



# Special Places

PARKS & TRAILS COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA NEWSLETTER



Shooting Star State Trail © Maureen Noterman

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Becklin Homestead preserves the only parkland in Isanti County that is along the Rum River.



## PHOTO CONTEST!

enter by Aug. 20  
[www.ParksAndTrails.org](http://www.ParksAndTrails.org)

Your photos will help protect Minnesota's parks and trails! Plus, you can win these great prizes!

**1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE** - \$250 gift certificate to MPLS Frame Shop + \$100 cash prize.

**2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE** - \$75 cash prize

**3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE** - \$50 cash prize

All winners and honorable mentions featured in MN Trails Magazine and on our website and facebook page.

## Land Project: Becklin Homestead Park/WMA Adding critical land at gateway to Rum River

Looking for a hidden gem of nature? You can't do much better than the Isanti County Park/Wildlife Management Area (WMA) of Becklin Homestead. Here you can find a pastoral landscape of prairie grasses and old-growth trees quietly resting along the banks of the scenic Rum River.

The park is relatively new, having been established in 2004 with the help of Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota and numerous other groups. This year, we helped add another 9.5 acres of critical land at the entrance to further

enhance the park. This addition was part of the original homestead but remained in private ownership with a house and several other structures, until the owner decided he was interested in selling.

Bill Carlson, Chair of the Isanti County Park Board, was instrumental in both the initial park establishment and this addition. He says this park is near and dear to him in part because it's a place he visited often as a child,

**Becklin Homestead** | pg. 9

## From the Executive Director

# Protecting parks and trails, it's a team sport



By Brett Feldman

Being able to work on behalf of Minnesota's parks and trails gives me boundless satisfaction. I get to work side-by-side with

both park professionals and elected officials who share in a passion and dedication to protect the public good of parks and trails. Yet, there are times when the reality of our reliance on a state political system to take action, can hit hard. As many of you know by now, the 2016 Legislature can best be described using one word: inaction.

So what does this inaction mean to you and how will it impact your outdoor recreation experiences? Well when you consider that our state park system celebrated its 125th birthday this year, and that much of that aging system built in the 1930s is facing increased demands from a growing

number of visitors, delaying much needed investment at this critical juncture means you can expect to see crumbling infrastructure, unresolved health and safety issues and antiquated camping and shower facilities. It also means that you won't see the much anticipated and high priority park upgrades and trail connections that were planned throughout the state. See Page 4-5 for a recap on the 2016 legislative session.

I assure you that my goal isn't to spoil your upcoming state park and trail adventures. Rather my intent is to encourage you to think of protecting parks and trails as a team sport. It takes all of us working together as a team to make sure our elected officials understand how important these special places are to our health, our economy and our quality of life.

Parks and trails may speak to you and me, but there is no one to speak for them – except us. Let's face it.

Parks and trails don't care if you are a democrat or a republican. And they sure don't care if you are from Greater Minnesota or the metro. All they care is that we use our collective voices to make sure we give them as much love as they give us.

With all 201 seats in the House and Senate up for election in November, it is likely that you will come face-to-face with a candidate running for office this summer or fall. Please make the most of that opportunity by telling candidates how important parks and trails are to you and by challenging them to make funding for these special places a top priority. Tell them you are a proud Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota member and urge them to support the Council's comprehensive package of funding priorities. Together we can get this done. Thank you for all you do!

*Brett Feldman*



We are a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, a workplace giving option comprised of 21 environmental nonprofits working to protect, conserve and restore Minnesota's environment. Visit the website to see if you can donate through your workplace or to find out how to add your workplace to the program.

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

### THANK YOU TO OUR BUSINESS SPONSORS



## Event Recap

# Our supporters explore old, new and proposed trails in Scott County

On June 25, Parks & Trails Council hosted a 40-mile bike ride exploring the parks and trails of Scott County.

Keith Ottoson, a long-time member, volunteered to coordinate the ride. Keith greeted 60 participants at The Landing in Shakopee ❶ where we started the ride by traveling 3 miles along a new segment of the Minnesota Valley State Trail, past Valley Fair Amusement Park ❷, stopping right before the trail ends at the Bloomington Ferry Bridge. Here David Minge talked about plans to extend the trail through the Minnesota Valley Wildlife Refuge ❸ with DNR senior trail planner Kent Skaar, explaining the plan for a dual surface corridor to accommodate both paved and natural surface trail users. We continued biking to Cleary Lake Regional Park for lunch and a presentation by forestry specialist Dan Comerford on the management of the forests in the park ❹. We were honored to be joined by the



mayor of Prior Lake, Ken Hedberg and Sen. Melissa Wiklund, both of whom have demonstrated their support for parks and trails. We would like to thank the Great Scots Bike Club and Michael's Cycles for providing support for the ride.

