: Met Council)

Additional information, resources and the full youth and parks report can be found on the [Met Council website](https://metro council.org/Parks/Research/Youth-Parks/Report.aspx) (<https://metro council.org/Parks/Research/Youth-Parks/Report.aspx>).

### STATE TRAIL VISITOR SURVEY

The 2024 State Trail Visitor Survey built on the state's commitment to better understanding what residents and visitors desire in their state trails system and the economic contributions made by those visitors to the local and state economies. This project provided an opportunity to explore state trail trends since visitors were last surveyed about state trails in 2019. Of note, this survey focused on visitors to paved state trails during the summer; the results do not represent use of natural surface state trails or winter uses, such as snowmobiling.

Key highlights include:

- More than 2,200 visitors completed a short survey during their visit and over 900 visitors completed a post-visit survey.
- The state trail visitors surveyed were highly satisfied and would recommend Minnesota state parks and trails.
- Opinions and experiences from the visitors surveyed highlighted the importance of maintaining state trails and the need to continue investing in this work. While respondents rated most trail amenities as acceptable, toilet facilities and bike repair stations had the most room for improvement.
  - Over 80% of respondents prioritized maintaining trails as the top priority for state trails, ahead of topics such as building new trails and trail connectivity.
  - 80% of respondents agreed that Minnesota should invest in more state trail maintenance.
  - The majority of comments from visitors who were dissatisfied with their experience on the trail referred to the condition of the trail.
- State trails contribute \$102.5 million in annual economic output. Visitors spent \$54.2 million while on state trail trips and an additional \$30.4 million at home preparing for the trip, supporting over 626 full- and part-time jobs.

More information about the 2024 State Trail Visitor Survey can be found on the [DNR, State Parks and Trails Studies webpage](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/pat/index.html). (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/pat/index.html>)

### STATE PARK VISITOR STUDY

The DNR has completed a state park visitor study every five years since 1987. The study aims to determine what activities visitors engage in at the park, their previous park experience, travel preferences, trip satisfaction, interest in a variety of proposed changes, trip spending and demographic information. The DNR and stakeholders use this information to understand who visits state parks, inform critical management decisions, and plan for the future.

Key highlights from the most recent survey (conducted in 2022) include:

- More than 2,000 park visitors participated in the survey
- Satisfaction among respondents was notably high:
  - 96% were “somewhat” or “very satisfied”
  - 82% were “very satisfied”
- 97% felt welcome during their visit
- 98% would recommend the park to others
- 89% believed the entrance fee was a good value

Hiking or walking (81% of respondents), observing or photographing nature (57%), sightseeing (57%) and going on self-guided nature walks (44%) were the most common activities visitors participated in during their visit to the park.

Respondents emphasized the importance of specific park attributes to their experience:

- 99% valued natural settings and trails
- 98% appreciated clean, well-maintained facilities
- 96% said that well-protected and managed natural resources were important, and that signs for finding their way around the park were important to an enjoyable park visit

Respondents expressed support for prioritizing the protection of remaining natural areas and culturally significant sites by limiting additional development (85%) but would also like more hiking trails (85%) and exhibits or other self-guided learning opportunities (77%).

Demographically, park visitors tend to be white, highly educated, and have higher incomes compared to the general Minnesota population. While there has been some expansion in the range of backgrounds among visitors, more work is needed to help ensure Minnesota's outdoor recreation system is welcoming and accessible to all.

The survey also found that state park visitors are important for supporting local tourism economies across Minnesota. The economic impact of state parks has grown as state park visitation has increased. The amount contributed by each state park visitor, on average, to local economies has also increased, even after adjusting for inflation.

More information about the 2022 State Park Visitor Study can be found on the [DNR, State Parks and Trails Studies webpage](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/pat/index.html). (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/pat/index.html>)

#### 4 THE OUTDOORS

Since 2021 the DNR has been engaged in an effort to identify what Minnesotans value for the future of conservation and outdoor recreation and the steps needed to reach that future. This effort included two phases of engagement with partners, stakeholders and the public. The first phase of engagement involved a group of external advisors, agency employee focus groups, and an online public forum.

Results from the first round of the engagement informed the creation of the *4 The Outdoors* report in 2022, which outlined four main takeaways concerning the current state of funding for conservation and outdoor recreation:

- *A lack of investment in conservation and outdoor recreation stresses resources that Minnesotans value.* Additional investment in natural resource management, recreation infrastructure, staff and technological advancement would benefit Minnesotans.
- *Funding restrictions and a lack of predictability limit the ability to successfully meet conservation and outdoor recreation goals.* More certainty in funding would allow Minnesota DNR to be nimble, accountable, and plan and management in line with natural systems and infrastructure lifespans.
- *There is a lack of shared stewardship and shared responsibility for conservation actions and recreation resources.* Some communities and interest groups pay for conservation and outdoor recreation access, but all Minnesotans benefit, whether they are director users or not. The economic benefits to Minnesota, in particular, are not in sync with state funding.
- *There is not a single "silver bullet" solution that will address the systematic challenges we face.* The funding system is complex and a single, simple solution will not be enough. Minnesota DNR cannot do this work alone and would not be the only beneficiary from an improved funding system.

4 the Outdoors is an ongoing effort. The second engagement phase includes stakeholder and interest group workshops, additional agency employee focus groups, a public questionnaire focused on funding options, and a second questionnaire on the use and role of fees.

For more information about 4 the Outdoors, [go to the DNR webpage: \(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/funding-future-natural-resources-and-outdoor-recreation.html.\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/funding-future-natural-resources-and-outdoor-recreation.html)



Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, Miner's Mountain Trail.

# SCORP 2026-2030 STEERING COMMITTEE

## PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP

The DNR convened a Steering Committee to help guide the development of the SCORP 2026-2030. The committee included 15 members, reflecting a broad range of interests in outdoor recreation across Minnesota. Representation included professionals from state, regional, and local parks and recreation agencies; individuals representing outdoor recreation groups; and non-profit organizations and community representatives focused on health, youth engagement, and access to outdoor recreation for all. Throughout the planning process, the Steering Committee met with the DNR Planning Team to inform and shape the direction of this SCORP.

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER ROLES

The Steering Committee played several important roles during the planning process:

- Ensuring that broad perspectives on outdoor recreation are represented in the plan
- Reviewing information and suggesting additional relevant sources
- Evaluating data and trends to be included or highlighted in the plan
- Reviewing the draft plan and providing feedback on its structure and content

An important task for the Steering Committee was to review and update the strategies to be included in the plan. This involved recommending revisions to existing strategies and the development of new strategies to address emerging issues and interests. The Steering Committee provided recommendations for prioritizing the strategies to be included in each of the four Strategic Directions in the SCORP.



Tettegouche State Park.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Four Strategic Directions organize the strategies in this SCORP 2026-2030, providing guidance for outdoor recreation providers for the next five years. The SCORP Strategic Directions continue to build on prior work set out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan (2011)* and Minnesota’s previous two *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (2014-2018 and 2020-2024)*. This structure is well known by outdoor recreation providers in Minnesota and presents a consistent framework for understanding the priorities and activities of groups involved in outdoor recreation throughout the state.

The SCORP 2026-2030 Strategic Directions are:

- Connect People and the Outdoors
- Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
- Take Care of What We Have
- Coordinate Among Partners

Within each Strategic Direction, strategies are grouped to help illustrate how they connect with and build on each other. During the planning process the Steering Committee reviewed the strategies from the previous SCORP (2020-2024). Some of these previous strategies were revised, some were removed, and new strategies were added to reflect the current outdoor recreation priorities and needs across Minnesota. Among all the strategies for this SCORP, the Steering Committee identified specific strategies as points of emphasis for Minnesota over the next five years. These strategies are indicated with colored shading and a **[Highlighted strategy]** label.

The strategies identified under each Strategic Direction are not separate or exclusive to that direction; rather, each set of strategies compliments and supports the others.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION: CONNECT PEOPLE AND THE OUTDOORS

### Welcoming Environment

1. Build relationships with groups that are less frequent visitors to public lands to expand outdoor recreation opportunities, and provide associated health and wellness benefits, for all Minnesotans. **[Highlighted strategy]**
2. Provide ongoing training to employees to ensure all visitors feel welcome and have positive experiences in the state’s outdoor recreation system.
3. Recruit, hire and mentor employees and volunteers who reflect the populations and communities they serve.
4. Help all visitors, through information and education, feel comfortable, stay safe and understand rules and etiquette in outdoor spaces.

### What do we mean?

**Connect people to the outdoors** by providing a welcoming environment, improving access and affordability, increasing marketing efforts, expanding programming, creating partnerships and providing a quality experience.

### Access

1. Design and redevelop outdoor recreation facilities so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (e.g., transit, driving, walking, biking and off highway vehicle (OHV) riding), including accessible forms of transportation.
2. Work with other organizations to provide transportation to programs and special events tailored as entry-level (trial/introductory) opportunities.
3. Design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities and backgrounds. **[Highlighted strategy]**

4. Ensure affordability of outdoor recreation facilities and experiences. **[Highlighted strategy]**

**Awareness**

1. Promote outdoor recreation experiences, programs and activities to increase awareness and participation by visitors.
2. Maintain ongoing market research to better understand current and potential visitors’ motivations, attitudes, beliefs and preferred ways of receiving information.
3. Use technology to communicate conditions and site information with visitors in real-time to ensure visitor expectations are met and exceeded. **[Highlighted strategy]**

**Quality**

1. Provide high-quality experiences to visitors through meaningful community engagement, thoughtful design, interpretation and innovative programming.
2. Provide high-quality facilities that are well-suited to their natural and social environment to support visitor experiences and lessen the potential for conflict between visitors. **[Highlighted strategy]**
3. Invest in staff development to further enable them to provide high-quality services.

**Programming and Special Events**

1. Increase development and promotion of outdoor recreation activities that contribute to visitors’ well-being.
2. Expand introductory experience programs to attract new visitors and provide intermediate- and advanced-experience programs to retain existing visitors.
3. Recruit and welcome partners that have a shared purpose and vision for outdoor recreation.
4. Ensure that programming and special events cater to a wide variety of visitors’ interests and needs.
5. Use program and special events to attract visitors during non-peak times.

**Partnerships**

1. Build relationships with community organizations and leaders that help providers better reach new visitors.
2. Develop and maintain partnerships with volunteer and community-based groups that will help maintain, promote and support Minnesota outdoor recreation opportunities.
3. Develop partnerships with private industry, including outdoors, travel, and hospitality businesses, that share goals and/or target markets with recreation providers.

**Addressing the Trends:  
Connect People and the  
Outdoors**

*Recreational providers in Minnesota can address current and future trends as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort but can be part of the core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:*

*Public Health and Well-being – Promote the physical, mental and social well-being benefits of nature and encourage people to get outside.*

*Access and Opportunities for All – Design and host activities and programming meant to attract new visitors and to welcome the broadest array of people and groups in our communities.*

*Accessibility – Provide training for staff to better understand and support visitors with accessibility needs.*

## Highlighting Progress – Connecting People and the Outdoors

### *Improving accessibility utilizing all-terrain track chairs*



Track chairs enabling a family to experience the outdoors together.

Electric-powered track chairs enable visitors to explore trails and other spaces within parks and other recreation areas that cannot be accessed using a regular wheelchair or may not otherwise be accessible to visitors with mobility limitations. Track chairs can traverse paved trails, natural surface trails, grass areas, and sand beaches.

Minnesota DNR launched its track chair program in 2022, starting with five chairs. Specific trails were designated for track chair use – ensuring that the track chair can navigate the trail without becoming stuck, endangering the rider or damaging sensitive natural resources. The track chairs are available year-round in some locations and seasonally in others.

