



2015 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Working to acquire, protect and enhance critical land for the public's use and benefit.

In preparation for each session of the Minnesota Legislature, Parks & Trails Council works with leaders of Minnesota's park and trail systems to review priorities. We also partner with friends groups, chambers of commerce and other community groups to ensure local voices are incorporated into our efforts of cultivating world-class parks and trails that contribute to the health, economy and quality of life of all Minnesotans.

Minnesota's parks and trails preserve the best natural wonders our state has to offer: The headwaters of the nation's greatest river and its confluence with the Minnesota River 500 miles downstream; the once-sprawling prairies; the sprinkling of lakes across the north woods; the rolling bluffs of the southeast and the rugged north shore of Superior. All these places are preserved in our parks and trails and made open for all to enjoy.

As Minnesota's preeminent public places, Minnesota's parks and trails rely on public support to accommodate the millions upon millions of people who use them every year. Our parks and trails are today amongst the best in the country thanks to the foresight and investment of past legislators. Minnesotans are counting on the 89th Legislature to continue this tradition.

The Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, as part of its mission, advocates for these special places to have the resources they need to acquire land, develop new opportunities, and operate on a day-to-day basis. Our latest legislative agenda lays out a set of practical proposals that will serve these needs for Minnesota's parks and trails in 2015 and beyond.

Parks & Trails Council's

2015 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Restore and expand General Funds for Minnesota's state parks and trails



Create a stunning park and trail legacy for future generations



Reinvest in Minnesota's state park and trail's aging infrastructure



Continue building Minnesota's parks and trails through the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund



Strengthen policies that protect and enhance Minnesota's parks and trails



Priority: Restore and expand General Funds for operations and maintenance in Minnesota’s state parks and trails

- ➔ APPROPRIATE \$62 MILLION FROM THE GENERAL FUND TO STATE PARKS AND TRAILS
- ➔ INCLUDE FUNDS DESIGNATED TO INCREASE MAINTENANCE ON STATE TRAILS

For the first time in nearly a decade, Minnesota is entering a budget year with a projected General Fund surplus. With a projected billion dollars in the bank, now is the time for the Minnesota Legislature to give state parks and trails the investment they have long deserved.

The General Fund is Minnesota’s main checking account. Every year, roughly \$20 billion dollars - mostly from income and sales taxes - is deposited into the General Fund; currently only \$20 million of it goes towards state parks and trails. That’s 11 cents out of every \$100, or roughly four dollars from each Minnesotan. These General Funds are the dollars that keep our special places open and maintained daily. In 2014, General Funds accounted for half of state parks and trails’ operation and maintenance budget.

Over the last 15 years, however, the state parks and trails General Fund appropriation was hit hard by economic recession in 2004 and again in 2010-2012. Funding recovered a little last biennium, but not enough to offset losses. As a percentage of Minnesota’s overall General Fund spending, state parks and trails today receive roughly half what they received through the 1990s. Meanwhile, the state park and trail system has increased in size, is hosting more visitors than ever before, and costs increase every year.

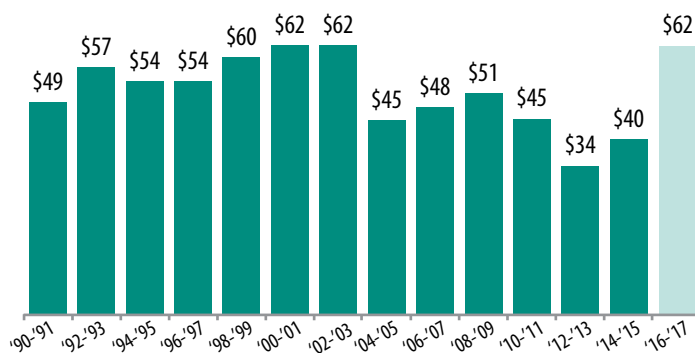
As a result of years of tight budgets, many needs exist across the state park and trail system. So much so that emergency funds were needed each of the last two biennia:

\$3.6 million was raided from the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund in 2012-13, and \$2 million supplemental funds were needed last year to keep our state parks afloat. But even with those temporary measures, jobs have gone undone: hours and seasons have been shortened, trail and building maintenance has been deferred, and new park units have not been fully staffed.