## State Parks News

# Which of these plates will soon be on Minnesota vehicles?



For many people, applying a state parks sticker on to a windshield is an annual tradition. But soon, that tradition could get replaced with another: applying tabs on a new specialty license plate. The new plate is expected to be available in October. Those who opt for the plate will pay an annual plate renewal fee.

The DNR invited the public to submit artwork and then vote on the three finalists (above). At the time this newsletter went to print, voting was underway. To see the winning design go to [www.mndnr.gov/parksplate](http://www.mndnr.gov/parksplate).

## Legislative Session Recap

### Session ends with unfinished work and mixed results for parks and trails

The 2016 legislative session is best characterized by what didn't get done. Legislators didn't agree on a transportation plan. A major tax bill was vetoed. And most critically for parks and trails, no bonding bill was passed.

Bonding was the primary focus of Parks & Trails Council's 2016 Legislative Agenda, which called for an ambitious \$100 million investment to celebrate the 125th anniversary of state parks in Minnesota. Our agenda, if funded, would have rehabilitated existing facilities and created new opportunities: campgrounds would have been renovated, historical buildings renewed, trails repaved, sewer lines replaced, native prairies restored, parklands acquired, new trails developed, and local and regional grant programs funded.

Unfortunately, without a bonding bill, all those projects are now on hold. The House and Senate worked on a bonding bill until the closing

minutes of session, but couldn't reach a compromise. The final bill under consideration, which ultimately failed, included \$26 million for DNR rehabilitation projects and \$11.5 million for state trail development. That bill was a start, but left many important projects unfunded.

As of late June, negotiations on calling a special session to pass a bonding bill are ongoing. Gov. Dayton issued a list of bonding projects that he says must be included before he will sign a bonding bill into law, and we are happy to report his list includes additional funding for DNR rehabilitation and Lake Vermilion State Park. Be sure to check your email for updates as bonding negotiations unfold.

Bonding wasn't the only disappointment at the capitol this year, as state parks and trails were cut from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations bill. Gov. Dayton vetoed significant portions of

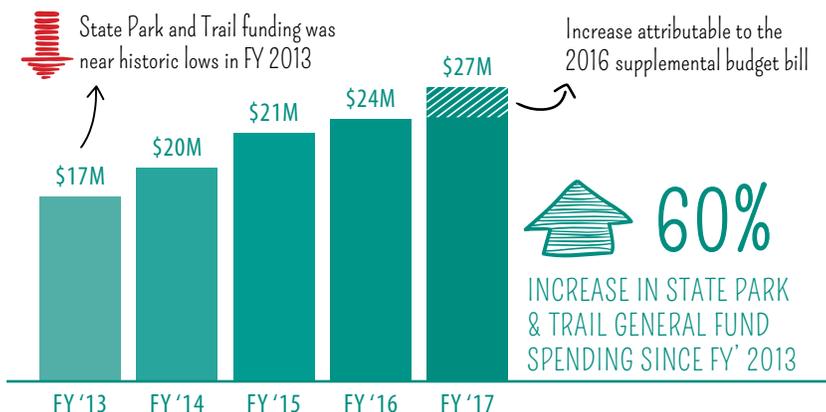
the bill because the legislature didn't fully follow the recommendations of the Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources. Lost in the shuffle was \$1.3 million that would have been spent on enhancements across the state park and trail system.

While the 2016 session had its share of disappointments, it thankfully wasn't without successes. Legislators passed a supplemental budget that includes \$5.1 million of additional funding for state parks and trails, including \$2.8 million from the General Fund. These funds will be used for maintenance, staffing and strategic land acquisition. The 2016 supplemental budget is another big step in the recovery from the historic cutbacks suffered two bienniums ago. Thanks to Gov. Dayton and the current legislature, and a lot of hard fought advocacy, general fund spending on state parks and trails has now increased in each of the last five years.



## LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS: General Fund increase marks five years of growth

### GENERAL FUND SPENDING ON STATE PARKS & TRAILS:



### WHY IS THE GENERAL FUND SO IMPORTANT FOR STATE PARKS & TRAILS?

The General Fund is crucial because it provides **OVER HALF** the funding needed to keep parks and trails open day-in and day-out. General Funds are used for vital visitor services, such as keeping bathrooms clean, trails cleared, naturalist programs running, and natural resources protected.



