



# Special Places

PARKS & TRAILS COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA NEWSLETTER



Cannon Valley Trail by Dave Simpkins

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 11<sup>th</sup> Annual BIKE MINNESOTA!



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

Don't miss out on what may be the last of our annual Bike Minnesota! bike tours. It has been a tremendous effort and enjoyment to put on this event that highlights different areas of the state. Many friendships have been fostered while biking, camping and touring.

We have a great lineup for this year, which is based at Glendalough State Park in west-central Minnesota, about 45 miles northwest of Alexandria.



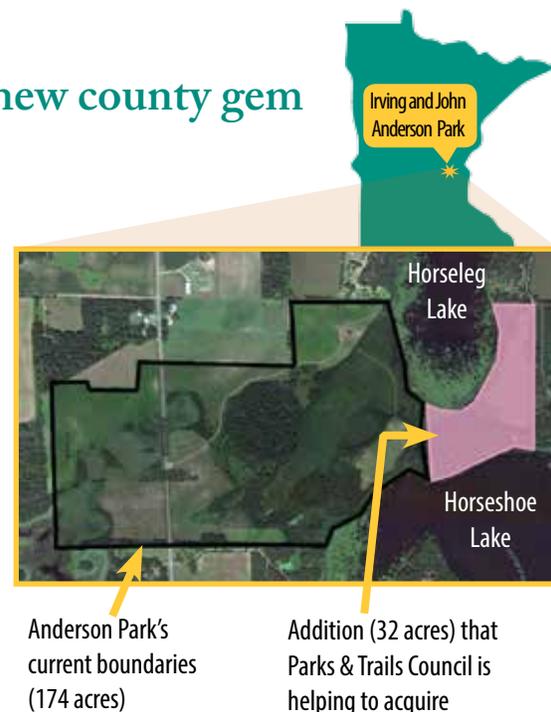
Marshland and Horseleg Lake at Irving and John Anderson Park adjacent to the land being acquired.

## Land Project Update

### Saving pristine land at new county gem

About one hour north of the Twin Cities, the Isanti County park of Anderson lies in a richly diverse environment that draws in throngs of migratory birds. This park, which was created only eight years ago, underwent an intensive transformation to be restored from a farm into the thriving ecosystem it boasts today. This hard work has paid off as park users now relish this natural place where it seems hard to imagine could have ever been anything other than natural.

*Isanti park continued on page 3*



Anderson Park's current boundaries (174 acres)

Addition (32 acres) that Parks & Trails Council is helping to acquire

# From the President

## Reflections on the legislative session



*By Mike Tegeder, president*

As the special session of the Legislature concluded I had mixed feelings over what was and was not accomplished.

I admit I had a dickens of a time beginning this article. You could say it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. On the overall environmental and natural resources front it was not a good session. The final outcome, which was negotiated literally in the dark of night, had many items added or taken out that are devastating to the environment. Already legislators are talking about needed changes to reverse these mistakes.

But on the parks and trails front there is much to celebrate. If not the best of times, it is getting better especially on the funding front. This issue of the newsletter will give the details but they point to how commitment, partnerships and hard work made the difference.

This is a time to thank all who made this happen. P&TC members and friends groups showed up and made the case to their representatives. The P&TC staff worked diligently in providing materials and convincing data. They communicated well with the DNR staff and Governor's office. Our Day on the Hill generated much energy. Our legislative agents, Joe Bagnoli and Sarah Psick, were persistent and persuasive. It all came together for a very successful session.

For me the secret to our success was revealed at our very delightful annual dinner. This year's Reuel Harmon award was given to long time P&TC member and Mill Towns State Trail founder, Peggy Prowe. In her gracious acceptance she related some lovely memories of her young family enjoying our state parks and trails.

She then told a cute story. As a member of the Northfield city council at a meeting back in 1995 the mayor lamented, "I don't know why we are going to build this trail from Northfield to Dundas, but someone wants

it so much." That someone was really some one!