Parks & Trails Council has identified a needed General Fund appropriation of \$62 million for the 2016-17 biennium. This figure includes the \$39.6 million base appropriation state parks and trails received last biennium, plus an additional \$22 million to restore park hours and operating seasons, staff new park units, keep pace with inflationary costs, and permanently replace the temporary budget stop gaps used the past two budgets. Included in this recommendation is \$4 million for increased trail maintenance, which has been one of the hardest hit areas of the budget. Even though there are twice as many paved state bicycle trails as 15 years ago, the DNR hasn’t received additional funds to care for them.

A \$62 million General Fund appropriation is in line with historical appropriations to state parks and trails, and could be achieved at minimal cost to the state budget as a whole. If only two extra dollars for each Minnesotan was spent on state parks and trails, the above needs would be met. That’s the price of just one cup of coffee. And that’s a price Minnesota can currently afford.

Base General Fund Appropriations to State Parks & Trails
(Dollars in millions, adjusted for inflation)



THE NEEDS FOR FISCAL YEARS 2016-2017:

- \$39.6M** General Fund base
- + **4M** Permanently replace 1-time stop gaps
- + **8M** Restore visitor services, park seasons, and building upkeep
- + **4M** Routine trail maintenance
- + **4M** Operate new units including Lake Vermilion & Brown’s Creek
- + **2M** Keep pace with the rising cost of supplies and equipment

\$62 MILLION GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION



Parks & Trails are a small investment, with a huge return for Minnesota...

Only four dollars per Minnesotan, from the General Fund, are spent on state parks and trails every year. **That's the price of two cups of coffee.**



Just one more cup would be enough to operate and maintain destination-quality parks and trails.

\$35 million

State Park O&M Budget (2014)

\$372 million

State Park Visitor Economic Effect (2012)

EVERY \$1 SPENT ON STATE PARKS AND TRAILS SUPPORTS OVER \$10 IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

...Making our state a better, healthier place to live, work, and play:



State parks host nearly 9 million recreation visits every year



Property values can increase 15% by having parks or trails nearby



Habitat protection for over 280 endangered, threatened, special concern, and rare species



Nearly 20% of summer tourists in Minnesota visit a state or national park.



Every \$1 spent on trails saves an estimated \$3 in health costs

Priority: Create a stunning Legacy for future generations

- ALLOCATE LEGACY FUNDS EQUITABLY ACROSS MINNESOTA'S THREE MAJOR PARK & TRAIL SYSTEMS
- ACCELERATE HIGH-PRIORITY ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
- CREATE TRAIL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WHERE MINNESOTANS LIVE, WORK, STUDY, AND PLAY

The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which Minnesota voters overwhelmingly passed in 2008, is an opportunity to create a stunning legacy that future generations will look back on as forever transforming Minnesota's parks and trails. The Legacy Amendment raised the sales tax three-eighths of 1 percent and dedicated 14.25% of the new revenue to park and trail projects. Constitutionally, these funds must supplement not substitute the traditional funds parks and trails receive.

In order for Legacy Funds to be truly transformative, they must be allocated equitably across Minnesota's park and trail systems. A 2012 work group reached a consensus recommendation that Legacy Funds be divided 40%-40%-20% between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Metropolitan Council, and the Greater



Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission for fiscal years 2014-2019. This allocation formula helps ensure Legacy Funds impact all corners of Minnesota in an equitable and balanced manner.

The DNR's 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan set a goal of acquiring and developing five new state parks and 600 miles of state trails between 2009 and 2034. With 19 years left until the Legacy Amendment is set to expire, there is still time to accomplish these ambitious goals. But to date, only 9% of Legacy Funds for state parks and trails have been used for acquisition, and only 20% has been used on new development. Accelerating the use of Legacy Funds for these purposes, and creating key trail connections to connect more people to Minnesota's great outdoors, should be priorities for the legislature moving forward.



Weeds taking root along the Heartland State Trail in Northwestern Minnesota.



Taking care of an Aging State Park & Trail System

Minnesota's state parks and trails are preparing to celebrate their 125th birthday in 2016, and they are starting to show their age. The system includes 76 state parks and recreation areas, 25 state trails, 1,600 buildings, 332 miles of roads, 1,300 miles of state trails., 355 fishing piers, and 1,496 water access points. Many of these facilities were built in the 1930s. Now is the time to spruce them up before the 125th birthday celebration.