> *Continued from previous page*

Parks & Trails Council's efforts at the legislature couldn't work without grassroots support. A big and heartfelt thank you to all our members who spent the last few months calling and meeting with legislators, and driving to St. Paul to sit in and testify before legislative committees. All your efforts will go a long ways as future legislatures finish the work left undone in 2016.



Friends of Chester Woods with Sen. Nelson after a Senate Capital Investment hearing on trails.



Parks & Trails Council testifying before the House Mining and Outdoor Recreation Committee.

## **LEGISLATIVE DISAPPOINTMENT:** Bonding bill stalls leaving important projects unfunded

**WHAT'S THE IMPACT OF NO BONDING BILL?** Without a bonding bill, Minnesota's parks and trails will have to wait another year - at least - before needed improvements can be made. We've highlighted a small handful of the important projects that will remain on hold until funding can be secured...

### ITASCA STATE PARK

Funding would have developed a new amphitheater, renovated visitor rental facilities, replaced the water and sewer system at Douglas Lodge, and stabilized erosion on the iconic headwaters of the Mississippi.



### GOOSEBERRY FALLS STATE PARK

Funding would have renovated the campground sanitation buildings at this heavily-visited park along Minnesota's stunning North Shore.



### JAY COOKE STATE PARK

Funding would have upgraded the historic Oldenburg toilet buildings at a popular day-use area.



### SIBLEY STATE PARK

Funding would have renovated the campground area and finished a trail connection of the Glacial Lakes State Trail between the park and the city of New London.



### SAKATAH SINGING HILLS STATE TRAIL

Funding would have repaved 9 miles between the cities of Madison Lake and Waterville, which are currently in poor condition with many uneven patches.





## 125th Anniversary of Minnesota State Parks Itasca State Park was the forefront of a movement

This year marks the 125th anniversary since the creation of Minnesota's oldest state park: Itasca. On April 20, 1891, at a time when forests were seen as an inexhaustible resource, land surveyor Jacob Brower convinced the legislature to halt logging in 10,000 acres of prime forest in northern Minnesota to create Itasca State Park.



**“NO ONE, WILL EVER FULLY REALIZE HOW NECESSARILY STRENUOUS WERE THE EXERTIONS WHICH FINALLY RESULTED IN ESTABLISHING ITASCA STATE PARK ~ JACOB BROWER**

It was a day that Minnesotans can take great pride in for this created the nation's second-oldest state park. Only Niagara Falls State Park, created in 1885, is older.

Minnesota was at the forefront of what would become a state parks movement that soon spread to all 50 states. This movement coincided with the birth of the national parks, which was spurred by John Muir, who successfully lobbied for the creation of the first national park in 1872 at Yellowstone. While this was nearly two decades before Itasca, the next national parks didn't come into existence until just one year before Itasca. They were Sequoia in 1890 and Yosemite in 1890. Minnesota was part of a cutting-edge idea and a leader in this parks movement.

Brower would later reflect: “No one, will ever fully realize how necessarily strenuous were the exertions which finally resulted in establishing Itasca State Park.” The bill creating the park passed by a margin of one vote. Later, opponents attempted to dismantle the park by introducing an amendment to terminate the park commissioner's salary after only 60 days.

There were other bumps along the way. To begin, the park continued to be illegally logged by people who realized that enforcement was minimal, in part due to lack

of staff and the remote, rugged landscape characterized by a checkerboard pattern of ownership that persisted until the inholdings were eventually acquired (and today the park has grown to three times its original size). The remoteness also limited the number of visitors and basic amenities such as trails weren't developed until 1899. Douglas Lodge was built in 1905 and the scenic drive was built in 1925.

By 1938, at the height of the New Deal programs put in place by President Franklin Roosevelt, Minnesota had 23 state parks and all were benefiting tremendously from Works Projects Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps crews who were constructing trails, buildings, roads and other infrastructure. Indeed, many of these amenities built in the 1930s

are still being used today (although many are in need of rehabilitation).

Today it seems only logical that Itasca was created to protect one the most iconic places in Minnesota. Although, surprisingly the outlet of Lake Itasca (i.e., the headwaters of the Mississippi River) wasn't included in the original park boundaries; it was added in 1901. But it took a new mindset and the ability to persist against tough odds to make it happen.