Peggy concluded, "that was the first three miles. So far, 2 tunnels, 2 trail heads, 2 bridges, and someday there will be the 26-mile Mill Towns State Trail connection between the Sakatah and Cannon Valley Trails." Someone wants it so much.

That is the secret for the success this year at the Legislature. Many someones wanted it so much. You wanted it so much. Thank you for all your efforts. We are making the connections throughout our great state.

Speaking of connections, I recently biked from south Minneapolis to Stillwater, about 40 miles, almost entirely on bike trails. And the last 6 miles was on the Brown's Creek State Trail, which just opened this spring. It is a magnificent trail following the creek with ample tree canopy and nice signage. It's worth checking out this summer.

**MINNESOTA**  
Environmental Fund



We are a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, a workplace giving option comprised of 22 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.mnenvironmentfund.org](http://www.mnenvironmentfund.org)

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Park users at Anderson Park in Isanti County observing wildlife (photo by J Sausen). Sandhill cranes and the threatened Blandings Turtle seen in the park, which is located in an area with the highest concentrations of special of special concern in Isanti County.

> *Isanti Park continued from page 1*

Earlier this year Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota began working with the county parks director, Barry Wendorf, to build on the success of this park by acquiring a critical 32-acre parcel on the east side of the park. This new addition will require virtually none of the intense restoration that the previous land acquisition required. This land has remained natural throughout its ownership history, preserving an area that will seamlessly blend with the current parkland.

**CHALLENGING LAND PROJECT**

However, sealing the deal on this land was less than certain, despite everyone's understanding of how crucial it would be for the park. The roadblocks came in the form of the county's lack of funds and staff resources to coordinate land acquisitions. Plus this land was owned by four individuals, which can add complexity to the transaction, and they wanted to move quicker than the county could move.

"For the Parks & Trails Council to come in with the funds and expertise to quickly and smoothly handle this, it's beyond beneficially to a small county like us," said Wendorf. It could

easily have been sold for lake home development as it has the potential for up to eight lots on the lake. That would have been a big loss to the park to see the adjacent land transformed in nearly the opposite way as the current parkland.

It was a lengthy process to restore the current parkland, requiring special equipment and several rounds of successfully requesting funds from the legislature. "Now here is this adjacent land that's already pristine and with a landowner who want to sell; this is exactly why Parks & Trails Council has a land fund," explained Brett Feldman, Parks & Trails Council's executive director.

This addition will extend the park's eastern boundary into a strip of land that straddles two clear, shallow lakes. It will double the amount of park shoreline to 3,000 feet on Horseshoe and 3,300 feet on Horseleg Lake with the potential for a short portage trail to be created between the two. This would provide the only public access to Horeshoe Lake. Both these lakes are largely undeveloped with little to no motorized use and providing excellent habitat for waterfowl.

The land being acquired has gone through several generations of the same family with additional investors added later. In the 1930s the land was used for breeding foxes, which were most likely used for their pelts. There are still some rows of cages on the property. But those are the only structures on the land. Since the 1950s the land has been used as hunting grounds with ducks and turkey being prime wildlife in the area. The land is mostly high ground that's a mix of hardwood forest and native prairie with some wetlands.

If all goes according to plan, the land will transfer ownership to Parks & Trails Council by the time this newsletter is mailed to our members. We will hold the land in trust and continue to work closely with the park staff to incorporate it into the park. This process could take up to four years as public funds and grants are identified.

Meanwhile we will work to make sure plans for the park progress. Wendorf expects to add another mile of trail through this parcel, bringing the total trails to 4 miles for hiking mountain biking and horseback riding and groomed for both skiing and snowshoeing in winter.

## Legislative Session Recap

### Parks and trails receive largest general fund appropriation in history

The primary job facing the legislature this year was passing a two-year state budget. Lawmakers ended up needing the entirety of the regular session, plus a one-day special session, to reach an agreement and keep the doors of Minnesota's government open.