DNR has structured its program to minimize barriers for visitors who wish to use the track chairs. Visitors can reserve a track chair ahead of time, and there is no fee for using a chair. DNR consulted with the Minnesota Council on Disability during early stages of the project, testing equipment and addressing operational issues as well cooperating on promotion. As of 2025, the track chair program now offers 23 chairs located in state parks across Minnesota.

Other Minnesota recreation providers have also begun to provide track chairs. For example, GMRPTC through a special grant program helped acquire track chairs for three regional parks – Hartley Park (City of Duluth), Bertam Park (Wright County) and Garvin Park (Lyon County). Each regional provider contributed a local match toward the track chair acquisition. GMRPTC anticipates funding additional track chairs as part of the next round of its grant program.

Visitors have shared that track chairs have transformed their outdoor experiences. Some visitors have described how using the track chair offered a sense of independence. Others talked about how the chair enabled them to explore the park together with their family, or to experience the park in a way that they had never been able to do, or had not done since an injury or illness affected their mobility. These efforts represent the type of actions needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities and backgrounds.”*



Track chairs are available at some locations year-round.

## Highlighting Progress – Connecting People and the Outdoors

### Minnesota State Parks Library Pass

The DNR partners with public libraries statewide to offer Minnesotans an opportunity to check out a free state park pass. The program's goal is to provide a way for Minnesotans of limited economic means to visit state parks without the financial barrier of an entry fee. The pass may be checked out for seven days and provides vehicle entry into all state park and recreation areas in Minnesota.

Originally piloted in 2018 and launched statewide in 2021, the program has expanded from about 100 participating libraries to more than 200 libraries and bookmobiles, with at least one participating library in all of Minnesota's 87 counties. The number of available passes has also increased from 175 to 450, with usage nearly doubling in the first three years of the program, from 1,960 pass checkouts in the first year (July 2021-June 2022) to 3,812 checkouts in the third year (July 2023-June 2024). Passes are funded by the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, to help connect more people to the outdoors. Partnering libraries facilitate the checkout process.

A 2024 survey of program participants found that most respondents were checking out a pass to save money, and the cost of purchasing a vehicle permit was a barrier to their ability to visit state parks. Some survey respondents noted they were not frequent state park visitors and were looking to try a state park before they bought a permit. Data also showed that the average household income of people using the library pass program was lower than the average household income of all state park visitors, an indication that that the program is reaching those who may have an economic barrier to visiting a state park or recreation area.

More information on the library pass program can be found on the [DNR website](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/minnesota-state-parks-library-program.html).  
([https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/minnesota-state-parks-library-program.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/minnesota-state-parks-library-program.html))



*The DNR has continued to expand its **state park library program**, providing free, seven-day access to all state parks and recreation areas in Minnesota. In partnership with more than 200 public libraries in all 87 counties, the program helps increase state park access for Minnesotans of limited economic means.*

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION: ACQUIRE LAND, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

### Strategic Acquisition

1. Prioritize acquisition of outdoor recreation lands in areas that lack near-home recreation opportunities, including:
  - In densely settled urban communities and the surrounding rapidly growing areas.
  - Near regional population centers located throughout rural Minnesota.
2. Accelerate acquisition of private inholdings, add new lands, and consider land exchanges to enhance resource protection and recreational opportunities for existing parks. **[Highlighted strategy]**
3. Focus acquisition efforts to preserve high-quality natural resource areas, including:
  - Where ecological subsections are not represented in the state park system or other comparable land holdings.
  - Lands with unique, high-quality natural resources that meet critical resource preservation needs near population centers.
  - Important water resources such as lakes, rivers, wetlands, shoreline and critical watersheds.
  - Corridors that connect other protected, high-quality natural resource areas.
4. Focus on acquiring priority trail segments according to established criteria, utilizing a range of tools including fee title purchase, easements, and access agreements so critical corridors are not lost to development or other land use changes. Favor the use of fee title purchase where possible to permanently protect the corridor.
5. Prioritize new trail opportunities that are closer to the concentration of visitors – including snowmobilers, off-highway vehicle riders, horseback riders and canoeists/kayakers.
6. Acquire land needed for trail support facilities (e.g., accesses, portages, rest areas and trailheads). Prioritize facilities that serve multiple interests or are in partnership with other entities.
7. Mitigate the loss of recreational opportunities caused by unavoidable conversions of existing parkland to non-recreational use.

### What do we mean?

**Acquire land and create opportunities** by prioritizing acquisition and development in densely settled, rapidly growing areas and regional population centers. Acquire private inholdings in existing parks, exceptional one-time opportunities, parcels with high-quality natural resources, trail connections, and parcels that protect water resources. Develop facilities that meet differing outdoor recreation needs for all abilities and accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses and construct sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support high-quality and compatible recreational opportunities.

### Development and Redevelopment

1. Prioritize development in areas where current population levels and anticipated future residential growth creates high demand for recreation opportunities, including:
  - In densely settled urban communities and surrounding rapidly growing areas.
  - Near regional centers located throughout rural Minnesota.
2. Design, develop and redevelop facilities to meet the differing outdoor recreation needs of people of all abilities.
3. Create an accessible environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses, such as nature play areas.

4. Develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the needs of Minnesota’s communities, demographics, and changing recreational interests, with an eye toward the anticipated needs and interests of future generations.
5. Establish sustainable trail systems that provide high-quality opportunities for a range of trail interests, seeking to accommodate new uses that are compatible with current trail activities.
6. Design and construct sustainable and resilient infrastructure.
7. Seek opportunities to expand renewable or low-carbon energy sources, such as solar and wind, to meet the needs of park and recreation facilities in alignment with other statewide initiatives and goals. **[Highlighted strategy]**
8. Embed emergency preparedness and strategies to enhance resilience to changing environments (e.g., natural disasters, pandemics, increased frequency of flooding or drought) when planning recreational facilities.



Itasca State Park.

### Addressing the Trends: Acquire Lands, Create Opportunities

*Recreational providers in Minnesota can address current and future trends as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort but can be part of the core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:*

*Minnesota’s Changing Population – When acquiring or developing new facilities, add amenities that cater to the interests and abilities of the state’s aging and more diverse population – responding more specifically to how this trend is playing out in individual communities.*

*Access and Opportunities for All – Seek out acquisition and development opportunities that, because of their location or connections with transportation options, can expand access to outdoor recreation opportunities to more Minnesotans.*

*Accessibility – Design new facilities and rehabilitate existing ones to serve people across a wide range of abilities. Consider how the recreational activities being provided can create a range of opportunities for people of all abilities. Recognize the variety of recreation experiences and personal challenges people with accessibility needs may be seeking.*

## Highlighting Progress – Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

### Expanding high demand recreation activities at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park



Aerial image of Split Rock Lighthouse.

Minnesota's North Shore parks are some of the most visited in the state park system. This high visitation corresponds with a strong demand for campsites, with reservations filling far in advance, especially during summer months. Statewide, electric campsites are also in high demand. The completion of a new electric campground at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park provides much needed camping opportunities along the North Shore.

The original management plan for Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, written in 1980, envisioned a drive-in campground connected by a road under Highway 61. An initial campground design was completed in 2011, followed by an updated plan in 2017 when construction funding for the project was identified. Construction began in late 2019 and finished two and a half years later, with the new Shipwreck Creek Campground opening to the public on June 1, 2022.

The campground added 46 new drive-in campsites with electric service, a new shower facility, and a host site. It also broadened the user base of potential campers by providing more accessible camping options. The campground features a paved connection to the Gitchi Gami State Trail and

connects to the Lake County's Split Rock Wilds Mountain Biking System, which includes 22 miles of trails. This project was paid for by dollars appropriated from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

Shipwreck Creek Campground has created new opportunities for Minnesotans to spend the night at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, the second most visited state park in Minnesota as of 2024. In doing so, it serves as an example of the actions needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the needs of Minnesota’s communities, demographics, and changing recreational interests, with an eye toward the anticipated needs and interests of future generations.”*



Shipwreck Creek Campsite, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION: TAKE CARE OF WHAT WE HAVE

### Protect the Public's Investment in Built Infrastructure, and Cultural and Natural Resources

1. Prioritize investment in existing infrastructure to ensure high-quality and safe experiences for visitors. **[Highlighted strategy]**
2. Maintain asset management plans to ensure protection of natural and cultural resources and full utilization of facilities.
3. When proposing new acquisitions and facilities, communicate operational, maintenance and assets management costs based on lifecycles of assets.
4. Maintain or improve existing high-quality natural areas and water resources. It is more cost-effective to preserve existing natural communities than it is to restore or reconstruct them.
5. Restore or reconstruct natural ecosystems that have been degraded or lost due to invasive species, agriculture or development. Prioritize locations with higher likelihood of success.
6. Use mitigation and adaptation strategies to address impacts to infrastructure and natural and cultural resources from natural disasters and weather-related events.
7. Use land-use planning tools and guidelines to protect natural and cultural resources while supporting outdoor recreation that is sustainable, accessible and safe for all visitors.



Lake Wobegon Trail covered bridge. (Photo Credit: Visit Greater St. Cloud)

### What do we mean?

Take care of what we have with regular reinvestment to ensure safe, high-quality experiences for current and future visitors.

### Addressing the Trends: Take Care of What We Have

*Recreational providers in Minnesota can address current and future trends as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort but can be part of the core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:*

Minnesota's Changing Population –  
*Evaluate ways that existing facilities could meet the needs of older visitors and attract new visitors as part of renovation and rehabilitation projects.*

Long-term Changes in Temperature and Weather –  
*Mitigate impacts from more frequent and intense flooding and other changes by relocating trails and other infrastructure. Improve energy and resource efficiency in our buildings, vehicle fleets, and other systems. Manage lands, waters, and other natural systems in ways that increase resilience and reduce the impacts of invasive species.*

Accessibility –  
*Prioritize projects to increase accessibility at existing facilities and invest in accessibility-related improvements as part of maintenance and rehabilitation work.*

## Highlighting Progress - Take Care of What We Have

### Improving accessibility at William O'Brien State Park

As recreational facilities age and design standards are updated, renovating existing amenities is critical to providing accessible recreation to all.

William O'Brien State Park was established in 1947. Like other parks of its era, its original facilities predated modern accessibility guidelines and practices. That changed in May and June of 2025, when \$5.25 million dollars of accessibility improvements were completed. This major investment in “*taking care of what we have*” was funded through a mix of state bonding (\$4.25 million) and Get Out MORE funding (\$1 million).



New restrooms and picnic shelter in day use area.

This renovation involved extensive accessibility improvements across the park. Improvements to the Walter F. Mondale Day Use Area included the construction of two new accessible restroom buildings, a new picnic shelter, an accessible canoe/kayak launch, the renovation of two existing picnic shelters, improved beach access and safety upgrades in the parking lot. In the Riverway Campground six campsites were renovated to meet federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards; the shower building was updated with a redesigned layout to incorporate a variety of ADA-compliant features; the Riverside Trail was resurfaced to better accommodate

wheelchairs, mobility devices and strollers; and a new accessible route was added to the park amphitheater. The ranger station building was also improved with the addition of an ADA-compliant outdoor service counter and window, more accessible parking, and new automatic door openers.

Situated on the St. Croix River just 35 miles northeast of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, William O'Brien State Park is an important outdoor recreation destination for many Minnesotans. While the park already sees an average of 287,000 annual visitors, these improvements, guided by the principles of universal design, make it a more accessible recreation destination for all Minnesotans.

These improvements and renovations serve as an example of the actions needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Prioritize investment in existing infrastructure to ensure high-quality and safe experiences for visitors.”*



Map of improvements to the day use area.