Luckily, this new idea spread. Since



Itasca's first building constructed by CCC crews in 1934 used giant, wind-fall trees.

1891, Minnesota has created a total of 75 State Parks covering about 275,000 acres.

Each park has its own creation story, often involving battles between competing interests. The grit and determination is needed today just as much as it was in 1891. Although today, the value of these places is well understood by countless number who have experienced them first-hand.

## Minnesota State Parks Quiz

1. What is the second oldest state park in Minnesota?

- a. Jay Cooke
- b. Interstate
- c. Afton

2. What is the newest state park/recreation area in Minnesota?

- a. Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine
- b. Cuyuna Country
- c. LaSalle Lake

3. Of Minnesota's total land area, what percent is preserved as a state park or trail?

- a. 10%
- b. 4%
- c. <1%

4. About how many miles of hiking trails are built in Minnesota's state parks?

- a. 500
- b. 1,000
- c. 2,000

5. How many endangered or threatened species can be found in state parks?

- a. 2
- b. 50
- c. 280



Bicyclists and horse riders along the Gateway State Trail where dual tread accommodates both.

## Recreation Tips

### How to share a trail with a horse rider

Have you ever been hiking or biking on a trail and seen a horse rider coming in the other direction? For people who are unfamiliar with horses these encounters can present novel amusement—a chance to momentarily stroll next to a giant, powerful animal that's both domestic yet with a hint of wildness. But for many there's also uncertainty about how to safely pass.

In May, a few staff members from Parks & Trails Council went on a horseback ride with members from the Minnesota Trail Riders Association (MTRA) and learned a few things about how to share the trail with these unique trail users.

The first thing to know is that horse riders are only allowed on designated trails within state parks or state trails. There are 19 state parks with designated horse trails and 13 state trails allow horseback riding on at least a portion of the trail.

Many of these are multi-use trails, meaning that hikers and occasionally mountain bikers are sharing the trail with the horseback riders. The MTRA explained that horse riders generally

have no objection to sharing a trail.

On trails where users are sharing the same tread as a horse rider, it may be helpful to have these tips:

#### For hikers

- Consider stepping to the side when meeting a horse.
- Greeting the horse rider in a friendly tone often keeps the horse calmer.

#### For dog walkers

- Do the same as above and try to keep your dog close and calm.

#### For bicyclists

- Do the same as a hiker.
- When approaching a horse from behind, stop, call ahead and ask to know when it's safe to pass.
- Ride at a slow steady pace past the horse.



Park planning staff and community members talk about plans for St. Croix during open house on June 16.

## State Parks Management

# Major blowdown spurs plans for a new future at St. Croix State Park

Waterfalls, prairies, woods, creeks... these are what make a state park a state park. But there's another element that's more hidden that plays a big role in how we experience a park—the management. Not only does management influence the resources themselves, for example prescribed burns can keep a prairie from turning into a forest; but it often shapes the way we interact with those resources, by building a trail to the river for example. If you want a say in management, a good start is to provide input on the master plan.

This spring planners began the process to create a master plan for St. Croix, which is the largest state park in Minnesota. Having been created before the master plan was a requirement, this will actually be the first plan for the park. This plan will be significant for another reason too. The DNR recently designated St. Croix as a “destination” park and lead planner Jade Templin explained that this “gives us our first chance to incorporate the new idea of a destination park into a plan and more fully develop what it means.”

On June 16 the public was invited to an open house to share ideas for the

### PLANNING WEBPAGE

Follow the planning process for St. Croix and provide input at:

[www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/parks/st\\_croix.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/parks/st_croix.html)

plan. A handful of people showed up. Some had concerns about specific ways they use the park, such as horseback riding. Others wanted to share their hopes for a new long-distance footpath along the river connecting St. Croix to Banning State Park. And still others were just curious about the process. St. Croix does not have a friends group, as many other parks do, otherwise they would likely be a key group to provide input on a master plan.

The public can still provide input and learn about the plan by visiting the planning webpage (see sidebar for address). The public can also join the citizen advisory committee. “This group becomes a sounding board as we develop ideas for the plan, explained regional interpretive supervisor Kacie Carlson. “We pitch ideas around as a group.” They will meet about four times this summer. The goal is to have a final plan completed by the end of the year.