The final sticking point in the budget agreement was the Omnibus Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources finance bill, which was controversial for rolling back a host of environmental protections. The bill's silver lining, however, was that it

included a large—and sorely needed—funding increase for state parks and trails. After a series of extremely close back-and-forth votes in the Senate, the bill eventually passed and was signed into law. The bill's passage avoided a government shutdown that would have closed our state parks during the busiest time of year.

When all was said and done, lawmakers agreed to spend a historic \$49 million on state parks and trails. While this amount is still below historical levels when adjusted for inflation, it's another big step in the

right direction. The DNR will use the additional funds to clean campgrounds, groom trails, provide naturalist programs and protect our park's natural resources.

Legislative advocacy is always a team effort, and this year's outcomes are thanks to our membership. Whether by attending our Day on the Hill; or contacting your representatives; or simply by talking with your friends, family, and neighbors about Minnesota's wonderful parks and trails, you've all made a difference this legislative session.

## Base General Fund Appropriations to State Parks & Trails

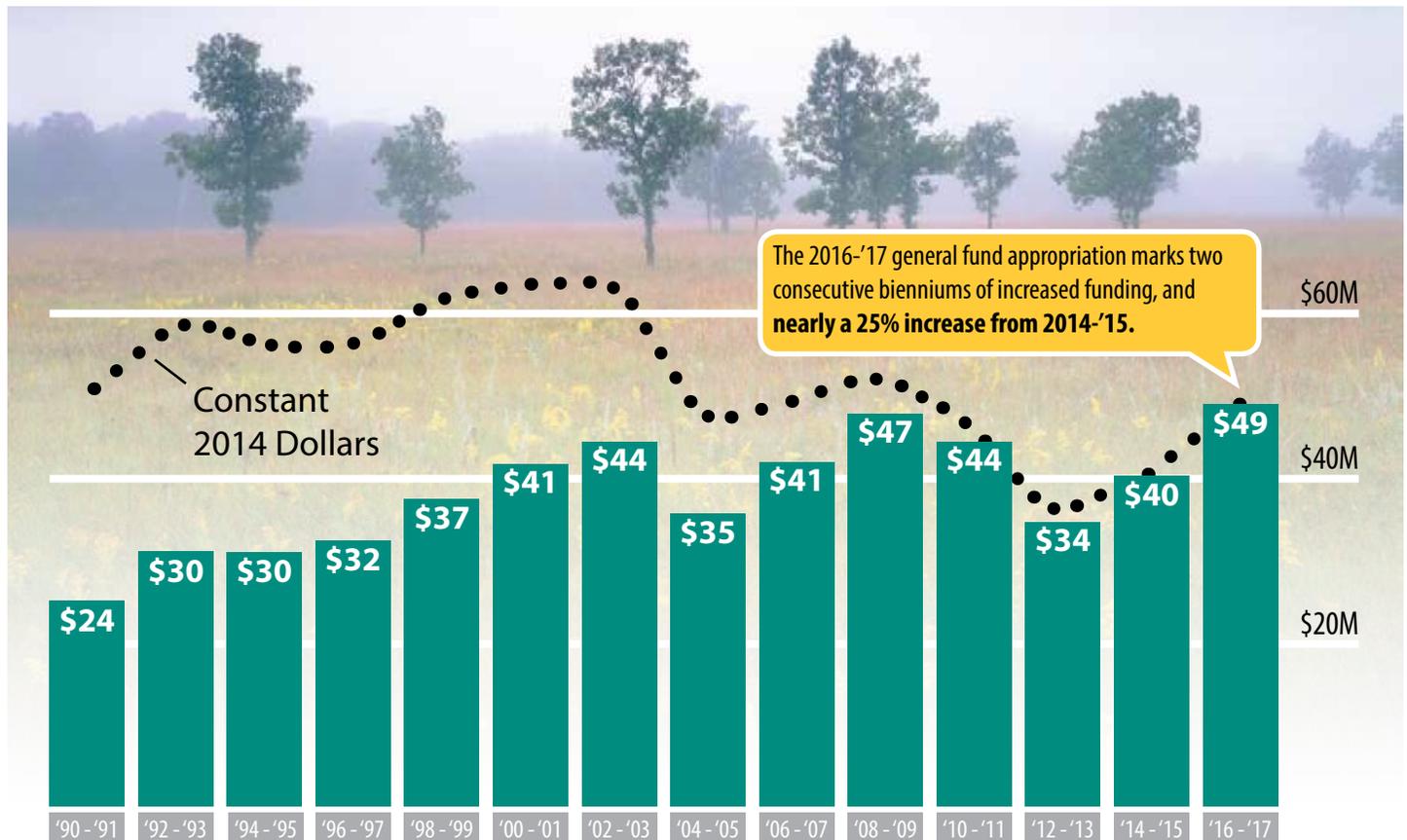


Photo: Lake Bronson State Park is one of many parks receiving Legacy Funds this year (© Gary Alan Nelson).

# Legislative Session Recap

## How did our legislative priorities fare in 2015?



The Mesabi Trail in Minnesota's Iron Range is one of the projects that received funding in 2015 (© Explore Minnesota).

*Parks & Trails Council entered the 2015 session with an ambitious legislative agenda. Check out how our legislative priorities played out in 2015:*

### 2015 PRIORITY

### OUTCOME

### DETAILS

**Restore and expand general funds for Minnesota's state parks and trails.**



General fund spending on state parks and trails increased from \$39.6 million to \$48.6 million. Additionally, \$740,000 in one-time spending was included for special projects. All told, general funds increased nearly 25%. The much-needed funding boost restores general fund spending on state parks and trails to pre-Legacy levels and marks the second consecutive budget that state parks and trails received a double-digit percentage increase.

**Create a stunning park and trail legacy for future generations.**



The Legacy bill was passed during the special session appropriating \$91 million over the next two years for parks and trails. The legislature abided by the consensus recommendation to allocate the Legacy Parks and Trails Fund 40%-40%-20% across Minnesota's three major park and trail systems (DNR, Metropolitan Council, and Greater Minnesota), and also agreed to fund the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission's planning efforts.