## Highlighting Progress - Take Care of What We Have

### *Mitigating impacts of changing precipitation patterns at Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park*



Tree die-back resulting from saturated soils.

Long-term changes in precipitation patterns and more intense weather events are impacting natural resources and recreation facilities across Minnesota.

Starting in 2015, DNR staff began noticing trees dying in several areas on the south side of Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park. By 2018, approximately 150-200 acres of dead or dying trees were documented. Mature trees across several species (maple, oak, basswood) were dying and many surviving trees and understory plants showed signs of stress. More flood-tolerant species such as ash and elm were less affected. Park trails in those same areas had also frequently been closed because of wet conditions. The tree die-back and trail flooding issues were concentrated in areas of level ground with heavier clay soils.

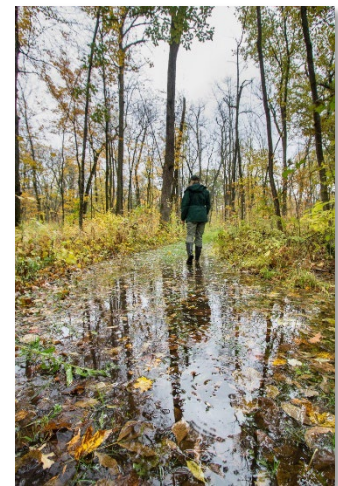
The area surround Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park in southeast Minnesota is experiencing wetter summers and more frequent 1-inch rainfalls. Both the annual precipitation and the number of 1-inch rainfalls are at historic highs.

Increased annual precipitation and more frequent 1-inch events have resulted in longer-duration saturated soil conditions, causing root-zone flooding and lack of oxygen during the growing season year after year. Over time, the trees die, and these areas of the park no longer support the “Big Woods” native forest community that was historically present.

The DNR is working to mitigate and adapt to these changing conditions. Some dead and dying trees were removed to address falling tree hazards to park visitors. Park staff are collecting data to determine vegetation planting and management strategies to establish native plant communities that will thrive under the new wetter conditions. Hiking trails were relocated to higher and drier ground within the park to reduce seasonal trail closures. The DNR is also sharing information with park visitors about how the state park is adapting to protect natural resources and park facilities.

This project represents the type of actions needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Use mitigation and adaptation strategies to address impacts to infrastructure and natural and cultural resources from natural disasters and weather-related events.”*



Frequently flooded trails need to be relocated.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION: COORDINATE AMONG PARTNERS

### Enhanced, Integrated and Accessible Information for Outdoor Recreation Visitors

1. Continue to collaborate on and improve opportunities for visitors to locate essential recreation information, plan trips, and create customized maps.
2. Incentivize coordination and cooperation among providers, such as cross-promotion of outdoor recreation opportunities and their benefits. Seek to involve state, regional and local government providers as well as non-profit, grassroots and community-based groups to support and promote outdoor recreation opportunities.

#### What do we mean?

**Coordinate among partners** by creating integrated and accessible information and enhancing cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries, funding resources, and among agencies, organizations and non-profits.

3. Continue to share data about outdoor recreation facilities and programs with other providers and make data accessible for other organizations to support visitors' decision-making and promote outdoor recreation opportunities. **[Highlighted strategy]**

### Enhanced Coordination at the Regional and Site Levels

1. Support projects that incorporate multi-jurisdictional planning efforts to create a seamless outdoor recreation system.
2. Develop best practices for enhancing coordination among providers and other groups, e.g., examples of how to formalize coordination efforts.
3. Fund research and monitoring to measure progress addressing Strategic Directions and strategies, e.g., managing natural and cultural resources, maintaining and rehabilitating facilities, attracting new and diverse visitors, addressing barriers to participation, and improving accessibility.

### Enhanced Coordination Among the Four Legacy Funds

1. Develop common goals and strategies among the four Legacy Funds with outdoor recreation providers and others, to identify overlapping opportunities and efficiencies.
2. Encourage coordination among Legacy Fund recipients to work together at the funding, landscape and project levels. Utilize these efforts to communicate the benefits of the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment. **[Highlighted strategy]**

### Enhanced Coordination with Tribal Governments and Tribal Entities

1. Coordinate with tribal governments and other tribal entities (e.g. Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, non-profits or other groups working on tribal interests) to identify, preserve, and restore sacred and culturally significant lands.
2. Engage with tribal governments in Minnesota to explore opportunities for tribal governments to access LWCF to support outdoor recreation projects on tribal lands.

### Enhanced Coordination with Other Agencies, Organizations, Industry, and Non-profits

1. Build stronger relationships with schools and other youth-serving organizations and increase the level of service provided to schools. Outdoor recreation providers are an important resource for schools and other youth-serving organizations in teaching lifelong outdoor recreation skills and environmental stewardship. For example, utilize relationships with schools to promote outdoor recreation and resource management career opportunities.
2. Facilitate discussion among different trail user groups across the state to find balance and cooperation on recreational trail use demands and management. **[Highlighted strategy]**

3. Continue partnering with a variety of entities to support and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities, including:

- Transportation interests and regional and local transportation authorities to support access to outdoor recreation as well as expand opportunities to develop new trails, enhance trail use and increase access to transit.
- Health agencies, health maintenance organizations and other health care-associated providers to support shared health and wellness goals through participation in outdoor recreation.
- Explore MN Tourism, chambers of commerce and other local tourism providers to promote outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Grant-in-aid groups, grassroots and community-based groups that promote and support outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Natural and cultural resource conservation groups, non-profits and other interested stakeholders to promote and collaborate on conservation and preservation efforts.
- Outdoor recreation-focused businesses and private recreation providers that promote and support outdoor recreation opportunities.



Duluth mobile mountain bike class. (Photo credit: GMRPTC)

### Addressing the Trends: Coordinate Among Partners

*Recreational providers in Minnesota can address current and future trends as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort but can be part of the core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:*

*Public Health and Well-being – Work with health care providers, community health agencies, and other partners to promote outdoor recreation as part of pursuing healthy lifestyles and promoting visitor well-being – linking health outcomes and the outdoor activities in ways that attract more people to participate in outdoor recreation.*

*Access and Opportunities for All – Outdoor recreation providers can work together to expand their connections to a range of audiences, share contacts with leaders and influencers from communities with lower engagement in outdoor recreation, and coordinate outreach efforts.*

## Highlighting Progress – Coordinate Among Partners

### *Nature-Based Education Program – Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park*

In 2019, Wright County Parks and Recreation embarked on a new adventure by partnering with Monticello Public Schools to develop a Nature-Based Education experience at Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park. This started with a nature-based pre-school that soon expanded to kindergarten, fourth grade, and fifth grade students. This new adventure allowed the community to engage with the natural world through a trusted educational partner.

Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park is a joint venture between Wright County Parks and Recreation and the City of Monticello. The acquisition and development of the park itself is a testament to what's possible when you coordinate through a shared vision. So, when Monticello Public Schools reached out with a proposal to create the Nature Based Education program, the Parks and Recreation Department was excited about the opportunity.

The partnership officially launched in 2019 with a pre-school program. That first year provided a framework to develop a larger program, though it came with its share of challenges. These challenges ranged from figuring out the impacts on the facility, to determining how the program would work in a public park, to clarifying responsibilities for maintenance and cleaning – all of which being minor in comparison to the COVID-19 challenges that arose in 2020. Through it all, constant communication between partners enabled the programs to expand in the Fall of 2020.

Monticello Public Schools' Nature-Based Education program provides students with the opportunity to learn and grow in an outdoor setting. Led by dedicated teachers, students spend 70 - 80% of their school day outdoors (except in hazardous weather conditions), engaging with nature as their classroom while meeting Minnesota's academic standards.



Teacher reading to class outdoors. (Photo Credit: Monticello Public Schools, Wright Co.)



Students hiking through the woods. (Photo Credit: Wright County)

The program emphasizes child-centered exploration, creativity, and hands-on learning. This innovative program and partnership serve as an example of the actions needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Build stronger relationships with schools and other youth-serving organizations and increase the level of service provided to schools. Outdoor recreation providers are an important resource for schools and other youth-serving organizations in teaching lifelong outdoor recreation skills and environmental stewardship. For example, utilize relationships with schools to promote outdoor recreation and resource management career opportunities.”*

## Highlighting Progress – Coordinate Among Partners

### *Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership*

ORIP is an inter-agency collaboration between Explore Minnesota Tourism, the DNR, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation. The partnership was formed in 2023 as a result of recommendations made by both the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Task Force and the Governor’s Council on Economic Expansion. The purpose of this partnership is to help raise the profile of the outdoor recreation industry as a major economic contributor to Minnesota’s economy.

One of the first products that ORIP sponsored was a 2025 statewide economic study, *Minnesota’s Untamed Dividend, Outdoor Recreation Fueling Our Economy*. The study provides a comprehensive assessment of the economic contribution, public benefits, and regional dynamics of outdoor recreation in Minnesota. A summary of the study can be found in the Public and Partner Engagement section of this SCORP. The complete study is available on [the ORIP webpage](https://outdoorindustrypartnership.com/resources/). (<https://outdoorindustrypartnership.com/resources/>)

ORIP represents a new framework for outdoor recreation agencies and outdoor recreation-focused industries to coordinate and collaborate to support Minnesota’s outdoor recreation economy. The partnership has several new collaboration opportunities under development including an Annual Outdoor Industry Summit.

This effort represents the type of action needed to address the strategies in this Strategic Direction, including:

*“Continue partnering with a variety of entities to support and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities, including:*

- *Outdoor recreation-focused businesses and private recreation providers that promote and support outdoor recreation opportunities.”*



MINNESOTA'S UNTAMED DIVIDEND  
Outdoor Recreation Fueling Our Economy

Cover image of the 2025 ORIP-sponsored economic study.



Snowmobiling in Mille Lacs Kathio State Park.

# OVERVIEW OF MINNESOTA'S OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM

Minnesota's outdoor recreation system includes lands owned or managed by local, regional, state and federal governments, as well as land owned by non-profit and for-profit entities. These organizations play different roles in managing and maintaining Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. The system includes everything from neighborhood playgrounds to regional parks, to state parks, to national forests. About one quarter of the land in Minnesota is in some form of public ownership, and the vast majority is administered by federal, state or county governments. Much of this land provides conservation benefits as well as some type of outdoor recreation opportunity. Managing this land for public benefits is an important responsibility and requires significant resources.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Federal lands providing outdoor recreation in Minnesota include two national forests, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, five units managed by the National Park Service (Voyageurs National Park, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, North Country National Scenic Trail, Pipestone National Monument, and Grand Portage National Monument), and 13 national wildlife refuges.

The Chippewa National Forest, established in 1908, was the first national forest east of the Mississippi River. The Superior National Forest, established in 1909, contains the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) the largest wilderness area east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the Everglades. With over 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 12 hiking trails and more than 2,000 designated campsites, the BWCAW is the most heavily visited of all federal wilderness areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages 13 national wildlife refuges and nine wetland management districts in Minnesota. These units provide unique opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, wildlife watching and photography, among other activities and programs.

For more than 50 years, the federal government has had a funding partnership with the state and local governments in Minnesota through the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. The impact of this program on the outdoor recreation system in Minnesota has been significant. This program is further described in [The Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) section of this plan.

## STATE GOVERNMENT

Itasca State Park, established in 1891, is one of the first state parks in the country. Many other Minnesota state parks were established during the 1930s with help from the federal government through the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and other federal Depression-era programs. Today in Minnesota there are 73 state parks and recreation areas encompassing over 233,500 acres, over 1,300 miles of state trails, more than 1,500 DNR-managed water access sites, and over 4,500 miles of waterways designated as state water trails.