Part of what spurred action on planning for the park was the severe windstorm that ripped through St. Croix State Park in July 2011. Within hours, the park was transformed with thousands of acres of dense forest blown down. Since then park staff have been working to restore the park and began to see this as an opportunity to plan for a new future. At the open house, the natural resource staff explained that before European settlement much of the land around St. Croix was a

pine barrens and the blowdown has given them the opportunity to restore that ecosystem. As such, the formerly dense pine forests will be managed to have fewer trees.

Templin said the planning process will likely explore creating shorter, loop trails in the park. “Right now if you want to go for a hike, you’ll need to be prepared for an all-day hike unless you back-track.” A possible redesign of the campground is also a subject ripe for discussion.



Park visitors can hike a trail along St. Croix River.



Once a dense forested area, but after the 2011 blowdown, this area is transitioning toward a pine barren reminiscent of pre-settlement times.



a) Park map showing the land acquisition. b) The house (hidden in trees) on the land acquired will be removed and land restored to look similar to c) other areas in the park where oak saplings and other native plants have been planted.

➤➤ *Becklin Homestead Acquisition* continued from page 1

long before it was a park. The Becklin family bought the farm from the original owner in 1898 and maintained it within the family until it was established as a park. During that time they welcomed people to enjoy the land. “The Becklins treated this land like a park, letting folks come and enjoy it by allowing them to hunt, fish and launch their boats,” said Carlson.

While Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota has a long history with state parks, there are also a number of county parks where we’ve played a key role. “Becklin Homestead definitely fit within our criteria for land assistance based on its outstanding natural resources located near a population center,” says Brett Feldman, Parks & Trails Council’s executive director.

Barry Wendorf, Isanti County parks director says the immediate plans for the new land include removing the existing residence structure, a well and septic system. Then, long-term plans will see the agriculture field restored into habitat for native pollinators,

such as monarch butterflies. The county will be seeking funding from the Legacy Amendment to make this possible. Visitors will eventually be able to enjoy a mowed surface trail loop through the wildflowers.

In the meantime, visitors to the park, which is jointly managed as a county park and wildlife management area, can enjoy 2.5 miles of multi-use trails, a welcoming picnic shelter, playground and boat access to the Rum River. Carlson says you will likely see bald eagles when you visit. At designated times during the year Becklin Homestead is open to hunting for people who are physically challenged as part of the Capable Partners program. The hunting community has provided significant fundraising to acquire both the original park and this addition. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources provided 50 percent of the acquisition costs through the Outdoor Recreation Grant.

### GETTING HERE

Becklin Homestead is located north of Cambridge:

- West on Hwy 95
- Right (North) onto Polk St / Hwy 14
- Left (West) onto 339th Ave and follow as it becomes Holly St and runs into the park

### ABOUT OUR LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM

With member support, we ensure magnificent natural areas are protected for the public’s benefit. We acquire critical land when it goes up for sale, before it’s lost to private development. We then hold it in trust while working with partners to add the land into a park or trail. Once incorporated, we reinvest those dollars into the next critical land acquisition. Learn more and apply for land assistance at [www.ParksAndTrails.org](http://www.ParksAndTrails.org)

## Citizen Science

# Volunteers can turn a fun pastime into valuable academic data



Photo by Jennifer Jewett / USFW

**Phenology** (*noun*): the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life.

Phenology is one of those things that you probably already do, but never knew it had an official, scientific name. Phenology can be as simple as marking down the date you first notice the leaves turning color in the fall.

Today, phenology is taking on added importance as climate change is affecting the timing of natural phenomena in new and uncertain ways.

Parks are a great place to engage in phenology. Many parks ask visitors to jot down observations in a park log book where you'll see notes like, "I heard the frogs croaking in the pond today" or "saw bloodroot along the trail." These notes are a great way to reflect on seasonal events and focus attention of the small, natural variations that occur throughout the year.

But now imagine ramping up these observations and systemically recording and sharing them for anyone to see and compare with others' across the state. With enough people recording, you could begin to see the exact timing of the budding of the forest from south to north, for example.

This is exactly what a group of scientists and concerned citizens are doing in Minnesota and they are looking for others to join them. The National Phenology Network has created a website called, Nature's Notebook ([www.nn.usanpn.org](http://www.nn.usanpn.org)) where anyone can create an account and begin to systematically record phenological observations.