**Reinvest in Minnesota's aging park and trail infrastructure.**



The legislature passed a bonding bill during the special session that funded various infrastructure needs across the state, but unfortunately no park or trail projects were included. Bonding for parks and trails will be a major priority for us in 2016.

**Build Minnesota's parks and trails through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.**



The legislature appropriated \$4.1 million out of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which is funded by lottery proceeds, for park and trail projects. The funding includes \$1 million for metropolitan parks and trails, \$1.5 million for state park and trail acquisition, \$1 million for development of the Mesabi trail, and \$600,000 for reintroducing bison to Minneopa State Park.

## Trail News

### Trail monitors wanted

By Vic Olson, trail advocate

Bicyclists wanting to help make riding state trails enjoyable can now join a trail-monitoring program that's as easy as riding a bike.

Monitoring is quite simple: bicyclists who enjoy regularly riding a state bike trail can also report maintenance and safety issues to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in a kind of "Adopt a Trail" program. Bicyclists ride about a six-mile section of the trail once a week or so during the biking season.

Trail monitors watch for fallen trees across the trail, developing potholes and washouts and debris after a heavy rain. For minor issues they clear off

the trail when possible, just as any courteous or thoughtful cyclist would do. Or they may report to the DNR so DNR staff can do the clearing. Monitors do not do any policing, but they can report trail rule violations they've observed to law enforcement.

Most of the time, the volunteer ride is just another relaxing time on the trail with no issues.

Monitors are covered by workers' compensation and liability insurance for any rare occurrences, as is the case with all official volunteers of the DNR, which also does a criminal background check (not driving, character or financial, just criminal court actions) of monitors.



Vic Olson on the trail

Cyclists can join a group that is already monitoring, or, if there is no group, start one or monitor solo.

### TO GET STARTED GO TO:

[dnr.state.mn.us/volunteering/statetrails](http://dnr.state.mn.us/volunteering/statetrails)

## New Projects Updates

### Lake Bemidji State Park opens first-of-its kind group camp

Looking for a place for your next family reunion? There's a new option that opened this summer at Lake Bemidji State Park. The Lavinia Group Camp can accommodate up to 50 people.