Minnesota's first state forest was created in 1900. Today there are 60 state forests totaling over 4.2 million acres. These lands provide many opportunities for camping, fishing, hunting, bird watching, canoeing, boating and other natural resource-based outdoor recreation. State trails and other trails in these units support a wide variety of recreational uses. Some support multiple uses while others cater to a specific use, such as single-track mountain bike or off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding trails. Other state-owned lands and managed areas that provide opportunities for some types of



All-terrain vehicle riders on a forest trail.

outdoor recreation include wildlife management areas, aquatic management areas, and scientific and natural areas.

In 1963, the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission was created to help determine state outdoor recreation needs and guide state investments to meet those needs. A cigarette tax was enacted to help fund outdoor recreation investments through the state Future Resources Fund. The commission later became the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) and now allocates some of the proceeds from the Minnesota State Lottery (the state’s Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund) to natural resource-related initiatives and projects. The commission has recommended projects and programs for funding to the legislature for the past five decades, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in both state and local outdoor recreation lands and facilities. The outdoor recreation system in Minnesota owes much of its existence to this multi-decade effort. Other major state investments in outdoor recreation acquisition and facilities have come through state capital bonding, the Clean Water Land and Legacy Act funds (the “Legacy Amendment”), and the recent one-time Get Out MORE initiative described in the [Notable Changes Since the Previous SCORP \(2020-2024\)](#) section.

### **METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REGIONAL GOVERNMENT**

The Met Council coordinates and plans for the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area’s outdoor recreation system in the form of regional parks, trails, and park reserves. The Met Council distributes state and regional funding for acquisition and development of the system through grants to ten implementing agencies - cities, counties and special park districts that make up the Regional Parks and Trails System. The implementing agencies are responsible for operating and maintaining the park and trail facilities, augmenting the grant funding with their own resources. The Regional Parks and Trails System, begun in 1974, now includes 58 regional parks and park reserves, eight special features, nearly 487 miles of interconnected trails, and more than 65,300 acres of land throughout the seven-county area.



Bicyclist at Minneapolis Chain of Lakes. (Photo Credit: Met Council)

### **GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION**

The GMRPTC was established in 2013 to carry out system planning and provide recommendations to the state legislature for grants funded by the Legacy Parks and Trails Fund to counties, cities, and tribal governments outside the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance. Previously, recreation providers in greater Minnesota had not been formally organized like the metropolitan area regional providers and state park and trail organizations have been.

The Greater Minnesota regional system now includes 85 facilities of varied types, including natural resource-based parks, special feature parks, regional trails, and supportive partnership units. These facilities encompass 489 miles of regional trails and over 41,000 acres of regional parkland. All facilities in the system have completed a qualified unit master plan and been evaluated by the GMRPTC, making them eligible for Legacy funding.



Hartley Park, Duluth. (Photo Credit: GMRPTC)

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

Minneapolis and St. Paul have extensive park systems dating back to the 1800s, as do many of the older and larger cities throughout the state. As suburbs arose in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, they acquired and developed increasingly extensive park and trail systems. Several counties throughout the state also began to acquire and develop county parks in the last half of the Twentieth Century.

Today, many cities and counties throughout Minnesota manage parks and trails in their communities. These facilities primarily provide close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities and often focus more attention on youth-related outdoor recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, community centers, swimming pools and beaches. While most of these facilities have been acquired and developed with locally generated funds, a significant number have been assisted by state and federal grants.

## **PRIVATE SECTOR AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

The private resort industry has been particularly important in Minnesota for water-related recreation such as fishing, canoeing, boating and swimming. Larger resorts also have added golf courses, tennis courts, and other facilities. A few resorts offer downhill and cross-country skiing. Apart from the resort industry, the private sector is also a major provider of golfing and downhill skiing opportunities. There are some privately operated hunting reserves, horse riding stables, and similar facilities in the state. Businesses also support outdoor recreation by renting bicycles, canoes, snowmobiles, OHVs and other equipment. These private businesses are an important part of the larger tourism industry, one of the most important economic engines of the state.

In addition to tourism, Minnesota's outdoor recreation ecosystem is supported by a vibrant outdoor industry sector. This includes manufacturers of boats, fishing tackle, paddlesports equipment, snowmobiles, OHVs, outdoor apparel, gear, and related products that are used by residents and visitors alike. Many of these businesses are homegrown Minnesota companies with national and global reach, making the state a hub for outdoor innovation. Specialty retailers and outfitters also play a key role by connecting participants with the equipment, expertise, and services needed to enjoy outdoor activities safely and sustainably. Together, these businesses not only generate significant employment and economic output but also strengthen Minnesota's reputation as a leading outdoor recreation state.

The combined impact of the tourism and outdoor industry sectors underscores the private sector's essential role in expanding access to recreation opportunities, fueling local economies, and fostering a culture that values and invests in the outdoors. Private landowners also play an important role in helping support outdoor recreation in Minnesota. Several types of facilities – including some state trails and large portions of the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system, as examples – rely on access to private lands via easements or other agreements. These trail opportunities would not be possible without use of these private lands.

Non-profit organizations also support outdoor recreation in the state. For example, the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the state's park and trail systems, dates back to 1954. It has helped in the acquisition of more than 9,280 acres of public land at 51 parks and trails. Organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the Nature Conservancy have also played key roles in supporting funding for state, regional and local outdoor recreation land; protection and restoration of natural areas; wetland protection; water quality and other natural resource and outdoor recreation-related purposes. Other non-profit organizations play an important role as partners for building and maintaining trails through volunteers, such as local equestrian, horse-riding, OHV and snowmobile clubs.

## CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS

This section provides an overview of the most pressing current and future trends and issues that impact how we plan for, manage, and enjoy the outdoor recreation system in Minnesota. These trends include recognition of 1) the public health benefits of outdoor recreation; 2) the need to serve all Minnesotans equitably in outdoor recreation spaces; 3) Minnesota's changing population demographics; 4) continued accessibility challenges at our outdoor recreation facilities; and 5) impacts on our natural world and recreational facilities from long-term changes in weather patterns.

### PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

#### **What Do We Know?**

Scientists continue to discover evidence that spending time in nature offers significant benefits for both physical and psychological health and well-being. Research shows that being in natural spaces can reduce stress, boost mood, and enhance cognitive functioning. Individuals, families, organizations, and communities can improve mental well-being by incorporating nature into their daily routines and workspaces. While most research involved time spent in outdoor spaces, there is also evidence that viewing nature scenes outside a window or on a screen provides a calming effect.

#### *Physiological Health*

The health benefits of physical activity and time spent in nature are well established. Much of the existing research has centered on nature's role in promoting physical well-being, revealing its potential to help prevent many common chronic conditions. These benefits include reduced stress, lower blood pressure, accelerated healing, support for addiction recovery, and decreased risk of cardiovascular, respiratory, and other long-term illnesses. Nature calms the nervous system by lowering stress hormone levels, encouraging regular physical movement, and promoting restful sleep—all of which contributes to improved cardiovascular health.

#### *Cognitive Development*

Recognition of the benefits of nature exposure for cognitive development is increasing across many disciplines, including education, human development, and psychology. Studies illustrate nature's positive effects on attentional restoration, academic performance, cognitive function in children and productivity. Exposure to natural environments helps the brain recover from mental fatigue, allowing for sharper focus and sustained attention. These restorative effects are especially beneficial for individuals with attention-related conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); studies have documented improvements in cognitive performance for such individuals following time spent in nature.

#### *Psychological Well-being*

Recent studies detailing the positive effects of nature on mental processing have inspired a variety of popular wellness-based outdoor programs and activities. Key examples of the improvements documented include reduced stress and anxiety, improved mood and ability to focus, and increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

#### *Social Health*

Another important benefit of time outdoors is the positive social effects it can have at an individual or community scale. Spending time in nature can strengthen social connections and opportunities for shared experiences. Several studies have found that nature facilitates social interaction, enables social empowerment, reduces crime rates and violence, and enables interaction among people with different backgrounds, demographics and experiences, among other positive social behaviors. Connecting with nature

can foster environmental stewardship, encouraging people to care for the environment around them, which can benefit the entire community.

### *Emerging Public Health and Wellness Challenges*

Parks and recreation agencies and outdoor recreation professionals are increasingly on the front lines of public health and wellness challenges that impact their local communities. These include impacts from changing weather patterns to mental health disorders and effects of social isolation. According to the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) *Advancing Community Health and Well-Being Report*, 76% of parks and recreation agencies surveyed are trying to reverse physical inactivity, a key contributor to chronic disease and diminished mental health.

### *Partnerships*

In response to growing awareness of nature's health benefits, outdoor recreation providers are expanding partnerships and programs that emphasize health and wellness aspects of nature, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2021 NRPA survey by found that 96% of park and recreation agencies collaborate with partners to meet community health needs. These partnerships span a wide range of sectors, including community-based organizations (76%), school districts (72%), libraries (58%), public health departments (53%) and healthcare providers (51%).

### **What Does It Mean?**

Research increasingly shows that spending time outdoors supports our physical and mental well-being. According to the 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey, the top motivations for spending time outdoors were to feel healthier (69%), rest mentally (65%) and be physically fit (64%). For many Minnesotans, the outdoors serves as a place to rest and relax, connect with family and friends, and improve their health. It is important to note that deep wilderness experiences are not required to gain health benefits from nature. Even passive time viewing nature through a window or images on a screen can provide a calming, restorative effect.

Spending time in and around natural environments, like parks and green spaces, can lower stress hormone levels, enhance emotional regulation, and promote positive feelings. Nature also offers opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and connection with oneself and others. Outdoor recreation providers offer the spaces and opportunities for people to connect with nature and improve the overall well-being and quality of life in their communities.

## **ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL**

### **What Do We Know?**

As demographic trends in Minnesota and across the country evolve, outdoor recreation providers must evolve to meet the needs of a changing population. Minnesota is actively working to ensure its outdoor recreation system is accessible to and serves all Minnesotans and visitors to the state, recognizing the wide-ranging benefits it brings to individuals, communities, and the environment.

Surveys and research reports are helping agencies track progress and identify gaps in access and opportunity. These tools also highlight historical and institutional factors that have created barriers to enjoyment of outdoor spaces. Common identified barriers include travel expenses, cost of gear and equipment, and limited access to natural areas in or near urban centers.

### *Programming and Facilities*

Parks and recreation providers seek to serve all members of a community by designing and marketing inclusive facilities, and by offering programs and activities attractive to populations that previously have not been engaged. Resources such as the NRPA's *Inclusion Report* (2018) can help recreation providers understand at the national level which community members have access to programs and activities that

meet their needs, and where there are service gaps. Park and recreation agencies and professionals seek to provide the best programs and services for the residents of their communities but often encounter barriers or challenges that slow or halt progress altogether. Insufficient funding was identified by 70% of agencies as the biggest challenge to expanding health and wellness programs and services. Other common challenges include inadequate staffing, a shortage of facility space, and lack of staff training.

### *Policy Integration*

To be effective, organizational policies and structures must reflect and advance the goal of providing access to all. This ensures accountability and shared responsibility across an organization. In Minnesota, data-driven initiatives are informing policy changes and resource allocations to provide outdoor recreation opportunities and access to more Minnesota communities and individuals. By prioritizing expanded access across operations, programs, and services, parks and recreation agencies have a unique opportunity to create inclusive spaces that promote fair and just access to health and well-being for all. For example, the Met Council requires its region's providers to conduct an analysis designed to ensure all residents can access and benefit from outdoor recreation opportunities as part of their long-range park and trail plan and has developed specific tools, including interactive datasets, to support these planning efforts.

### *Partnerships*

Partnerships are essential for advancing and supporting inclusive programs and spaces. Parks and recreation agencies collaborate with schools, non-profit organizations, agencies on aging and disabilities, and local law enforcement to develop and enhance programming and activities to better serve all members of their communities.

