

This newsletter provides an overview of issues relating to Lebanon Hills, including:

- Recap of Master Plan Adoption
- Connector Trail Status
- What's Planned in 2016
- Natural Gas Pipeline
- Natural Resource Stewardship



**Happy New Year!**

*Wishing you all  
a year filled with  
good health, happiness...  
and time in nature!*

## Brief Recap of Adoption of Controversial 2015 Lebanon Hills Master Plan

**Jan. 26, 2015** - A draft Lebanon Hills Master Plan Update, including a 6-mile, end-to-end paved trail, graded 5% or less through the interior of the park, was released for a 30-day public comment period. Of 690 comments received, 97% were opposed to this plan as reported in the Star Tribune.

**Mar. 17, 2015** - Despite the outpouring of opposition from across the metro region, Dakota County Commissioners, on a 5-2 vote, adopted the 2015 Master Plan for Lebanon Hills.

### *Dakota County Commissioners Voting Record for Master Plan*

**Voted YES**

*Commissioner Workman (term ends 2016)  
Commissioner Gerlach (term ends 2016)  
Commissioner Gaylord (term ends 2018)  
Commissioner Slavik (term ends 2018)  
Commissioner Holberg (term ends 2018)*

**Voted NO**

*Commissioner Egan (term ends 2016)  
Commissioner Schouweiler (term ends 2016; not seeking re-election)*

**Aug. 26, 2015** - The controversial 2015 Lebanon Hills Master Plan was formally adopted by the Metropolitan Council in a unanimous vote. **With this action, the Plan became eligible for implementation and funding at the discretion of elected Dakota County Commissioners.**

*Going forward...Wilderness in the City will remain engaged as the 2015 Plan is implemented by continuing to meet with elected officials and decision makers, and will inform you when decisions are pending which may impact the future of Lebanon Hills and how you can take action.*

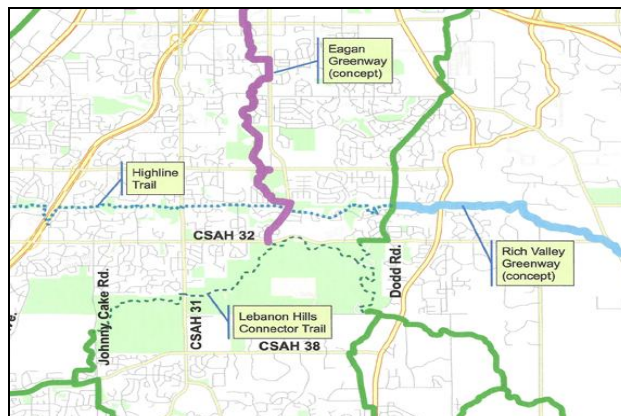
## Connector Trail Status

The most controversial element of the Master Plan, the **Connector Trail**, is not included in the Capital Improvement Program for 2016, meaning that no action is expected on the trail project this year. Status of the connector trail, however, remains an outstanding issue to watch.

### Dakota County's Greenway Trail Network

**Greenway Trail Networks** are highway-like systems for commuting bicyclists by providing non-motorized transportation alternatives. Greenway trails are designed to accommodate 20-mph bike speeds with grading to 5% or less, wide clearance for sightlines, and kept free of snow/ice.

*As shown on the map, the connector trail within the park was originally proposed as a main artery of the planned greenway bike network. That status changed with adoption of the new Master Plan.*



**Connector Trail Status - cont'd**

The adopted Master Plan states that "The paved Connector Trail is not to serve as a segment of the Greenway system..." (p. 184), however, the Dakota County Board has not yet approved a change to realign the greenway network around Lebanon Hills.

**Outstanding Issue to Watch in 2016**

On 7/28/15, Dakota County Commissioners authorized a contract with a consulting firm to evaluate and designate trails around Lebanon Hills for bicycle transportation (commuters and fitness cyclists). This "Central Greenway Connectivity Study" is expected to be completed in 2016. Public opportunities for review and comment are expected during this process (see open house notice below.)

**To eliminate the potential for the proposed connector trail to serve as a segment of the Greenway system, and Lebanon Hills from becoming a thoroughfare, Wilderness in the City supports greenway trails outside park boundaries and not directly linked to the proposed connector trail.**



Did you know...

Funding for new paved greenway bike trails comes from County taxes, Met Council, State funds, and Federal grants.