The site, which rents for \$200/night is designed for both tent camping and RVs with five 50-amp electric hook-ups. The facility is the first of its kind in Minnesota state parks, according to the DNR.

Located in a private area of the park, the site features a screened picnic shelter with four picnic tables, counter space and electric outlets. A large fire

ring lies in the middle of the site. It also has the basics of water, two vault toilets, and grills.

This project was made possible with funding from the Parks and Trails Fund, created after voters approved the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in November 2008.

"The Lavinia Group Camp is a premier example of a Legacy-funded development project that will better meet the needs of today's park visitors," said



Picnic shelter in background at group campsite.

Note: grass is now being established where bare here.

Erika Rivers, director of Minnesota state parks and trails.



Ribbon cutting with DNR staff, legislators, city officials and trail advocates.



Bicyclists on the Brown's Creek State Trail

## Trail News

### Brown's Creek State Trail officially open

On June 6, the Brown's Creek State Trail was officially opened during a celebration with activities, a band, cake and ribbon cutting and many happy bicyclists, rollerbladers and walkers.

The 5.9-mile trail spurs off from the Gateway State Trail and follows the route of a former dinner train, which parallels Brown's Creek and ends in downtown Stillwater. The land was acquired in 2012 in a rare opportunity to obtain the entire corridor from one landowner. Often segments must be purchased from many private landowners over years of negotiations.

The idea and official authorization for the trail came years before that when the Zephyr Dinner Trail went out of business in 2007. The Zephyr had operated for 22 years as a restaurant on rails along this corridor.

It can take years, sometimes decades, after the Minnesota Legislature authorizes a trail before funding and planning begins. For example the Casey Jones State Trail was authorized in 1967 yet many miles show no hint of a trail.

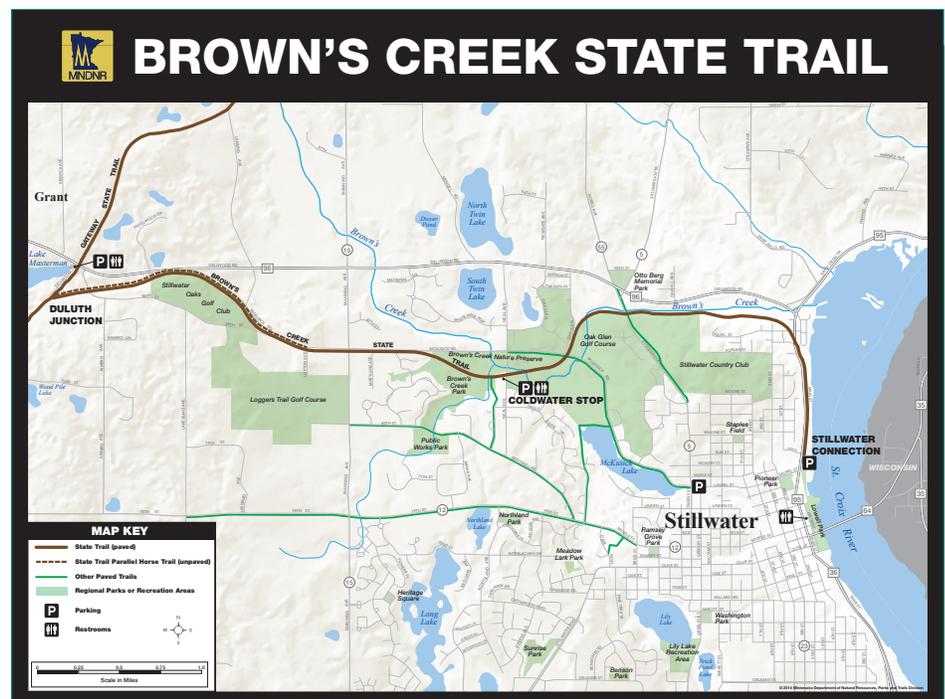
The Brown's Creek State Trail was relatively quick. Work progressed in

stages and was aided by the Gateway-Brown's Creek Trail Association and other trail advocates, including Parks & Trails Council, helping to secure several rounds of funding required to remove the train tracks, build a bridge over the busy Manning Ave., and pave the trail.