### *Outcomes*

Creating welcoming environments for individuals of all abilities, backgrounds and identities can enhance outcomes in community development, health and education across all groups. Some of the advantages include expanded opportunities, stronger communities, economic growth from welcoming and attracting new users and increased engagement in environmental stewardship.

## **What Does It Mean?**

Minnesota's outdoor recreation providers must continue expanding programs and facilities that serve all residents and visitors. While expanding access to outdoor opportunities can present challenges, providers are actively developing solutions through policy integration, accountability measures, and strategic partnerships. These efforts aim to create lasting, sustainable outcomes.

To better serve all communities, agencies will need to strengthen outreach and engagement, listening closely to community needs and ideas. Park and recreation professionals are already taking steps to do so. However, significant opportunities remain for recreation providers to expand outdoor recreation access and opportunities to all people in the community, regardless of background or ability. As Minnesota's population continues to change, park and recreation providers are uniquely positioned to lead the way by developing community-driven solutions that foster belonging and promote well-being for all.

## **MINNESOTA'S CHANGING POPULATION**

### **What Do We Know?**

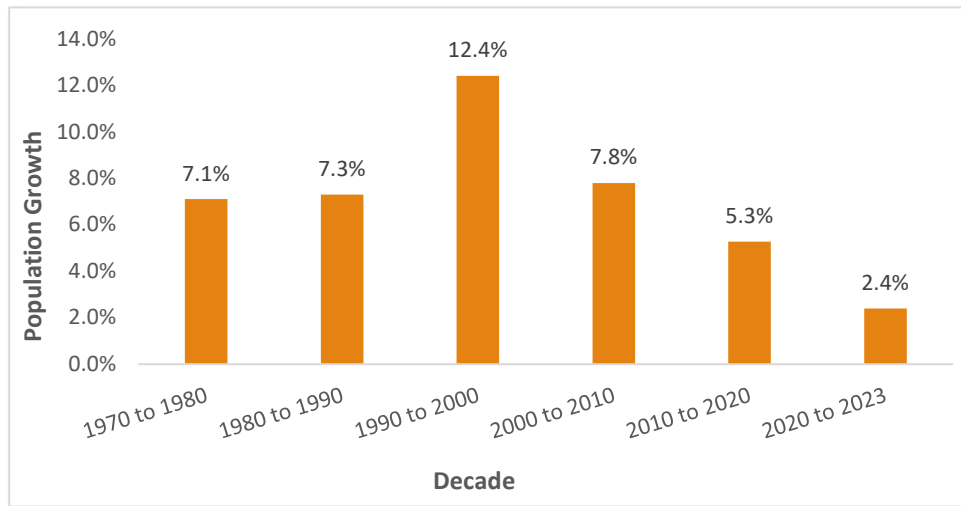
According to the State Demographic Center, Minnesota's total population in 2024 reached 5,842,388, reflecting a 2.4% increase since the 2020 decennial census. Demographic trends, such as declining population growth rates, increasing numbers of older people, and expanding communities of color, are all evidence of Minnesota's changing population. These changes will play an important role in the demand for, and value

placed on, outdoor recreation opportunities and how nature-based recreation providers choose to serve their communities over the next five years and beyond.

### *Declining Population Growth*

Minnesota added over 400,000 residents between 2010 and 2020, a 7.6% increase, contributing to an estimated total population of more than 5.7 million. However, the growth rate in Minnesota’s population has declined overall in the post- World War II period, except for the 1990s when there was a 12.4% increase in population over 10 years. These rates are projected to decline further throughout the coming decades. By 2065 the rate of deaths is projected to surpass the rate of births in Minnesota. Net migration is expected to keep the population growing, albeit at a much slower rate.

Figure 1: Minnesota population growth by decade, 1960-2020 (Source: US Census Bureau)



### *Aging Minnesotans*

About 285,000 Minnesotans turned 65 years old between 2010 and 2020, which was more than in the last four decades combined. “Empty nesters” are now the most common household type in Minnesota, followed by households consisting of older adults living alone. Projections from the Minnesota Demographic Center indicate that the total number of adults 65 and older living in Minnesota will more than double between 2020 and 2075, and most of this growth will take place in metropolitan areas, specifically suburban communities in and around Minneapolis and St. Paul.

### *Growing Multicultural, Racial, and Ethnic Groups*

Between 2010 and 2024, the populations of Black or African American Minnesotans grew by 70%, the population of Asian Minnesotans grew by 53%, and the population of Hispanic Minnesotans grew by 56%. The growths in these populations were much faster than the 9.7% overall growth rate of the state during that period. In 2024, the largest group of foreign-born Minnesotans were born in Mexico, followed by those born in Somalia, India, Laos (including Hmong), Ethiopia, China (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan), and Vietnam. These trends are expected to continue in Minnesota into the future. Data from the Minnesota

State Demographic Center suggests that 24.8% of Minnesota’s population will be nonwhite or Latino by 2035, making for a 121% increase in this portion of the state’s population between 2005 and 2035.

Figure 2: Minnesota population by racial and ethnic groups, 1960- 2024 (Source: US Census Bureau)

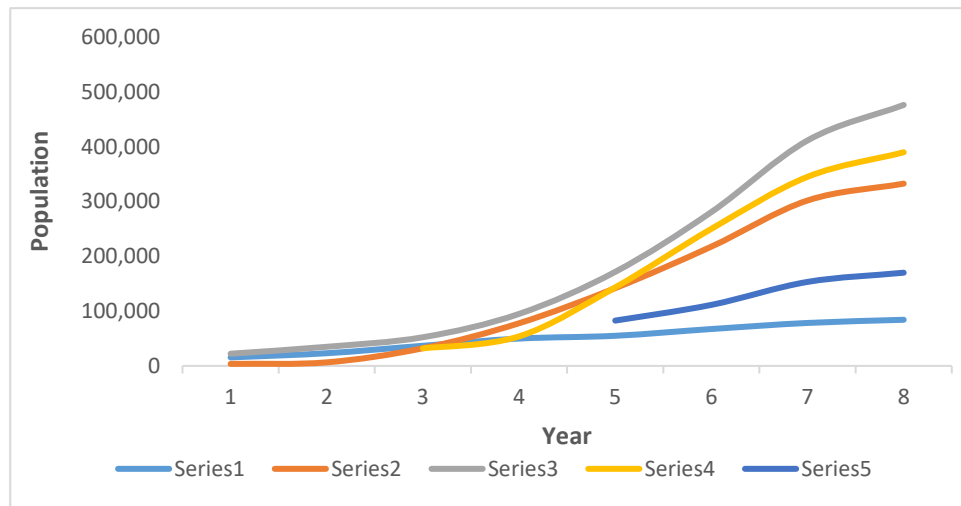
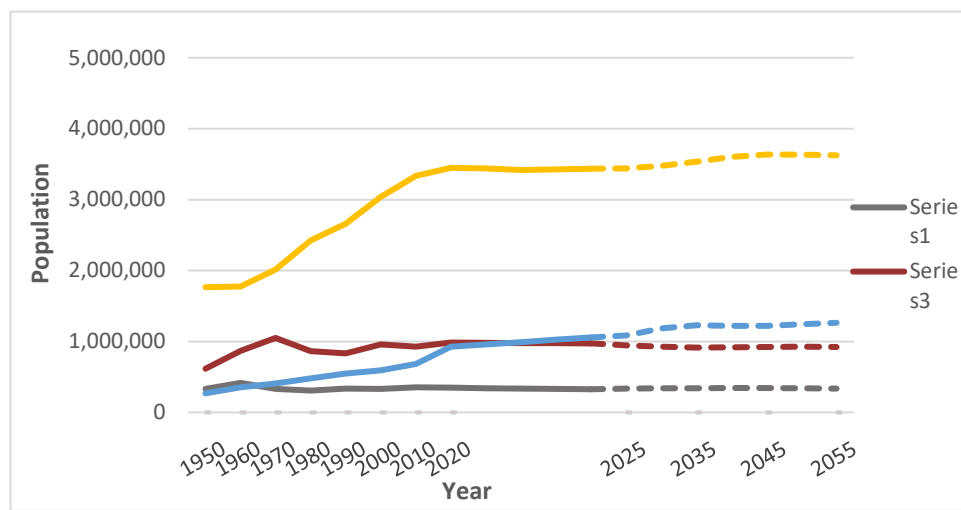


Figure 3: Minnesota population by age group, 1950-2055 (Source: US Census Bureau)



### What does it mean?

Although the population in Minnesota is growing, the rate of growth has slowed since the 1950s and is projected to continue to decline. This means population growth will have a declining impact on recreational demand, including urban expansion-driven park and trail development; near-home parks and trails demand; and potential participants in nature-based outdoor recreation overall. Because Minnesota’s demographics are skewing older, outdoor recreation providers should consider how their facilities and programming will need to adapt to serve an older audience in the upcoming decades. Although the historic trend has been that older adults participate less in outdoor recreation as they age, this growing age cohort also represents an opportunity for providers – a group that may have more free time and interest in programming and activities that promote the health and wellness benefits of outdoor recreation.

Additionally, the growth in populations of color presents an opportunity for outdoor recreation providers to connect to new audiences. Providers should seek ways to better serve residents by gaining a better

understanding of, and providing access to, the recreation opportunities they desire. Recreational providers will also need to consider changes to the activities they provide to attract the next generation of visitors. For example, programs such as the DNR’s “I Can!” series teach outdoor skills for activities like camping, paddling, and fishing to people without experience with these pursuits. These kinds of programs can help connect with groups that are currently infrequent participants in outdoor recreation and build awareness, interest and confidence among new audiences.

## ACCESSIBILITY

### What Do We Know?

Many outdoor recreation facilities were built before the advent of the ADA in 1990 and associated accessibility standards and guidelines. It remains a priority of outdoor recreation service providers to update facilities and continue to ensure that new developments allow all Minnesotans to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation.

#### Prevalence

In 2023, 12% of Minnesotans reported having a disability, including hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, or independent living difficulty. The most common type of disability among Minnesotans was cognitive difficulty, with 5.5% of people reportedly experiencing this type of disability. The second most common type of disability was independent living difficulty, at 5.3%, followed by ambulatory difficulty, at 5.0%. The percentage of those with a disability within a particular demographic group varied. Those who identified as American Indian and Alaska had a higher percentage of disabilities than other groups, and the likelihood of an individual having a disability increased significantly with age, with the 75 and older population experiencing disability at a rate of 42%.

#### Development and Redevelopment

Recreation providers must make reasonable modifications to ensure equal opportunities for access and participation. State and local outdoor recreation providers are developing and updating public spaces, programs and services to improve access for all and meet state and federal accessibility requirements.

