

Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

*Public Comments Needed on or before **Thurs., Sept. 27 at 5pm***

- Why were ecologically sensitive river bluffs exploded away in Spring Lake Park Reserve?
- Why is Lebanon Hills at risk of becoming a thoroughfare for bicyclists?
- Why is buckthorn and other invasive plants allowed to choke our woodlands?
- Why is asphalt and new construction diminishing our nature-based opportunities?
- *Why? Because the Regional Parks Policy Plan allows it.*

Met Council is currently updating the Regional Parks Policy Plan; changes proposed would allow these concerning practices to continue eroding our valuable, natural destinations in the metro region.

Proposed Changes: Trending away from Nature

- shifting towards more built infrastructure
- lacks accountability for natural resource management and sustainable practices
- strengthens overlap of transportation planning with nature-based recreation regardless of known conflicts
- increases unfunded and ongoing expenses for ongoing maintenance

Policy Plan Update: More asphalt and new construction, undefined built amenities, diminished woodlands and wetlands, manicured and treated turf:



Our Alternate Proposal: Gateways to Nature

- provide low-impact, nature-based opportunities, affordable and accessible to all
- increase accountability to natural resource management
- eliminate conflict of transportation planning through nature-based parks
- foster a community of stewards and inspire the next generation through outreach and programming

Our Proposal: Environmentally friendly surfaces, expanded pollinator gardens and native grasses, restored woodlands, access to natural environments and programming for nature-based opportunities.



What You Can Do

Your voice is crucial to help keep Lebanon Hills and other Regional Parks "Forever Wild". **Let Met Council know that the priority for our Regional Parks System is natural resource restoration and ongoing management, with programming to support a natural environment.** (Suggested statements to include with your personal message are below.)

1. **Submit Comments:** On or before 5pm on Thurs., Sept. 27, to: public.info@metc.state.mn.us -- Copy your Met Council member [contact info can be found at: metro council.org/About-Us/Who-We-Are/CouncilMembers.aspx]
2. **Attend the Public Hearing:** Mon., Sept. 17, 4pm -- Metropolitan Council, 390 Robert St. N., St. Paul -- Comment on the draft plan update in person. *Note: Comments are expected to be limited to 3 minutes.*

Suggested Comment

Use as is, or edit as you prefer with a personal story or experiences on why you appreciate nature-based opportunities.

TO: Metropolitan Council
public.info@metc.state.mn.us

COPY: Jon Commers, Chair, Community Development Committee
jon.commers@metc.state.mn.us

RE: Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

I do not support the draft plan which increases built infrastructure throughout our Regional Parks System, and lacks accountability to natural resource restoration and management. I urge you to send the draft plan back for revisions.

To maintain the integrity and achieve the potential of this nature-based parks system for now and future generations, I would support revisions that:

- strengthen accountability for restoring and managing the high quality natural resource base of the regional parks system
- attract users and foster a legacy of stewardship through outreach, programming and low-impact natural-resource based recreation suitable for all users
- eliminate language for expansion of undefined recreation amenities
- eliminate any potential for transportation planning within regional park boundaries

Thank you for your consideration and support of our unique, and potentially world-class, nature-based park system.

Sincerely,

Name
Address

Additional Suggested Statements

The draft update removes and revises language from the original RPPP which strongly emphasized preservation and protection for the natural resource base of the park system. This is concerning, especially because a red-lined version showing changes was not available which would have provided greater transparency. **I am opposed to these revisions made in the update which diminish the critical role of protecting and conserving the natural resource base of the Regional Parks System.**

Public engagement for this draft update involved a very small and select group of individuals; this continues to be a disturbing trend for key stakeholders who are not given opportunity to be part of the process. Equitable means equal for all, not just those who aren't using the parks. I urge you to engage with all interested parties as this and future RPPP updates move along.

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As an overriding message, the Policy Plan update should:

- strengthen accountability towards management of natural resources within the Regional Parks System;
- maintain the integrity and achieve full potential of a nature-based parks system with low-impact recreation opportunities for all users
- leave a legacy of Nature instead of more built infrastructure

I do not support expanded development and overlap with transportation planning, which are allowed and even encouraged by this update.

1. The draft plan approves "secondary or support activities", yet fails to defining what that means. As a result, contrary to nature-based recreation, at least one regional park is now proposing a new skate park pending approval of this policy plan update. What next? Simply putting something into a natural setting does not make it a nature-based activity. **To maintain high-quality, nature-based opportunities, this section must be removed, or clearly defined in order to minimize potential for built infrastructure to diminish wildlife habitat and nature-based opportunities.**
2. The Regional Parks System was not created to serve as a future extension of the transportation network. **Paved trails intended to serve as a bicycle commuting route must be aligned outside the boundaries of regional parks.** This is especially important considering the increasing use of electric bikes which can readily reach speeds in excess of 30mph. Trails within park boundaries should only be designed to serve a recreation function, and therefore, not be subject to extensive construction -- as evidenced by the irreversible ecological damage within Spring Lake Park Reserve -- required for a transportation function.

I DO NOT support the use of Legacy dollars for new construction. I DO support the use of Legacy dollars for natural resource restoration, programming to support a natural environment, repairs to existing infrastructure in a manner that meets criteria for highest standards of sustainability, and outreach to build awareness of the regional parks system.

The integrity of the natural resource base for the regional parks system must be maintained. Toward that goal, I support the following:

- Implementing agencies should partner with ecology professionals throughout the master planning process.
- Following approval of master plans, bi-annual reports must be available showing implementation progress to help assure natural resource stewardship is not neglected.
- Project funding requests should include a report on how the proposed project will minimize impacts, and how it maintains or benefits the integrity of the parks natural resource base.