



# 2013 Legislative Agenda

As part of our mission, the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota advocates for the acquisition, development and operation of parks and trails throughout the state. Our 2013 legislative agenda was crafted with extensive research and involvement with community partners and agency input.

The Minnesota Legislature heads into the 2013 session with a new lineup of players. For the first time in 20 years, one party (DFL) is in control of the House, Senate and Governor’s office. And there are many challenges facing these legislators as they prepare the upcoming budget. A \$1.1 billion budget shortfall for the 2014-25 biennium is forecasted (Minnesota Management & Budget Office, Nov. 2012). In the last few biennia, the budget has been balanced with temporary fixes (MMB, Dec. 2012). Now we should make sound investments in our future—including in our parks and trails.

## I. Restore base funding to operate State Parks and Trails

Minnesota has outstanding natural resources that have been preserved for everyone to enjoy as parks and trails. These places attract tourists from all over Minnesota, other states and nations. Particularly, in greater Minnesota, these places have an overwhelmingly positive effect on the tourism economy. State Parks make up the majority of Minnesota’s top visitor attractions (Table 1).

However, over the past four years, the necessary funds to manage these places have been diminishing. Starting in 2012, visitors to our state parks and trails have begun to feel the cutbacks, as evidenced by complaints about dirty bathrooms, lack of staff to provide customer service, bike trails in disrepair, closed campgrounds, and broken amenities. All a result of funding cuts.

The general fund needs to maintain our treasured system. With the general fund appropriated every two years, we must get it right during this legislative session or we’ll be stuck with a deteriorating system into June 2015.

Table 1. State Parks see the most visitors of all the attractions in greater Minnesota

Region	# of top 10 attractions that are State Parks
Northwest	9
Central	9
Southern	8
Northeast	5
Metro	1

Source: Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2012

Declining funds to operate State Parks and Trails

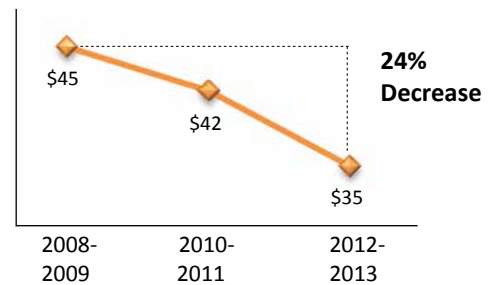


Figure 1. General Fund appropriation to Division of Parks and Trails by biennium (in millions). Source: Minnesota Management & Budget Office, 2012 & MnDNR, 2012

Table 2. Amount of General Funds needed to care for Minnesota’s State Parks and Trails system

Purpose	Biennium Amount
Support new parks and trails places like Lake Vermilion State Park and Browns Creek Trail	\$3 million
Operating shortfall filled primarily with one-time dollars in last budget	\$7 million
Base funding ensure our treasured legacy is cared for	\$34.5 million
<b>Total Amount Needed</b>	<b>\$44.5 million</b>



The general fund appropriations have already eroded by 24 percent over the last two biennia (figure 1). If our parks and trails are expected to thrive, we need to restore these cuts and invest in the new parks and trails that have recently been added.

Complaints have begun, and the full pain from cuts have not even been felt yet; the cuts were plugged with a one-time gimmick that used Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund money. But that plug is about to be pulled, and if it's not restored with general fund appropriations, we can expect the rumblings from visitors to turn into an outcry.

## SUSTAIN BENEFICIAL GROWTH

Minnesota is growing in population, diversity, and use of parks and trails. We need to ensure the growing demands are met. We have begun this work by seizing on important opportunities to preserve outstanding places such as Lake Vermilion State Park and Browns Creek State Trail.

Citizens glow with pride for these places, which get people out to experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, not to mention the boost they bring our tourism economy. Such important benefits

need to be maintained. The Parks and Trails Division estimates the operation and maintenance of these places at \$1.5 million annually (State Parks and Trails Future Strategies Committee, Oct. 2012).

An investment in these places is an investment in the future of our state's economy and our people's well being.

The total amount needed to operate our State Parks and Trails is at least \$44.5 million for the 2014-2015 biennium. This would ensure our treasured places are cared for and continue to invigorate our tourism economy.

## II. Make Legacy Funds truly transformative for our parks and trails

On November 4, 2008, in the midst of a recession, Minnesotans overwhelmingly voted *yes* on the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which raised state taxes by 0.375 percent until 2034 to pay for enduring conservation investments.

As the 25-year Legacy Plan says, "In very clear terms, the citizens of Minnesota told park and trail providers to make sure that this new source of funding has a significant and lasting impact" (p. 37).

### ACCELERATE "ACQUIRE LAND, DEVELOP OPPORTUNITIES"

have a significant and lasting impact. And with more than 40,000 acres of legislatively authorized parkland still in private hands, now is the time to secure those places for present and future generations. Minnesotans are counting on lawmakers to not squander this historic opportunity to invest in our state's great outdoor way of life.

Are Legacy Funds suppose to mostly just take care of what we have?



Figure 2. Parks and Trails Legacy Fund spending by strategic direction, FY2010-FY2013. Source: MnDNR (2012), Met Council (2012). Greater MN allocation not available.

The Legacy Plan identifies "acquire land, create opportunities" as one of its four strategic directions for the funds. However, so far the strategic direction receiving the majority of funds has been "take care of what we have" (figure 2). The general fund is intended to take care of what we have. Legacy Funds should be used to make truly transformative investment in our parks and trails.