Figure 4: Minnesota individuals with a disability by age, 2023 (Source: US Census Bureau)

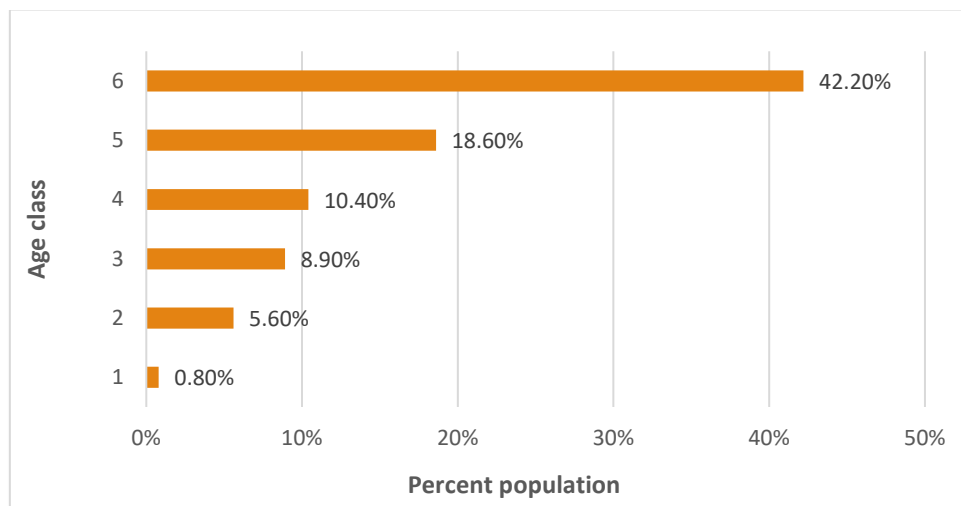
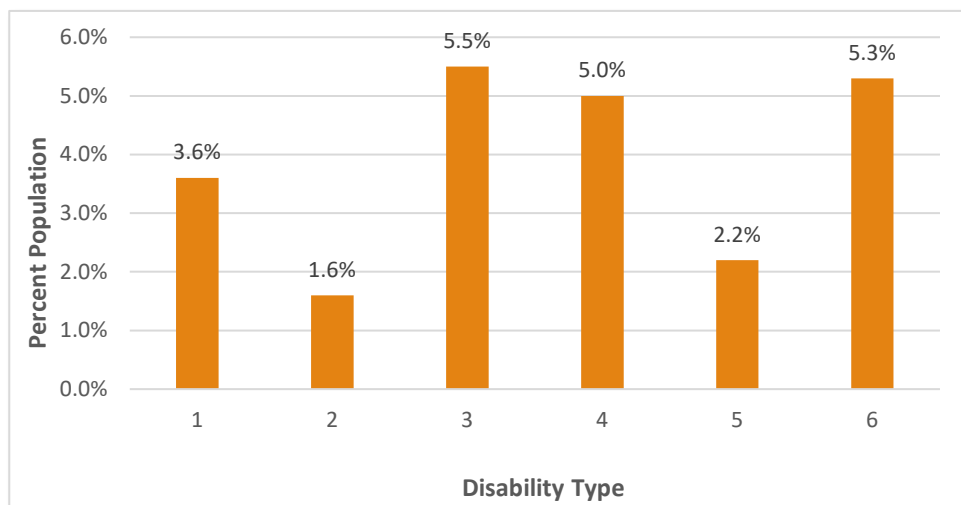


Figure 5: Minnesota individuals with a disability by type, 2023 (Source: US Census Bureau)



### What does it mean?

As Minnesota’s population continues to age and the number of individuals with disabilities continues to climb, outdoor recreation providers will need to continue developing and updating their programming, facilities and services to facilitate more and better access for people with disabilities. While much important work has been done to improve the accessibility of recreational facilities, agencies will need to significantly increase their investments to keep pace with Minnesota’s growing need for facilities and opportunities that accommodate, and are welcoming for, people with disabilities.

## LONG-TERM CHANGES IN MINNESOTA’S WEATHER PATTERNS

### What Do We Know?

Data from the State Climatology Office show that in Minnesota, average temperatures are increasing, especially during the winter, and extreme precipitation events are becoming more common. Substantial warming during winter and at night, increased precipitation, and heavier downpours already have affected our natural resources and how we interact with and use them. These trends are expected to continue, and likely intensify, in the decades ahead, bringing more volatile and warmer weather, especially warmer winters and nights, as well as longer dry spells followed by larger rainfalls.

#### *Warmer and Wetter*

Minnesota has warmed by 3.2 degrees Fahrenheit between 1895 and 2024, while annual precipitation increased by an average of 3.5 inches. Minnesota has gotten warmer and wetter since 1895, with the most dramatic changes having come in the past several decades. Compared to 20th century averages, all but two years since 1970 have been warm, wet, or both, and each of the top 10 combined warmest and wettest years on record occurred between 1998 and 2024. Although conditions will vary from year to year, these increases are projected to intensify through the 21st century.

#### *More Damaging Rainfalls*

Heavy rains are now more common in Minnesota and more intense than at any time on record. Long-term observation sites have seen dramatic increases in 1-inch rains, 3-inch rains, and the size of the heaviest rainfall of the year. Since 2000, Minnesota has seen a significant uptick in devastating, large-area extreme rainstorms as well. These ‘mega-rain’ events, which are categorized as six inches of rain falling over 1,000 square miles in 24 hours or less, were 2.5 times more common between 2000-2021 than between 1973-1999.

### *Warming Winter Temperatures*

The most significant impacts of warming in Minnesota are happening in the winter. Although Minnesota will always see periodic severe cold spells, the overall trend is for warmer winter temperatures. Daily average minimum winter temperatures have increased dramatically from 1895-2021. Northern Minnesota has seen an increase of 7.3 degrees Fahrenheit, central Minnesota has seen an increase of 6 degrees Fahrenheit, and southern Minnesota has seen an increase of 4.9 degrees Fahrenheit in southern Minnesota.

### *Impacts to Outdoor Recreation*

These changes are having, and will continue to have, profound impacts on how agencies manage natural landscapes and provide outdoor recreation opportunities to Minnesotans and visitors. Examples of impacts to outdoor recreation that have already been documented include:

- Shorter winter seasons - shorter and more inconsistent conditions for winter activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling.
- Longer shoulder seasons - some recreational activities may benefit as temperatures warm more quickly in the spring and stay warm longer in the fall.
- More storm event impacts to recreation facilities – wind, erosion and flooding damages trails, beaches and other facilities.
- Greater damage to natural communities and cultural resource sites – erosion along rivers and destabilizing slopes are causing loss of historic sites and impacts to rare natural communities.
- Higher prevalence of invasive species - increasing spread of invasive species that are suited to changing conditions and the arrival of new invasive species.
- Additional ecological impacts affecting other activities – changes to fish and animal populations affect fishing, hunting and wildlife watching.

### **What Does It Mean?**

Recreation providers will need to adjust their programs, operations and facilities to adapt to these changing and more variable conditions. Longer shoulder seasons and shorter winter seasons are affecting visitation patterns and could lead to changes in public expectations. Outdoor recreation providers will need to evaluate and address the impacts of these changes on their facilities and the programs they offer, such as offering fewer snow- or ice-dependent activities, designing and rehabilitating facilities to withstand more extreme weather events, etc. Providers will also need to communicate and demonstrate how they are addressing long-term changes in weather patterns to respond to visitor and public concerns. Some possible actions include adopting non-carbon-based energy sources (e.g., solar and wind power); using electric vehicles for facility operations; reducing energy and water use at facilities; and providing charging stations for privately owned electric vehicles. Providers can take such actions in concert with promoting environmental stewardship messages to their visitors.

# THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND GRANT PROGRAM

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), created by Congress in 1964, has an important place in the history of the United States' outdoor recreation and conservation efforts. The 1964 LWCF Act created a trust fund to collect receipts from several sources (primarily from outer continental shelf oil leases) from which Congress would annually appropriate funds to be distributed among the states and territories.

The LWCF program is divided into the "State Side" (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/stateside.htm>) which provides grants to state and local governments, and the "Federal Side" (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/federalside.htm>) which is used to acquire lands, waters, and interests therein necessary to achieve the natural, cultural, wildlife, and recreation management objectives of federal land management agencies. Since its inception, the State-side LWCF grant program has made available more than \$6.5 billion which has supported more than 46,500 projects located within every county in the country. The states have matched this amount with at least \$6.5 billion of investments, for a total of at least \$13.0 billion, to acquire and improve parks and natural areas in every county in the nation.

In 2019, Congress voted to reauthorize the LWCF permanently in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Public Law 116-9, Sec. 3001). This was a definitive statement in support of the LWCF as a unique program dedicated to the protection of our recreation lands and outdoor places. In 2020, the federal Great American Outdoors Act (Public Law 116-152) mandated \$900 million annual disbursements from the LWCF nationally across the United States and territories (i.e., no longer subject to further Congressional appropriation).

The State-side LWCF grant program has had a large impact on outdoor recreation in Minnesota, with federal investment totaling more than \$109 million in the state's outdoor recreation system for close-to-home recreational opportunities. Most of this investment occurred between the late 1960s and mid-1980s; however, since permanent LWCF reauthorization in 2019, Minnesota has received over \$34.4 million in appropriations that have increased annually. Given the program's 50% match requirement, the federal dollars leveraged significant match from state and local dollars over the years, demonstrating the need for and commitment to outdoor recreation systems across Minnesota and amongst government units at every level. This investment has created a permanent legacy of parks and trails throughout Minnesota.

In Minnesota the LWCF supports both local and state outdoor recreation projects, with each receiving 50% of the Minnesota's LWCF appropriation per Minnesota Statutes, Section 84.0264. A list of projects funded from 2020 to 2025 is provided in [Appendix B](#).

LWCF grants are provided to local units of government via Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation and Natural and Scenic Area competitive grant programs administered by the DNR. These grants fund acquisition, development and/or redevelopment of outdoor recreation and natural areas. To date, LWCF has funded 944 local government park and trail projects across all Minnesota counties.

At the state level, LWCF dollars support the acquisition and development of the State Outdoor Recreation System defined in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 86A. Over time, LWCF has funded projects at 157 DNR-managed outdoor recreation units, three Minnesota Historical Society recreation sites, and three University of Minnesota recreation sites.

## Highlighting Progress – Local Park and Trail Grant Projects

### *Investing in Communities Across Minnesota*

LWCF monies are distributed via a grant process to local communities throughout Minnesota. Grant requests are solicited annually, and projects are evaluated using the Open Project Selection Process. These grants, matched by local funds, enable counties, cities and townships to invest in outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities to serve their residents and visitors. The two examples included here represent the type of projects that LWCF has funded, and the significant difference this funding has made across the state.

#### **City Park, City of Edgerton**

Located in Southwest Minnesota in Pipestone County, Edgerton City Park serves this rural community and surrounding area. The project resurfaced existing tennis courts to use as tennis and pickleball courts, added a basketball/sports court, and created accessible walkways throughout the park, connecting to all park facilities.

Edgerton received a \$169,000 grant from LWCF for this project. The intent of the project was to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. The project added new opportunities for park visitors – pickleball and basketball – that were not available before. New fencing and walkways improved accessibility and safety for all visitors to the park.



Aerial view of City Park, City of Edgerton.

#### **City of New Brighton, Totem Pole Park**

Located in the northwestern Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, Totem Pole Park in the City of New Brighton serves densely populated and low-income neighborhoods. The project created pedestrian connections to the park, upgraded numerous park facilities for safety and accessibility, and added new recreation opportunities.

New Brighton received a \$300,000 grant from LWCF for this project. The park improvements are intended to create quality outdoor recreation opportunities within walking distance of underserved populations. The project included a new picnic shelter with restrooms and new pickleball courts. Refurbished facilities included an existing baseball field, basketball court and bankshot courts. A reconfigured parking lot also improved safety for drivers and pedestrians.



Bankshot court in Totem Pole Park, City of New Brighton.

