

Join us on November 14

Presented By Wilderness in the City
PRESERVING URBAN NATURAL SPACES

OUR WILDERNESS OUR FUTURE

Community Discussion

Wed, Nov. 14, 6-9 pm, \$10 Suggested Donation
School of Environmental Studies, Apple Valley
Followed by Social Gathering at
The Mason Jar, Eagan With Food & Drink Specials

Will Steger

World Renowned
Polar Explorer,
Educator,
Photographer,
Writer, & Lecturer



Eye Witness to Global Warming

Steger shares stunning photographs from his expeditions along with compelling data and satellite imagery to document the deterioration in the polar ice caps. While the issue is critical, and the presentation is dramatic, Steger's message is one of hope and empowerment.

AND Lebanon Hills Regional Park Natural Resource Projects:

Restoration update, Q&A, and discussion with Dakota County natural resource staff.

Wilderness in the City
www.wildernessinthecity.org
651-271-1257



Sponsored By

Improving Lebanon Hills

On Sept. 30 an exciting and inspiring transformation took place at the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center as more than 100 volunteers joined staff to plant native grasses and flowering plants. In years ahead, **visit often and watch this space come alive** with pollinators, birds and other wildlife! Learn more with interactive displays throughout the native garden.

Our sincere thanks to the many volunteers who participated, and to the Dakota County Parks Department and Board of Commissioners for this valuable improvement!



(Lebanon Hills - continued on back page)

Legacy Amendment: 10 Year Later

A look at how this voter-approved conservation fund is impacting our nature based regional parks

maintenance shops * administrative offices * expanded parking lots * entrance drives * buildings * asphalt trails * wave pools * diesel generators * pole sheds * exploding river bluffs * fragmenting forests

- Since inception, the majority of Parks and Trails spending has focused on constructing new or expanding built infrastructure and recreation amenities, often to the detriment of natural resources, and contrary to what voters intended.
- Spending for restoration projects—which is different than repairing land that was damaged during construction—has been negligible.

For Lebanon Hills, if this trend continues, **Legacy dollars will provide a significant source of funding to construct the controversial, 6-mile asphalt bike trail through the park—if** the County Board chooses to implement that project.

(continued on page 2)

Thank you for supporting Wilderness in the City!

give TO THE MAX
NOV. 15, 2018

Legacy Amendment Nature — or More Built Infrastructure to Maintain?



Wilderness in the City is advocating for "A Legacy of Nature"

Taking care of the Natural Resources within our valuable Regional Parks System must be a priority. Investments made now will help ensure a lasting legacy of high-quality natural areas for future generations of people, and valuable habitat for wildlife.

The next round of funding for Parks and Trails Legacy projects will be considered by the Legislature during 2019. Contact your State Legislators and ask them to support Nature, not new development, with our Legacy dollars.

- **\$36.6 million** is estimated to be allocated to 10 Regional Park Implementing Agencies, including \$2.8 million to Dakota County "Forever Wild" Parks.
- Consistent with past years, the vast majority of funding requests continue to focus on new or expanded construction. (*Met Council CDC Agenda, 10/15/2018, Item 2018-261*)
- *For development, there are bonding dollars; for our natural resources and wildlife, voters approved the Legacy Amendment.*

Learn more at www.wildernessinthecity.org/legacy-of-nature

Litigation Pending to Preserve Environmental Funds

In 1988, the **Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund** was established for the "Protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources."

Late in the 2018 session, the MN Legislature passed a bill that allows the state to use the funds for infrastructure projects normally funded with general obligation bonding.

Now, the *Minnesota Environmental Partnership*, along with eight conservation and environmental groups plan to sue the state for tapping into an environmental fund in a way that they say violates the Minnesota Constitution and betrays voters' trust.

Depending on the outcome, this could establish an alarming precedence with implications for how the Legacy Amendment funds are used in the future.

The Legacy Amendment

In 2008, the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) was passed by Minnesota voters. **Most who supported the Legacy Amendment cited reasons such as clean water and preserving nature as their reason for voting "yes."**

Legacy revenue is divided into four funds:

1. Outdoor Heritage Fund (33%)
2. Clean Water Fund (33%)
3. Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (19.75%)
4. **Parks and Trails Fund (14.25%), further divided between three agencies:**
 - Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails (20%)
 - Minnesota DNR (40%)
 - **Metropolitan Council (40%) This is the main source of Legacy funds for our Regional Parks System**



The 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

Created in 2011 to provide guidance for Parks and Trails Spending

VISION: Natural Resources and Future Generations

- The Plan's overarching vision focused on **protecting natural resources** and **creating a next generation of stewards**,
- Balanced spending is emphasized: "a viable parks and trails system does not focus on certain expenditures to the exclusion of others."
- Includes taking care of our natural resources: "high-quality natural areas and water resources must be preserved and, in areas where they already have been degraded, they should be restored."