The majority of ongoing expenses for maintenance of paved greenway trails, and natural buffers on either side, is the County's responsibility.



**Central Greenway Connectivity Study - Open House**

Tues., Feb. 16, 5-7pm  
Rosemount Community Center  
13885 South Robert Trail, Rosemount 55068

Representatives from Dakota County's Planning Department will be available at this Open House.

Information will be provided for the Central Greenway Connectivity Study, and the Rich Valley Greenway Trail, which is planned to connect to Lebanon Hills.

Photos show construction of a greenway bike trail project through Spring Lake Park Reserve, which is managed by Dakota County's transportation department. The Board's decision to keep greenway trails outside of Lebanon Hills should help to preserve the park's natural resources and its unique character.



**What's Planned for 2016**

On Dec. 15, 2015, the Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the 2016 capital improvement budget for Dakota County Parks.

The approved budget includes \$511,000 as base funding for natural resource for the entire county parks and trails system, which is less than the \$650,000 projected annual stewardship spending for Lebanon Hills alone as presented by the County's ecological consultant to the Lebanon Hills Citizen Advisory Panel. **The County Board's decision means that successful restoration at Lebanon Hills and other county parks is heavily dependent on competitive grants which may or may not be received.**

**Wilderness in the City supports a stronger commitment by the Board of Commissioners to Natural Resource stewardship to help assure that staff has resources necessary for best practice and long-term management of natural resources at Lebanon Hills and the entire park system.**

<b>2016 Dakota County Parks and Trails Budget</b>		
Greenway Dev.	69.71%	\$16,416,211
Acquisition	19.46%	4,583,333
Park Development	3.04%	716,016
Maintenance	2.61%	378,000
<b>Natural Resources</b>	<b>2.34%</b>	<b>551,000</b>
Grant Match	2.34%	550,000
Planning	<u>1.51%</u>	<u>355,000</u>
	100.00%	\$23,549,560

"Invasive species have degraded the park's ecosystems and are preventing regeneration of native red oaks. As the park's oaks decline, other less desirable species, primarily buckthorn, will become dominant. Buckthorn is well-established in the park is the major threat. It out-competes native vegetation, reduces wildlife diversity, causes erosion and contributes to declining water quality." (2015 Lebanon Hills Master Plan, p. 64)

**Outstanding Issue to Watch in 2016**

At their Nov. 17, 2015, Board meeting, Dakota County Commissioners established the Environmental Legacy Fund for the protection, preservation or enhancement of the environment.

On Dec. 1, staff presented that this fund has a current balance of \$37 million and has expected annual revenues of \$7 million. This fund could be used for natural resource stewardship projects throughout Dakota County, or it could be used for construction of regional bike trails, or something else. How the funds will be spent is at the discretion of the County Board.

**Wilderness in the City supports the use of Environmental Legacy Funds for preservation and protection of natural resources in parklands as a priority over enhancements such as construction of regional bike trails.**

**Lebanon Hills -- Park Development and Natural Resource Projects**

The following projects specific to Lebanon Hills were approved by the Board as part of the 2016-2020 Capital Improvement Program.

**Park Development Projects**

- ADA-compliant paved trail around McDonough Lake
- ADA-compliant paved trail at Holland Lake trailhead to fishing pier
- Upkeep to the deteriorated trail bridge at Bridge Pond (the "crooked bridge")
- Upkeep to the deteriorated A-frame at Portage Lake
- Facility and natural resource improvements at the West Trailhead and at Wheaton Pond

**Natural Resource Projects**

- Phase 1 Buckthorn Management -- *continue to manage acres started*
- Buck Pond Restoration (175 acres -- grant funded)
- Tamarac Bog (23 acres -- grant funded)
- *Star Pond (116 acres -- pending grant approval)*



**Natural Gas Pipeline Proposed through Lebanon Hills**

Information about the pipeline, including **what you can do**, will be updated regularly on our website, [www.wildlebanonhills.org](http://www.wildlebanonhills.org).

Northern Natural Gas Company (NNG) is proposing a new 20-inch diameter natural gas pipeline to be installed through Lebanon Hills Regional Park. Wilderness in the City, together with Clean Water Action, will host a 30-minute informational forum about the pipeline on Thurs., Feb. 4. Learn more about the project, potential impacts to Lebanon Hills, and what you can do to take action.