## MINNESOTA’S FINANCIAL NEEDS

Minnesota’s estimated annual financial needs for the acquisition, development and redevelopment of outdoor recreation facilities are shown in the table below, grouped by the four different types of Minnesota providers:

1. Local governments (city, county and township facilities)
2. State agencies (state parks, state trails, water access sites and natural areas)
3. Met Council (regional parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area)
4. GMRPTC (regional parks outside of the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area)

Outdoor Recreation Provider	Estimated Annual Financial Need (\$)
<b>Local governments</b> (city, county and township facilities) <i>Source: Local parks and trails 2024 (FY25) application requests through DNR grant programs</i>	25,500,000
<b>State agencies</b> (state parks, state trails, water access sites and natural areas) <i>Source: DNR 2025 10-Year Capital Asset Need Report - annual need for recreational areas, water accesses, trails, bridges and roads</i>	222,103,386
<b>Met Council</b> (regional parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area) <i>Source: Metropolitan Council 2040 Regional Park and Trails 5-year Capital Improvement Plan 2018-2022)</i>	30,000,000
<b>GMRPTC</b> (regional parks outside of the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area) <i>Source: Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails 2023 (FY25) Application Requests</i>	35,050,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$312,653,386</b>

These figures represent an approximate annual request/need for funding. Minnesota has a backlog of financial needs in the billions of dollars to take care of existing facilities and expand the outdoor recreation system to meet current and anticipated future demand. Each year brings increased funding requests from communities in need of financial support to renovate or replace their existing facilities to meet current safety and accessibility standards. Additional funding is needed so outdoor recreation facilities can fulfill their vital role in connecting people to the outdoors and creating the next generation of natural resource stewards. Funding both destination and close-to-home experiences are essential if the vision is to be achieved.

# MINNESOTA'S 2026-2030 LWCF PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

The DNR has developed and implemented a systematic approach to administering the LWCF funding provided to Minnesota.

The Open Project Selection Process, described in more detail below, is followed for LWCF grants to local units of government via the Outdoor Recreation and Natural and Scenic Area competitive grant programs. This process ensures equal opportunity for all eligible applicants by establishing public notification of the availability of funding, application assistance, and an objective review system based on the priorities established in the SCORP.

At the state level, project proposals are solicited periodically from DNR managers of units of the state Outdoor Recreation System. These projects are also evaluated based on the priorities established in the SCORP.

Following project review and prioritization, the highest-priority state and local projects are recommended for award. The recommendations are reviewed by DNR leadership prior to submittal to the National Park Service for final award decisions, which typically occurs on an annual basis.

## OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

### 1. Notification of Grant Opportunities

DNR grants staff inform all potential applicants each December about the availability of funding by e-mail and by posting the Request for Proposals (RFP) notice on the DNR website. Potential applicants can access application materials via the [DNR Recreation grants webpage \(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/index.html\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/index.html), or by emailing a request to [info.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:info.dnr@state.mn.us).

Application materials include Minnesota's project selection criteria for the current funding cycle, the types of facilities eligible for funding, an explanation of how the open project selection process works, and the application deadline (typically March 31 each year). Program manuals and application materials are also updated annually, including maximum and minimum award amounts and scoring criteria.

### 2. Program Assistance

DNR grants staff assist potential applicants with the preparation of applications and alert them to prerequisite requirements, such as the need to pass a public resolution before submitting the proposal and the preparation of proposed site plans. DNR grants staff also provide an opportunity for potential applicants to share their draft proposal for staff review and feedback prior to the application deadline.

### 3. The Priority Ranking and Project Recommendation System

Minnesota has an objective, two-part process to evaluate, rank and select local projects for LWCF dollars. The first part of the process involves an evaluation of the proposed project based on the Minnesota's SCORP strategies and the associated priority actions. A number of specific criteria derived from these priorities are included in the evaluation sheet used in reviewing each application.

In the second part of the evaluation, applications are evaluated on site-level design criteria including accessibility, quality, and safety. Other evaluation criteria include documented need for the project and beneficial impact to the community; level of local government commitments; public support; extent of positive or negative impact, if any, to environmental and cultural resources; and completeness and quality of application materials. This evaluation ensures that projects selected for funding are viable, well-designed and in conformance with current laws and standards.

Following application evaluation and ranking, the highest-ranking proposals are recommended for award.

## STATE AND LOCAL LWCF SELECTION GUIDELINES

As noted previously, the SCORP priorities guide the review of state and local projects proposed for LWCF grant funding. The selection guidelines are based on three of the four Strategic Directions and associated priorities and strategies in the SCORP. The fourth Strategic Direction -- coordination among partners -- does not include recommendations applicable to evaluating proposed grant projects. The following questions guide the evaluation of project applications.

### *Does the Project Connect People to the Outdoors?*

- Does the proposed project design and redevelop outdoor recreation facilities so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (e.g., driving, walking, biking, canoe/kayaking, snowmobiling, and ATV riding), including accessible forms of transportation)?
- Does the proposed project design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities and backgrounds?
- Does the proposed project provide high-quality experiences to visitors through thoughtful design, programming, and interpretation?
- Are the proposed outdoor recreation facilities and experiences affordable for people with different economic means?

### *Does the Project Acquire Land and/or Create Opportunities?*

- Is the proposed project located in an area lacking near-home recreation opportunities, including both densely settled urban areas and the surrounding rapidly growing areas, and regional population centers located throughout rural Minnesota?
- Does the proposed project accelerate the acquisition of private inholdings and add lands to existing parks to enhance resource protection and recreational opportunities?
- Does the proposed project preserve high-quality natural resources? This includes:
  - Ecological subsections not represented in the state park system or other comparable land holdings
  - Exceptional one-time opportunities of unique, high-quality natural resources that meet critical needs near population centers
  - Important water resources including lakes, rivers, wetlands, shoreline and critical watersheds
  - Corridors that connect other protected high-quality natural resources areas
- Does the proposed project design, develop, and/or redevelop facilities that meet the outdoor recreation needs of people of all abilities?
- Does the proposed project create an environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses?
- Does the proposed project develop infrastructure and amenities that meet a broad spectrum of community needs and interests and consider future generations?
- Is the proposed project designed with a focus on developing sustainable and resilient infrastructure?
- Does the park design take into consideration emergency preparedness and resilience to changing environments (i.e. flooding events, floodplain changes, shade and water availability, plant adaptivity, and invasive species management)?

### *Does the Project Take Care of What We Have?*

- Does the proposed project result in redevelopment, renovation or rehabilitation of existing infrastructure to ensure high quality and safe experiences for the public?
- Does the project sponsor maintain a capital asset management plan to ensure protection and full utilization of the proposed facility (facilities)?
- Does the proposed project preserve existing high-quality natural areas and water resources?
- Does the proposed project restore and reconstruct natural communities that have been degraded or lost due to invasive species, agriculture, or development?

## MINNESOTA'S WETLANDS

The National Park Service requires each SCORP to address wetlands as an important outdoor recreation resource. This section articulates this value for Minnesota's SCORP 2026-2030.

There are many types of wetlands in Minnesota, each with widely varying characteristics. Some wetlands are dry for much of the year; others are almost always covered by several feet of water. Some wetlands have grasses and sedges, shrubs, or trees. They may be small, confined basins or extend for hundreds of miles. It is estimated that Minnesota has lost about 50% of its original wetland acreage.

Minnesota recognizes the multiple benefits that wetlands provide, including:

- Erosion control: Wetland vegetation reduces wave damage along lakes and stream banks.
- Flood control: Wetlands can slow and retain runoff, reducing the frequency of flooding along streams and rivers.
- Groundwater recharge and discharge: Some wetlands recharge groundwater by holding surface water and allowing it to slowly filter into the groundwater reserves. Some wetlands are discharge areas; they receive groundwater even during dry periods and help maintain flows in nearby rivers and streams.
- Water quality: Wetlands protect the water quality of downstream lakes, streams and rivers by removing pollutants.
- Rare species habitat: 43% of threatened or endangered species in the U.S. live in or depend on wetlands.
- Recreation: Wetlands are a great place to canoe, hunt, fish or watch wildlife.
- Economic value: Wetlands provide economic commodities such as wild rice and bait fish.

### MINNESOTA WETLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN

The *Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Plan* (MWCP) sets directions for managing and regulating the state's wetlands and examines the way to consolidate the many different existing wetland programs. The goal for wetland conservation in Minnesota is to maintain and restore the quality and diversity and increase the overall quantity of wetlands in the state, varying regionally in accordance with differences in the character and health of the wetland resource, to promote ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable communities.

Implementation of the MWCP is further guided by a memorandum of understanding that includes state and federal agencies whose work impacts wetland issues. Signatories to the memorandum are the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Minnesota Department of Agriculture as "Sponsoring State Agencies"; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service collectively as the "Cooperating Federal Agencies."

Further description of the status of wetland resources in the state, the *Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Plan*, and the Memorandum of Understanding are available on the [Minnesota DNR website: \(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wetlands/index.html\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wetlands/index.html).

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## APPENDICES

- A. Local Provider Survey Summary**
- B. LWCF Projects in Minnesota, 2020-2025**

# APPENDIX A. LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDERS SURVEY, 2025

## INTRODUCTION

To help inform this SCORP, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) distributed an on-line survey to local outdoor recreation providers throughout the state of Minnesota in January 2025. The intent of the survey was to gather information from local providers – primarily counties and cities – about issues they see for outdoor recreation and how they anticipate prioritizing their efforts for the next five years. The survey results would supplement information about local-level outdoor recreation that was already available from other sources, including the Greater Minnesota Park and Trail Commission and the Metropolitan Council.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Survey Instrument Development*

The survey instrument and communication materials were developed by the DNR SCORP project team in 2018 and repeated with minor updates in 2025. Survey topics were selected to collect data that could be compared with information about state-level and regional level priorities. The team also looked at survey instruments used by other states as part of their SCORP planning processes.

### *Survey Instrument Description*

The survey instrument consisted of 28 scale, list, and open-ended response questions. Topics addressed by survey questions included visitation trends, funding sources, types and conditions of facilities managed, and plans for acquisition, development and rehabilitation activities. Open-ended questions included inquiries about impacts on and adaptations to recreational opportunities and built infrastructure from a range of factors, as well as identifying priorities for the next SCORP.

### *Administration of the Local Recreation Providers Survey*

The notice of the online survey was distributed to local recreation providers with the assistance of several groups. The survey notice and online link was distributed by the Minnesota Parks and Recreation Association to its member organizations. The notice was also distributed via the Association of Minnesota Counties and League of Minnesota Cities, and DNR grant programs. The project team realized there would be some overlap – with some organizations possibly receiving multiple notices – when distributing the survey through these groups but preferred some overlaps to potentially not reaching some local providers.

## ANALYSIS

Providers shared that use of local park and recreation systems has largely increased over the last 5 years. Some expressed that the changes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have made it hard to assess long-term trends. Increases in demands from visitors (e.g. level of service) have come alongside increases in use. Providers prioritize maintenance of existing facilities higher than development of new facilities or acquisition of land. While some activities have emerged or grown (e.g. e-bikes and pickleball), overall trends for recreational activities have largely remained the same from 5 years ago.

## RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS: LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDERS SURVEY, 2025

### Most local providers are seeing growth in visitation and use of their systems.

Q4 - Has visitation to your recreation system increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the last 5 years?



### Providers identified types of facilities that are adequate or inadequate to meet demand.

*In general, does your system have an adequate number of the following facilities/amenities to meet demand?* Respondents could select adequate, inadequate, or N/A. N/A choices were excluded from calculations to develop the lists below.

Fewer than 40% of providers said the following facilities were adequate to meet demand, indicating there may be the greatest need for expansion of these opportunities:

- Equestrian trails
- Mountain bike trails
- Motorized off-road trails
- Interpretive trails
- Environmental education facilities/nature center
- Trailhead amenities (e.g. restrooms, drinking water, garbage, parking, sign...)