REALITY: Funding Development

- Within our regional parks, the majority of funds are spent on New Development—including projects that fragment our forests and prairies, increase built amenities and asphalt in our natural areas, and diminish wildlife habitat.
- Since inception, on average only 3% of funding has focused on restoration projects, for the sake of restoration -- which is different than "restoring" land that has been impacted by development.
- Natural resources throughout our metro regional parks system are degraded and stressed, diminishing quality for wildlife and nature-based recreation.

Regional Parks Future Direction

VISION: "Gateways to Nature"

The Regional Parks System was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1974 to preserve and protect the most valuable remaining open space in the metropolitan region. This system is part of a comprehensive system including State parks, city parks and other recreation providers.

- Regional Parks complement amenities and services found in other parts of the system.
- Regional parks contain significant natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood forests, native prairies and groundwater recharging areas.
- With proper management, the Regional Parks System provides valuable support for endangered pollinators, health and wellbeing, and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards.

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



REALITY: Increasing Built Infrastructure

The Metropolitan Council's Regional Park Policy Plan (RPPP) serves as a guide for Regional Parks System. Criteria established in the RPPP must be met by park implementing agencies (such as Dakota County) to be eligible for State and Met Council funding.

- Language within the RPPP can influence accountability toward natural resource stewardship and capital development within our nature-based Regional Parks System, including Lebanon Hills.
- The RPPP was updated in Fall 2018.
- Changes result in a shift toward increasing built infrastructure throughout our nature-based regional parks system.
- The importance of natural resources is emphasized, however, the Plan lacks accountability towards restoration and ongoing management of these resources.

Regional Park Reality: More asphalt and new construction, undefined built amenities, diminished woodlands and wetlands, manicured and treated turf.



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.

It's Your Money—Your Future: Make Your Voice Heard!

Contact your local elected officials and State Legislators and let them know your priorities for the Regional Parks System:

- Inspire the next generation of environmental stewards
- Provide places for respite in an otherwise built environment, especially for those who aren't readily able to visit places like the Boundary Waters and places further away
- Practice fiscal integrity by NOT overbuilding, which increases unfunded but ongoing operations and maintenance expenses.

It's not about
what it is, it's
about what it can
become.

~ Dr. Suess, The Lorax



Keeping Lebanon Hills "Forever Wild"



Natural Resources Restoration in Progress

Funded Projects: Acres will be actively managed for three years by a professional contractor. After three years, Dakota County is responsible for ongoing management of the sites.

- 336 acres currently in grant-funded projects (5 projects)
- 104 acres proposed by not yet approved for grant-funding (2 projects)

Additional work outside of grant areas:

- Removing large buckthorn from Camp Sacajawea
- Monitoring vegetation
- Water quality projects
- Monitoring wildlife

A **Natural Resources Management Plan** for Lebanon Hills is expected to be completed soon. With that, planning will begin for best practice on how to restore the park in its entirety, with minimal disruption to visitors' experiences.

THANK YOU!

Our thanks to the **Dakota County Board of Commissioners** for their continued commitment to Natural Resource Improvements at Lebanon Hills and throughout the Forever Wild Parks System, to the dedicated **Dakota County Parks natural resources staff**, and to the hard-working **volunteers** who have spent countless hours helping to improve Lebanon Hills!

Recreation Amenities Improvements

As decisions are made regarding built infrastructure and recreation amenities, we encourage the County to **minimize development footprints and maintain the rustic character of the park** -- which is its most valuable asset.

- **Canoe and portage routes** improvements are planned— which should support the Parks' reputation as the "Boundary Waters South" providing visitors with a sense of wilderness just ten minutes from the Mall of America.
- **Canoe/Kayak rental area** improvements are planned.
- **Outdoor education space** is being planned near the visitor center.
- A **Campground Improvement study** is planned for 2019
- **Trailside benches** are planned to be installed
- **Connector Trail Update:** *At this time, no action is expected during 2019.*



Wilderness in the City

We are dedicated to preserving and enhancing urban natural areas for future generations of people and wildlife.

Far too often, natural space in urban areas is viewed as empty and needing to be filled, or is left unmanaged and degraded.

We have a different vision.

Our nature-based regional parks system is filled with opportunities for environmental education, low-impact recreation, and valuable wildlife habitat. They offer places for respite, close to home and accessible to all, from the built world around us.

Support our Efforts

We are a grassroots, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization fully supported by your donations. All donations are 100% tax-deductible. Thank you for your support!

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We'd love to hear from you!
Contact us at
wildernessinthecity@gmail.com*

Wilderness in the City
is a proud member of



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