The trail has already become a tremendous asset to the city of Stillwater. So far Brown's Creek Trail appears to be one of the most used trails in the state trail system.

### Quick Fact: Adding Miles

Prior to Brown's Creek State Trail, the last addition to the state trail system happened just last year with the opening of a 6-mile segment of the Paul Bunyan State Trail. The new segment extends the trail south from Brainerd-Baxter into Crow Wing State Park. This solidified Paul Bunyan State Trail's status as the longest continuously paved trail in the nation.



# Community Partner News

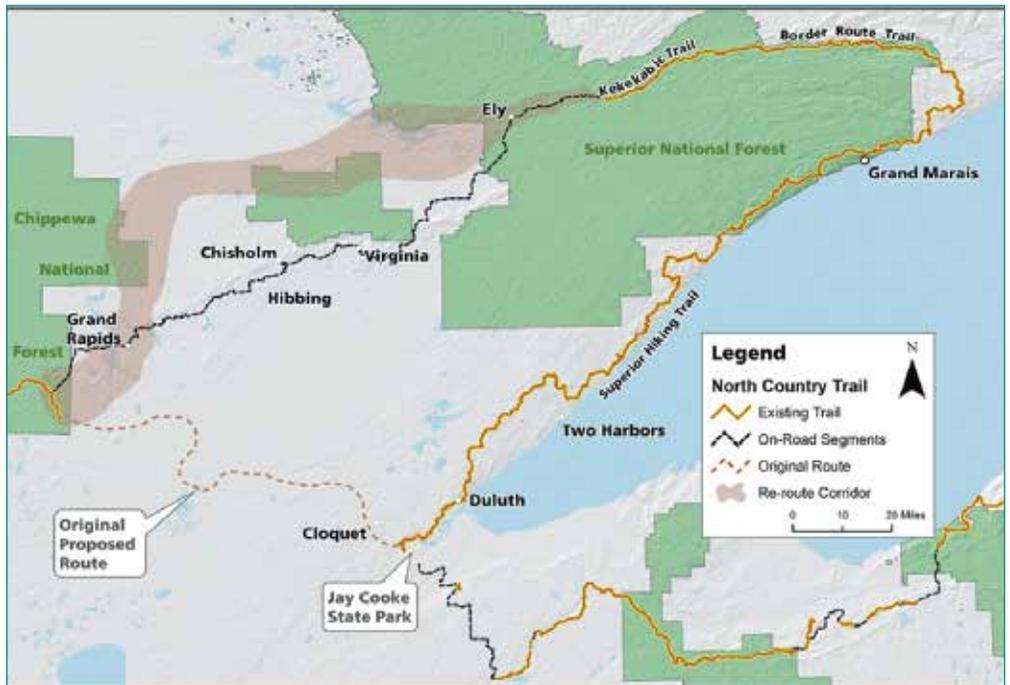
## North Country Trail re-route pending

By Matthew Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator for MN & ND North Country Trail Association

Thanks to Minnesota North Country Trail champions Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Rep. Rick Nolan, the North Country National Scenic Trail Route Adjustment Act legislation has been re-introduced in the 114th Congress, with the co-sponsorship of Sen. Al Franken and Minnesota members Reps. Peterson, Ellison, Walz, Paulsen, and McCollum.

This simple, bipartisan legislation (H.R. 799 & S. 403) would officially approve the North Country National Scenic Trail's (NCT) "Arrowhead Re-route" in northeastern Minnesota. It would also extend the NCT into Vermont to the Appalachian Trail—the original concept in the late 1970's. The "Arrowhead Re-route" would replace the NCT's original route—100+ miles through pretty wet country between Jay Cooke State Park and Remer (completely un-built after 35 years) with a fantastic new route through Minnesota's "Arrowhead." The new route uses the Superior Hiking Trail and the Border Route and Kekekabic Trails within the Boundary Waters. The last piece would be 150 miles of new NCT to link the Kekekabic Trail with the existing NCT near Remer.