Minnesota's growing population needs access to outdoor recreation opportunities. The health of our population depends in part on such access (see P&TC Public Health fact sheet, 2012). Minnesota's tourism economy depends on parks and trails (see P&TC Tourism and Economy fact sheets, 2012).

Legacy Funds spent on acquisition and development would be transformative not only for our parks and trails, but for our state.

Acquiring land now, when values in most parts of the state are at their lowest levels since 2007, would



### III. 13 trail projects still backlogged from 2010 vetoes; It is time to build

We have one of the oldest and most respected park and trail systems in the nation because of the investment made by previous legislatures. But in times of stress on public funding of all kinds, as we have now, there is a risk that we won't carry on that legacy.

Bonding is a vital tool to acquire land for new parks and trails. In preparing our bonding priority list, the Parks & Trails Council continually seeks input from organizations, communities and citizens across Minnesota to best represent the state. This citizen information is weighed along with input from public agencies.

Trail projects emerged as particularly important in this bonding session. The Parks & Trails Council has a set of established criteria for determining which trail-related land acquisition projects it will pursue.

**These 13 projects meet the following criteria:**

- The trail provides a high-quality “destination” experience
- The trail is well located for high use
- The trail enhances connectivity
- The opportunity to develop the trail is dependent on quick action

As such, our bonding priorities for 2013 are focused on 13 projects to acquire and develop state trails. These projects were approved by the Legislature in 2010, but never received funding because they were vetoed at the



Bikers along the Gitchi Gami State Trail along the North Shore. Photo by MnDNR.

last minute by former Governor Tim Pawlenty. Restoring these projects will help revitalize Minnesota’s outdoor economy and help keep our citizens healthy and happy.

**Benefits of funding the proposed trail projects:**

- Trail development projects result in local job retention and creation.
- Trails contribute to sustainable economies by creating business opportunities and supporting other tourism activities.
- Trails offer a safe transportation alternative, complementing roads and commuter routes.
- Trails contribute to healthy citizens.

#### PRIORITY PROJECTS FOR 2013

##### **BLAZING STAR STATE TRAIL—\$500,000**

To acquire and develop 5.2 miles connecting the village of Moscow to Austin. This segment extends the Blazing Star Trail east from Myre-Big Island State Park toward Austin, where it will connect with the western end of the Shooting Star State Trail.

##### **CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL—\$2 MILLION**

For initial acquisition and development of the recently authorized Camp Ripley/Veterans State Trail. The trail starts at the Paul Bunyan State Trail in Crow Wing State Park, goes south along the Mississippi River through Little Falls and ends at the Soo Line South ATV Trail near Royalton.



**CASEY JONES STATE TRAIL—  
\$2 MILLION**

Development of 7 miles of multipurpose trail in Pipestone County and acquisition of 4 miles of trail in Murray County. Complements past state funding.

**CUYUNA LAKES STATE TRAIL—  
\$1 MILLION**

Continued development of the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail with segments from Crosby to Deerwood, Paul Bunyan Trail to Lum Park and a segment connecting to the Sagamore Unit of the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area. Complements past state funding.

**GATEWAY STATE TRAIL—  
\$2 MILLION**

Continuation of land acquisition and trail development of 7-mile trail from Pine Point Park in May Township to William O'Brien State Park near Marine on St. Croix. Complements past state funding.

**GITCHI GAMI STATE TRAIL—  
\$500,000**

Development of 7.5 miles on the Gitchi Gami State Trail from Grand Marais to the Cascade River. This funding request is necessary to match federal funding. Complements past state funding.

**GLACIAL LAKES STATE TRAIL—  
\$1.5 MILLION**

Acquisition and development of 5 miles of trail extending the Glacial Lakes State Trail and connecting Sibley State Park to New London. Project includes a bridge over Hwy. 71.

**GOODHUE PIONEER STATE TRAIL—\$1.3 MILLION**

Land acquisition and development of 5 miles of trail from White Willow to Goodhue. The state already owns 3 miles of the trail, and the remaining 2 miles have seven willing sellers. Complements past state funding extending the trail from Zumbrota to White Willow and from Red Wing to Hay Creek.

**HEARTLAND STATE TRAIL—  
\$1.5 MILLION**

Land acquisition and development to complete 9-mile trail segment from Detroit Lakes to Frazee. Complements funding from 2006 and 2008.

**LUCE LINE STATE TRAIL—  
\$2.373 MILLION**

Paving of 24 miles of existing limestone trail west from Winsted through Silver Lake and Hutchinson to Cedar Mills. Adds 1 new mile of trail, closing the gap in the trail west of Winsted.

**MILL TOWNS STATE TRAIL—  
\$550,000**

The Mill Towns Trail will provide a permanent trail linking the Cannon Valley Trail at Cannon Falls and the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail at Faribault. Funding is required now for three critical segments: purchase of 6.5 miles of undeveloped rail bed from Faribault to Dundas; construction of a bridge over the Cannon River connecting the Sakatah Singing Hills trail to the Mill Towns Trail at a trail head in Faribault; and purchase and development of 3 miles of Cannon River shoreline east of Lake Byllesby to connect Lake Byllesby County Park to the Cannon Valley Trail in Cannon Falls.

**MINNESOTA RIVER TRAIL,  
MANKATO TO ST. PETER—  
\$400,000**

Pre-design and preliminary acquisition connecting Mankato and St. Peter. This trail will also provide connections to the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail and the Red Jacket Trail. The local communities have built trail connections and trailheads to accommodate the state trail.

**SHOOTING STAR STATE TRAIL—  
\$1 MILLION**

For property acquisition and trail development (Rose Creek to Austin segment) and to develop existing 5.6 miles of trail. Complements past state funding.

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