

Legislative Agenda | 2021



A record number of Minnesotans are using parks and trails for safe, close-to-home recreation and relief during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this unprecedented time, keeping parks and trails accessible, affordable and maintained is as important as ever. In 2021 we're urging lawmakers to support Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails, both through increased General Fund support and smart policies that enhance these special places.

Tettegouche State Park
Matt Rohlander / P&TC Photo Contest

Our 2021 Legislative Priorities:



COVID-19 RELIEF
& RECOVERY



EQUITY, DIVERSITY
& INCLUSION



LEGACY, LCCMR &
LOCAL GRANTS



ACCELERATED TRAIL
REHABILITATION



KEEP STATE PARKS
QUIET AND NATURAL

See reverse side for details



Just what the doctor ordered:

Increase General Funds for parks and trails as part of COVID-19 recovery budget

► Parks and trails are essential services that need strong General Fund support

We support increasing General Fund appropriations for State Parks and Trails, Metropolitan Regional Parks, and the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear parks and trails are essential, and strong public funding for these systems is more important than ever before. Minnesotans turned to parks and trails for COVID-19 relief in record numbers, and it's easy to see why. They're just what the doctor ordered: they're affordable, close-to-home sanctuaries that improve physical health while reducing anxiety and stress.

► State Parks and Trails should be affordable for all Minnesotans

Minnesota State Parks are funded by a mix of user fees and General Funds to keep them affordable. But that mix began to shift in 2017 when lawmakers cut General Fund support to state parks by \$2.7 million and increased entrance fees 40%. And now, despite a \$1.6 billion budget surplus on top of \$2.6 billion from the federal American Rescue Plan, a new proposal seeks to raise entrance fees yet again. Increasing entrance fees 80-100% in only a four-year span (as is being proposed) will hit working families, the unemployed and low-income Minnesotans the hardest. Rather than increase entrance fees again, we urge lawmakers to use the surplus to increase General Fund support to state parks by \$2-3 million annually so the DNR has time to explore tier-based fee options, partnership programs and other alternatives that keep parks affordable.

State Park Entrance Permits

Cost Comparison

Price of Resident State Park Annual Permit

Bordering States Average **\$22**
(North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan)

Minnesota Proposed **\$45**
(\$45 proposed, currently \$35)

Skyrocketing price of State Park Permits

% increase in cost, 2021 proposal vs. 2016 price

Daily Permit ▲ 100%

Annual Permit ▲ 80%



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

► WE ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT

legislative efforts to develop innovative programs designed to be inclusive of Black people, Indigenous people and people of color within Minnesota's parks and trails.



Legacy, LCCMR & Local Grants

► **LEGACY FUNDS** should be allocated equitably, with coordination and balance between the needs of State system, Metropolitan system and Greater Minnesota system. Historically, Legacy funds have been split 40%-40%-20% between these park and trail systems. We support that allocation until a new consensus agreement is reached.

► **WE SUPPORT** the full LCCMR recommendations on appropriations from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

► **WE SUPPORT** additional funding for regional and local park and trail grant programs (HF 1039 / SF 513)



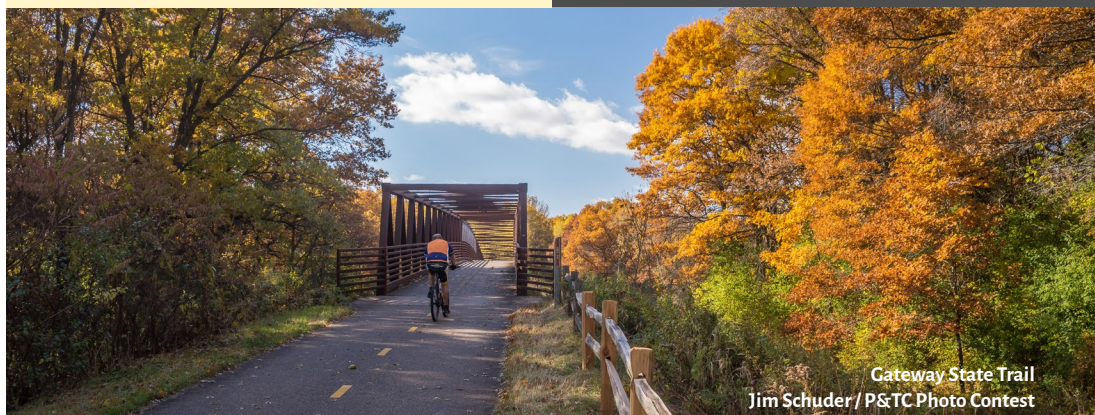
Trail Rehabilitation

► **HF 697 / SF 698** provides \$4.8 million for rehabilitation of paved state trails. This supports our recommendation from the 2018/2019 *State of the Trails Report*, which accessed the roughness of every mile in the system. Without this funding our state trail system will steadily fall into disrepair.



Quiet and Natural State Parks

► **WE OPPOSE** any change that would introduce the use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) in State Parks. State law is clear that OHVs are incompatible with State Parks, visitors oppose the idea, and OHVs already have nearly 1,800% more state land than state park users.



Gateway State Trail
Jim Schuder / P&TC Photo Contest

Graphics courtesy of Freepik