Since 2004, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) and our friends in Minnesota and elsewhere have been advocating for the re-route legislation in Congress but, despite ample local support and no opposition, all previous efforts have failed.



Map showing the proposed re-route of the North Country Trail across northeastern Minnesota

We are off to a good start in the 114th Congress with early introduction of the bills, 15 bipartisan co-sponsors of HR 799 and 9 bipartisan co-sponsors of S. 403, and a Senate sub-committee hearing. The NCTA still aims to recruit many more co-sponsors and, in particular, more republican co-sponsors. Targets in our area include Rep. John Kline (MN-2), Rep. Tom Emmer (MN-6), Rep. Sean Duffy (WI-8), and Sen. Ron Johnson (WI). With six of eight Minnesota congressmen and both senators on board, it would be great to count the entire Minnesota delegation.

The NCTA is asking hiking, Boundary Waters, and state park supporters who live in northwestern Wisconsin and Minnesota's 2nd and 6th districts to make constituent contacts. People

simply need to contact their representative and/or senator and ask that they support the legislation and co-sponsor it. Be sure to tell them why this legislation is important to you.



Thank you to our sustaining members who strengthen our parks and trails while providing ongoing, dependable support.

To become a sustaining member visit [parksandtrails.org/join\\_donate](http://parksandtrails.org/join_donate)

# Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails Update

## Retiring Met Council park manager reflects on decades of work



Arne Stefferud in the early days of his career at Met Council's parks department

Minnesota's metro region is rare. We are the only state to have an entity to oversee planning for parks on a regional scale. In 1974 the Metropolitan Council was established with some visionary language:

"The pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large recreational open spaces in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use."

Since that time regional park visits have increased nearly ten fold. This is what the retiring manager of parks and natural resources for the Metropolitan Council, Arne Stefferud finds most rewarding about his tenure.

Stefferdud gives credit to the many

legislators who passed bills funding these places—something he never took for granted. "Every bonding bill is like a Christmas tree and every paragraph is an ornament," Stefferud says.

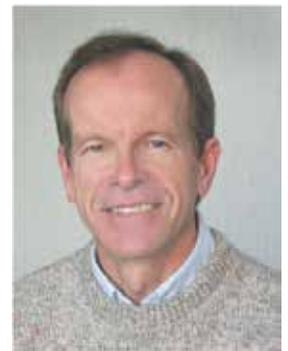
Prior to taking on the role of manager in 2012, Stefferud spent three decades overseeing the finances, which may explain why numbers are continually peppered throughout a conversation with him. Off the tip of his head he can tell you the number of acres, visitors, and especially the amount of dollars appropriated for each park project. Of the \$836 million appropriated for regional parks since 1974, he touched 83% by either putting in the requests, monitoring the legislation or administering the funds.

As he retires he is very optimistic about the direction of the metro regional parks. The new 10-year plan for regional parks was finalized in February 2015 by the small but capable staff he leaves behind. "I was basically the only staff working on parks for a brief time in 2006," Stefferud says. "Now we'll have six staff members."

He is excited that the new parks plan recognizes the growing diversity in the metro. The plan calls for the creation of park ambassadors to connect with diverse residents and welcome them to the parks.

The other positive direction for the metro regional parks is the increased dollars coming from the Legacy

Amendment's Parks and Trails Fund. Stefferud wants citizens to understand that regional parks are funded from three entities:



Arne Stefferud

met council, the state and local government. He hopes to see more recognition of these funding sources, particularly the Legacy Funding. "We need people to recognize this so when Legacy comes up for renewal [in 2034] they'll understand its impact," says Stefferud.