The potential for Friends Groups to work together in collecting data at a specific park or trail is particularly

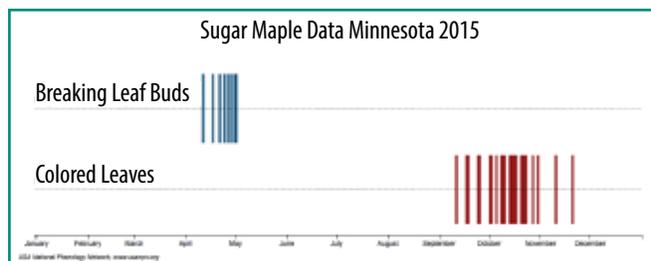
intriguing. Park managers may find such information helpful in deciding when to conduct prescribed burns for example, or when to host a bluebell festival in the park.

Scientists are already using the data collected by citizen scientists on this website to inform studies. The more data they have, the more it can influence local decisions.

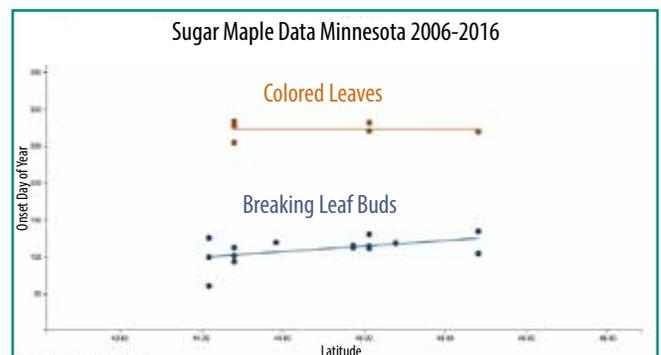
### START RECORDING

You can create a personal or group account to monitor specific species at:

[www.nn.usanpn.org](http://www.nn.usanpn.org)



Examples of the types of graphs available from Nature's Notebook. Top displays timing of leaf events for sugar maples trees. Graph on right shows similar data at different latitudes.





## Meet a Friends Group: Prairie Visions Building a trail that connects pastoral towns



In 1990, community leaders in southern Minnesota wanted to preserve the area's natural and historic resources while creating a sustainable economy. They soon formed a group to focus on this goal.

Since then, the group has been diligently working, along with Parks & Trails Council to advocate for public funding to develop the Shooting Star State Trail. This year the group will celebrate the opening of 11 new miles of trail connecting into the city of Austin. With this addition the trail will cover about 30 continuous miles from LeRoy to Austin.

The friends have also successfully fundraised to add benches, signs, and shelters along the trail. In 2015 the friends funded, designed and built a Norwegian-style shelter along the trail near the city of Adams.



They have also fundraised to get a trail sweeper to keep the trail clean.

Their annual bike ride was on June 25 this year. The ride promotes the trail where bikers enjoy wildflowers and remnant tall-grass prairie.

### PRAIRIE VISIONS *at a glance*

**Friends Group Started:**  
Early 1990s as a pseudo-municipality created by a Joint Powers Agreement among four cities: Adams, LeRoy, Rose Creek and Taopi.

**Mission:**  
For 25 years the main activity has been in supporting the Shooting Star State Trail and Shooting Star Scenic Byway.

**Websites:**  
[www.prairievisions.org](http://www.prairievisions.org)  
[www.shootingstartrail.org](http://www.shootingstartrail.org)

**Shooting Star State Trail:**  
A 20-mile paved trail in southeast MN crosses through Lake Louise State Park.



## Friends Group Partners

*Friends Groups that are members of Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota*

- Border Route Trail Association, Inc.
- Cedar Lake Park Association
- Central Lakes Trail Association
- Cuyuna Lakes State Trail Association
- Freeborn County Trail Association
- Friends of Anderson Park
- Friends of Cannon Valley Trail
- Friends of Casey Jones Trail
- Friends of Fort Ridgely
- Friends of Glacial Lakes State Park
- Friends of Itasca State Park
- Friends of Jackson County Trails
- Friends of Lake Bemidji State Park
- Friends of Lake Maria State Park
- Friends of Luce Line West
- Friends of Maplewood State Park
- Friends of Mill Towns State Trail
- Friends of Scandia Parks and Trails
- Friends of the Lindbergh Heritage
- Friends of Wild River State Park
- Frontenac State Park Association
- Gateway-Brown's Creek Trail Association
- Gitchi Gami Trail Association
- Glacial Ridge Trail Association
- Glendalough Park Partners
- Lake Louise State Park Association
- Minnesota Horse Council
- MN Nordic Ski Association
- North Star Ski Touring Club
- Northstar Trail Travelers
- Prairie Visions**
- Sibley State Park Improvement Association
- Southeast Minnesota Association of Regional Trails (SMART)

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