Broken bridge trestle along the Willard Munger State Trail (©Minnesota DNR)



Historic Seppman Mill in Minneopa State Park is in need of repairs (©Randy Wood)

Priority: Reinvest in Minnesota's state parks and trail's aging infrastructure

➤ INCLUDE STATE PARK AND TRAIL ASSET PRESERVATION, REHABILITATION, AND RENEWAL IN ANY 2015 BONDING PACKAGES

➤ PRIORITIZE PROJECTS THAT THREATEN VISITOR SAFETY SUCH AS UNEVEN TRAILS, DETERIORATED BRIDGES AND SANITATION FACILITIES IN STATE PARK CAMPGROUNDS

➤ CREATE A CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN THAT DETAILS AND PRIORITIZES SYSTEM NEEDS

Minnesota's state park and trail system will turn 125 years old in 2016. And as the nation's second oldest state park system, our parks and trails are starting to show their age. Many of the facilities managed by the Division of Parks and Trails were built in the 1930s and are lacking major upgrades. The Department of Natural Resources estimates that rehabilitation needs across state parks, state trails, and water access points are close to \$50 million annually.

While 2015 is not a "bonding year," Parks & Trails Council is anticipating that the legislature will debate and pass a small

bonding package that focuses on emergency needs and other urgent, time-sensitive projects. A full array of state park and trail projects meet those criteria and should be included in any 2015 bonding package. For example, nearly 100 miles of state bicycle trails are in poor condition and create hazardous conditions for users, many state park facilities lack modern plumbing, and historic structures across the park system are in urgent need of renewal. Funding these projects now is crucial for putting our state parks and trails on full display for their 125th celebration in 2016.

In order to fund the rehabilitation needs of Minnesota's state parks and trails in an efficient manner, Parks & Trails Council is continuing to work with the Department of Natural Resources to create a capital investment plan that details and prioritizes the system's needs on a regular basis. Such a plan would prioritize asset preservation, development, and acquisition needs across the system and serve as a road-map for decision makers to make wise investments in Minnesota's state parks and trails.

Priority: Continue building Minnesota's parks and trails through the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund

- ➔ FUND THE PARK & TRAIL INITIATIVES RECOMMENDED BY LCCMR
- ➔ RESTORE ENRTF FUNDS FOR LOCAL PARK AND TRAIL GRANTS

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) receives revenues from the Minnesota State Lottery to fund projects that enhance Minnesota's "air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources." The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Natural Resources (LCCMR) is an advisory body that makes recommendations to the legislature on how the ENRTF should be spent each year.

For 2015, LCCMR recommended 65 projects totalling \$45.8 million including over \$4 million for parks and trails. Historically, the ENRTF also provided funds to grant programs for local park and trails projects, but has not done so since 2011. Parks & Trails Council urges the legislature to fund the park and trail initiatives recommended by LCCMR, and to restore ENRTF funds for local grant programs should funds become available in 2015 or future years.



PARK & TRAIL PROJECTS RECOMMENDED BY LCCMR:

 <p>Metro Regional Park System Land Acquisition \$1,000,000</p>	 <p>State Park and Trail Land Acquisition \$1,500,000</p>
 <p>Mesabi Regional Trail Development \$1,000,000</p>	 <p>Bison Reintroduction in Minneapolis State Park \$600,000</p>

Priority: Strengthen policies that protect and enhance Minnesota's parks and trails

Parks & Trails Council continually reviews, analyzes, and updates policy positions on issues that affect Minnesota's parks and trails heritage. Some of these issues span multiple legislative sessions, and may or may not require legislation to achieve results. In 2015, we are working with our partners on the following policies that protect and enhance parks and trails across the state.

➔ GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Parks & Trails Council supports an appropriation for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission to support a staff person and office space to carry out the Commission's work, which is essential for making planning and funding decisions in Greater Minnesota's regional park and trail system.

➔ STATE TRAIL EXPENDITURE REPORTING

Parks & Trails Council is encouraging the DNR to report operation and maintenance expenditures on state trails. Tracking state trail budget trends has become more difficult following a division merger in fiscal year 2010. Reporting expenditures would increase transparency, illustrate needs, and better inform stakeholders.

➔ STRATEGIC LAND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Parks & Trails Council is monitoring the DNR's Strategic Land Asset Management (SLAM) program to ensure decisions are made transparently and that park and trail lands remain in the public trust. SLAM is a new program to improve Minnesota's "portfolio of public land assets through comprehensively planning for and implementing acquisitions, sales, and exchanges."

➔ CITIZEN VOLUNTEERING

Parks & Trails Council will continue to work with the DNR to identify and implement solutions that support volunteer group's contributions to state park and trail projects.