### By the numbers: Metro Regional Parks

- 54 Parks & reserves
- 40 Trails
- 340 Miles of trails
- 80 Percent of park reserve land managed as natural
- 47 Millions of visits each year
- 2 New parks opened since 2010



Clockwise: Walking the proposed Minnesota Valley State Trail in Bloomington. Rep. Ann Lenczewski from Bloomington. Cindy Wheeler, MnDNR trail planner

## Magney Circle Mingle Building the Minnesota Valley State Trail

On a near perfect summer day in June a group of Parks & Trails Council supporters took a walk along the Minnesota River in Bloomington to see the future site of a new segment of the Minnesota Valley State Trail. This planned 13-mile segment will run from the Bloomington Ferry Bridge to the Minnesota Valley Wildlife Refuge (MVWR) Visitor Center. It will have two tracks: one natural surface for mountain biking and one hardened surface for multiple uses that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

The outing was part of our Magney Mingle hosted on the property of the Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League. The Chapter, which is the largest private landowner in Bloomington's Minnesota River Valley, is planning to grant a right-of-way across their property for this dual-track trail.

The Minnesota Valley State Trail has been authorized since 1969 to originate in Fort Snelling State Park and extend southwesterly along the

Minnesota River to LeSeur. Currently six miles are paved between Chaska and Shakopee, but until the 2014 legislative session it looked like the remaining trail was stalled. That was when the trail got a kickstart of \$2.165 million to develop this 13-mile segment.

At the Magney Mingle we heard the many leaders who have been integral to this project. We started with Cindy Wheeler, who is a trail planner with the MnDNR, to learn the status of the plans. Preliminary engineering drawings have been completed for the trail and the alignments for the paved and natural trails will be separated as much as possible.

Both Tim Bodeen, the current MVWR manager and Ed Crozier, the original MVWR manager, are excited to see this multi-use trail connect to the MVWR. Many people don't even realize the MVWR exists near the Mall of America with numerous trails along the river. This trail will connect people to this resource.

Several elected officials have provided crucial leadership. Rep. Ann Lenczewski shared stories of her lifelong love of this natural area where the trail will be built along with her appreciation for Parks & Trails Council work on this trail.

Bloomington Mayor Gene Winstead shared his enthusiasm for this project and the positive impact it will have on his city.



Named in honor of Judge C. R. Magney, the Magney Circle consists of members who support our mission with a generous contribution of \$500 or more each year. Magney Circle members are invited to special events during the year. To join, visit [parksandtrails.org/join\\_donate](http://parksandtrails.org/join_donate)

## Friends Group Corner

### Friends building sugar shack at Maplewood

With a name like Maplewood State Park it's no surprise that maple syrup is a big deal at this northwestern park. For years the Friends of Maplewood have been fundraising and coordinating logistics to build a sugar shack for the growing maple syrup interpretive program.

All that work is on the verge of paying off. This summer workers may begin breaking ground in the field near the Trail Center for a 20' x 28' building. The DNR chose the exact site to fit with future long-range plans for a new Trail/Visitor Center.

This sugar shack, as the building is known, will be built by volunteers under the direction of a certified contractor. It will have a rustic look with a metal roof. Inside will be an evaporator that boils down the sap collected from the park's trees to make syrup. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to produce 1 gallon of syrup. There will also be a large viewing area for park users to learn about the process.



Left: Field where the sugar shack will be built.  
Bottom: Park staff tapping a sugar maple to collect the sap.



## Friends Group Partners

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

Border Route Trail Association, Inc.

Friends of Anderson Park

Friends of Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park

Friends of Cannon Valley Trail

Friends of Casey Jones Trail

Friends of Forestville

Friends of Glacial Lakes State Park

Friends of Jackson County Trails

Friends of Lake Bemidji State Park

**Friends of Maplewood State Park**

Friends of Mill Towns State Trail

Friends of Murray County Parks

Friends of Scandia Parks and Trails

Friends of Wild River State Park

Gateway-Brown's Creek Trail Association

Gitchi Gami Trail Association

Lake Louise State Park Association

Minnesota Rovers Outdoors Club

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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