More than 60% of respondents said the following facilities were adequate to meet demand:

- Picnic areas
- Golf courses
- Playgrounds
- Tennis courts
- Baseball/softball fields
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Snowmobile trails
- Public water access/boat launch
- Football fields
- Fishing areas
- Cross-country ski trails
- Outdoor basketball courts
- Sand volleyball courts
- Hunting areas
- Swimming beaches
- Disc golf courses
- Winter hiking/snowshoe trails
- Soccer fields
- Dog parks

Between 40% and 60% of respondents said the following facilities were adequate to meet demand:

- Outdoor pools/waterparks
- Heritage/historic areas or sites
- Skateboard parks
- Multi-use paved trails
- Water-based area amenities (e.g. restrooms, drinking water, garbage)

- Wildlife viewing areas
- Campgrounds with electricity
- Archery ranges
- Pickleball courts
- Sledding/tubing areas
- Campgrounds without electricity or other rustic camping areas
- Natural surface hiking trails
- Winter biking areas/trails

**Generally, providers said recreation facilities are in good or fair condition.**

*In general, how would you describe the condition of the following facilities/amenities in your system?*

Respondents only rated the condition of facilities if they identified that facility as being adequate/inadequate in the previous question. Providers could rate the condition as good, fair or poor.

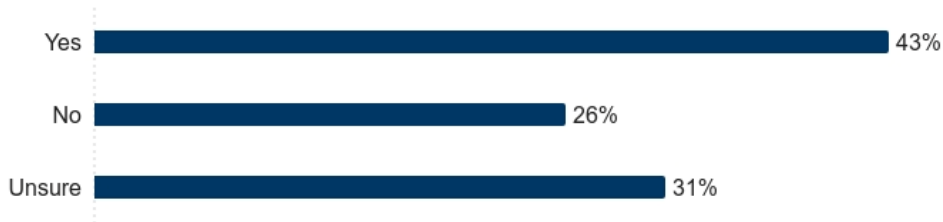
More than 25% rated the following facilities as being in poor condition. Facilities at the top of the list received a poor rating from the most providers.

- Environmental education facilities/nature center
- Interpretive trails
- Motorized off-road trails
- Sledding/tubing areas
- Winter biking areas/trails
- Heritage/historic areas or sites
- Swimming beaches
- Outdoor pools/waterpark

All other facilities were rated as being in good or fair condition by more than 75% of providers.

**There is not a consistent direction on acquiring additional land for recreation.**

Q7 - Does your organization plan to acquire new land in the next 5-10 years?



Priorities for land acquisition:

- New trail development, including paved trails, natural hiking trails, access along water and trails in new neighborhoods
- Open space and lands for resource preservation
- To facilitate new recreation development, including parks in new neighborhoods, access to water, camping and facilities for other recreation activities

Reasons for not planning land acquisition:

- Lack of demand due to communities being fully built out, no need for additional recreation lands, or already having opportunities to expand facilities on existing lands
- Some providers cited lack of funding or capacity

## Most providers plan on developing new facilities or infrastructure.

Q9 - Does your organization plan to develop new facilities or infrastructure in the next 5-10 years?



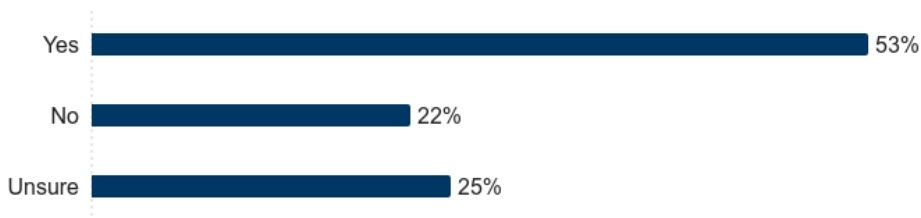
Kinds of facilities or infrastructure planned for development:

- Trail development and amenities, including expanding, connecting and upgrading trails; and building trail supporting facilities such as trailheads, shelters and restrooms
- Recreation and community spaces, such as community centers, amphitheaters and picnic areas
- Facilities to support recreation activities, such as outdoor sports fields, pickleball courts, ice arenas, playgrounds, and campsites

Providers cited lack of funding and lack of demand as reasons for not planning to develop new facilities.

## Half of providers are planning major rehabilitation projects.

Q11 - Is your organization planning major rehabilitation projects in the next 5-10 years?



## Management priorities

What priority level do you expect management of the following activities to be for your organization over the next 5-10 years? Rated on a scale 1=low priority, to 3=high priority.

- **High Priority** (mean 2.1 – 3.0): Special events; Water quality management; Partner-based programs, and Youth recreation or sports
- **Median Priority** (mean 1.9-2.1): Landscaping, Adult recreation or sports, Self-guided interpretation, Native plan and forest management, and Invasive species control
- **Low Priority** (mean 1.0 – 1.9): Adaptive recreation, Day camps, Naturalist programs, and Wildlife management

These management priorities are largely the same as providers expressed five years ago.

## Maintaining current facilities and infrastructure is the highest priority for investment over the next 5-10 years.

Providers rated the priority level for various investments. Maintaining current facilities and infrastructure was rated a high priority by 77% of providers. About 40% of providers rated new

development of facilities and infrastructure as a high priority. About 30% of providers rated natural resource protection and management; environmental education, sports, and recreation programming; and marketing and outreach to build awareness of your organization as a high priority. Only 13% identified land acquisition as a high priority.

**Providers have observed a variety of changes and trends in recreation in the last 5 years.**

Providers are observing increased use of outdoor facilities along with rising expectations from visitors. These increases have not come with more resources for operations or maintenance of facilities, and in some cases, volunteerism in parks has decreased alongside the increase in demands.

**About half of providers are taking steps to improve recreation opportunities for all Minnesotans, particularly communities with lower engagement in outdoor recreation.**

Actions providers have been taking to better serve all Minnesota communities include:

- Engaging communities through outreach and events, such as cultural festivals, multi-lingual communication, influencer campaigns, introductory outdoor skills programs and partnerships
- Modifying program fees and policies where necessary to reduce barriers, including offering low-cost or free recreational programs, and providing scholarships
- Emphasizing accessibility through improving ADA compliance, providing adaptive recreational equipment and inclusive design of new facilities
- Improving access to the benefits of outdoor recreation and a healthy environment, including investing in grant programs to improve equitable distribution of resources across areas, utilizing demographic data in decision-making, and enhancing tree-cover in communities

**About half of providers are concerned about the impacts of climate change and are taking, or considering, the following actions in response:**

- Increasing focus on flood mitigation and planning, including redesigning or relocating infrastructure out of flood-prone areas, better stormwater management, naturalizing flood-prone areas and budgeting for flood response
- Adapting recreational activities and facilities for changing seasonal trends, e.g. preparing for winter alternatives to skiing and sledding, reducing outdoor ice rinks, and considering how changes to seasonal weather may impact popularity of various outdoor activities
- Enhanced natural resource management, including pursuing diverse tree canopies, considering shifts to habitats, addressing invasive species and shoreline stabilization
- Increasing investments in energy and water efficiency of facilities
- Planning for amenities needed by the public in response to severe weather events, e.g. providing drinking water and shade at recreation facilities for summer heat waves, and facilities to serve as severe weather shelters

## APPENDIX B. LWCF PROJECTS IN MINNESOTA, 2020-2025

### INTRODUCTION

The LWCF contributed to the successful implementation of 50 projects across Minnesota from 2020 to 2025. The LWCF funding totaled almost \$16.5 million, leveraging almost \$19.5 million in local and state matching funds and an additional \$147,200 in other state funding.

Year	Project #	Recipient	Title	LWCF Contribution	State/Local Match	Other State Funds
2021	LW27-01441	Belle Plaine	Fountain Park	150,000	150,000	
2021	LW27-01446	Cottage Grove	Oakwood Park	250,000	250,000	
2021	LW27-01442	Cottage Grove	Hamlet Park	141,000	211,900	70,900
2021	LW27-01445	Detroit Lakes	South Shore Park	190,000	190,000	
2021	LW27-00986	DNR	Split Rock Lighthouse State Park	600,000	370,155	
2021	LW27-00987	DNR	Sibley State Park	750,000	750,000	
2021	LW27-01438	Elk River	Orono Park	250,000	250,000	
2021	LW27-01437	Inver Grove Heights	South Valley Park	250,000	250,000	
2021	LW27-01436	Lake City	Ohuta Beach	250,000	250,000	
2021	LW27-01444	Proctor	Proctor Regional Recreation Center	200,000	200,000	
2021	LW27-01439	Richfield	Augsburg Park	200,000	200,000	
2021	LW27-01443	St. Francis	Siwek Park	245,000	245,000	
2021	LW27-01440	Wyoming	Swenson Park	165,000	165,000	
2022	LW27-01447	Bovey	Greenway Sports Complex	150,000	150,000	
2022	LW27-01448	Edgerton	City Park	169,000	169,000	
2022	LW27-01449	Hastings	Lake Isabel Park	240,000	240,000	
2022	LW27-01451	Inver Grove Heights	Heritage Village Park	250,000	250,000	
2022	LW27-01452	New Brighton	Hansen Park	250,000	250,000	
2022	LW27-01453	Park Rapids	Depot Park	250,000	250,000	
2022	LW27-01454	Richmond	Centennial Park	134,000	134,000	
2022	LW27-01455	Rochester	Lincolnshire Park	195,000	195,000	
2022	LW27-01457	Sherburne County	Grams Regional Park	250,000	250,000	
2022	LW27-01450	St. Paul	Victoria Park	173,700	250,000	76,300

Year	Project #	Recipient	Title	LWCF Contribution	State/Local Match	Other State Funds
2022	LW27-01458	Waconia	Waterford Park	250,000	250,000	
2023	LW27-01466	Forest Lake	Beltz Park	300,000	700,000	
2023	LW27-01463	Lakeville	Antlers Park	300,000	900,000	
2023	LW27-01465	Little Canada	Pioneer Park	300,000	450,000	
2023	LW27-01462	New Brighton	Totem Pole Park	300,000	700,000	
2023	LW27-01471	Pelican Rapids	E.L. Peterson Park	260,000	260,000	
2023	LW27-01468	Prior Lake	Ponds Park	299,485	299,485	
2023	LW27-01470	Rochester	Slatterly Community Park	250,000	250,000	
2024	LW27-01477	Carver	Creekside Park	350,000	350,000	
2024	LW27-01478	Cottage Grove	Oltman Park	350,000	350,000	
2024	LW27-00989	DNR	Sibley State Park Campground	2,650,000	2,650,000	
2024	LW27-01475	Jordan	Pauly Park	350,000	350,000	
2024	LW27-01474	Marshall	Independence Park	210,274	210,274	
2024	LW27-01476	Mayer	Old Schoolhouse Park	314,714	314,715	
2024	LW27-01473	Pequot Lakes	Trailside Park	265,405	265,405	
2024	LW27-01479	Rochester	McQuillan Park	370,850	370,850	
2024	LW27-01472	Sherburne County	Island View Park	341,414	341,414	
2025	LW27-01493	Big Stone County	Toqua Park	350,000	350,000	
2025	LW27-01483	Cottage Grove	Mississippi Dunes Park	350,000	759,000	
2025	LW27-01484	Cottonwood	CW Reishus Park	350,000	350,000	
2025	LW27-01485	Duluth	Hillside Sport Court Park	350,000	650,000	
2025	LW27-01486	La Crescent	Wieser Park	166,116	166,815	
2025	LW27-01487	Madison	Theodor S. Slen Park	350,000	350,000	
2025	LW27-01488	Rochester	Silver Lake Park	350,000	350,000	
2025	LW27-01489	St. Bonifacius	Missile Park	350,000	350,000	
2025	LW27-01490	St. Paul	The Heights	350,000	1,150,000	
2025	LW27-01491	Wright County	Montissippi Regional Park	350,000	350,000	
			<b>Total Project Funds</b>	<b>\$16,480,958</b>	<b>\$19,458,013</b>	<b>\$147,200</b>