Following the forum, all are welcome to stay for a viewing of an inspiring and award winning film, *Elemental*. The film tells the story of three individuals united by their deep connection with nature and driven to confront some of the most pressing ecological challenges of our time.

Admission is free, but registration is appreciated. To register, go to [www.cleanwateraction.org/LebanonHills](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/LebanonHills) or contact Wendy Heath at [wheath@cleanwateraction.org](mailto:wheath@cleanwateraction.org), 612-627-1511.

**Lebanon Hills Pipeline Forum & Film Event**

Date: Thursday, February 4  
Time: 6:30pm Pipeline Forum, 7pm Film  
Location: Lebanon Hills Visitor Center, 860 Cliff Rd., Eagan 55123

**Natural Resource Stewardship**

Wilderness in the City supports natural resource volunteer opportunities in Lebanon Hills Regional Park. In 2015, volunteers worked with Dakota County Parks staff on a number of new and vital projects:

- Removal of invasive Garlic Mustard and Japanese Hedge Parsley
- Native seed collection of Rattlebox and Little Bluestem on a prairie remnant; collected seeds will be used for an adjacent area of the park
- Buckthorn removal; volunteers hauled pre-cut buckthorn to areas where it could be chipped by work crews

**Our thanks to Volunteers and Dakota County Parks natural resource staff for a successful year!**

Did you know...

Spending time in nature is good for the body and mind, leading to health benefits including reduced depressive symptoms and lower blood pressure.

## Volunteer with us in 2016!

Kick-off the 2016 Natural Resource Volunteer season with Garlic Mustard training at Lebanon Hills!

Save the date for one of these training sessions: Tues., May 3 (6-8pm), Thurs., May 5 (6-8pm) or Sat., May 14(9-11am). Registration details, and a complete schedule of 2016 natural resource volunteer events, will be posted on our website early this Spring.



### Restoration Progress at Lebanon Hills

**Jensen Lake and Buck Pond** -- Dakota County will remove buckthorn and other invasive species from 136 acres of woodland, plant 31 acres of new prairie, enhance 5 acres of rare remnant prairie and restore 2.5 acres of wetlands around Jensen Lake and Buck Pond. The restoration project is funded by a \$350,000 grant, and restoration will take place over 3 years.

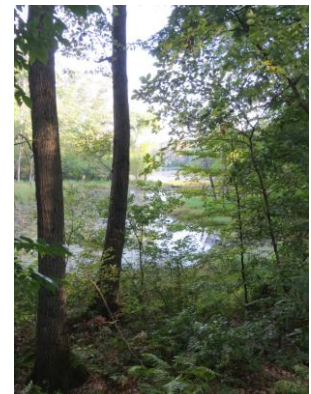
**Tamarack Bog** -- Just west of Holland Lake, a restoration project is planned for 23 acres of tamarack swamp, a rare plant community, and adjacent woodlands. This project is funded with an \$81,000 Conservation Partners Legacy Grant.

**Buckthorn Management** -- Have you seen the piles of cut buckthorn in the preserve zone (East section) of the Park? Phase 1 Buckthorn Management started in 2014, and by the end of 2015 staff reports that approximately 700 acres have started in this long-term effort.

#### Outstanding Issue to Watch in 2016

**Comprehensive Natural Resource Management Plan** -- Dakota County natural resources staff is working with consultants to develop a Dakota County Comprehensive Natural Resource management Plan for protecting lakes, rivers, wetlands, wildlife habitats and other natural areas. Opportunities for public involvement is expected during this process, including an open house to be scheduled in March.

*This study is expected to be completed and the findings presented to the County Board during 2016. Additional natural resource management plans for each regional park, including Lebanon Hills, will then be developed. Funding and implementation of the Natural Resource Management Plans will be at the discretion of the Dakota County Board of Commissioners. Since 2001, the Board of Commissioners has not funded stewardship at a level which keeps up with the needs in parklands despite recommendations of past natural resource management plans.*



## Wilderness in the City Advocacy \* Outreach \* Stewardship



- **Advocating** for preservation of urban natural spaces for the benefit of future generations of people and wildlife.
- **Informing** you when decisions are pending and how you can take action.
- **Promoting** Lebanon Hills as a unique destination.
- **Supporting** natural resource projects.
- **Engaging** the next generation of stewards.

Did you know...

Wilderness in the City is advocating for greater use of Legacy Funds for stewardship in urban natural areas such as Lebanon Hills and other Regional Parks.