

Included in this newsletter:

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- Elections



AHHH...Spring!

A wonderful time of year to watch, and listen, as landscapes and wildlife transition out of winter.

Natural Resources - Events and Updates

Natural Resource Volunteer Work Nights!

Join us at Lebanon Hills Regional Park for monthly volunteer work nights! These events are a fun and informative way to help restore and preserve the park, and build a community of stewards for future generations.

Garlic Mustard Training at Lebanon Hills

**Tues., May 3 (6-8pm) Thurs., May 5 (6-8pm)
Sat., May 14 (9-11am)**

Kick off the 2016 Natural Resource Volunteer season! Attend one of these training sessions including brief instruction and also field time. After training, you are encouraged to participate in the 2nd annual "Garlic Mustard Challenge"!

For additional information and to register, go to www.wildlebanonhills.org and click on "Volunteer".

2016 Schedule of Events

Join us for any or all of the following scheduled work nights!

Thursday, June 9, 6-8pm

Thursday, July 14, 6-8pm

Wednesday, Aug. 10, 6-8pm

Thursday, Sept. 8, 6-8pm

Late September -- Buckthorn training and 2nd annual BUCKTHORN BUST!

Schedule subject to change ~ check the Volunteer page of our website for updates. Specific projects will be determined closer to dates, but are expected to be similar to 2015 projects including invasive species removal and native restoration.

Restoration Progress at Lebanon Hills

We acknowledge and thank Dakota County's Parks and Natural Resource Staff for their efforts toward securing grant funding, which accounts for the majority of stewardship funding in Dakota County.

Jensen Lake and Buck Pond -- Buckthorn and other invasive species will be removed from 136 acres of woodlands, 31 acres of new prairie will be planted, and restoration will be done on 5 acres of rare remnant prairie and 2.5 acres of wetlands around Jensen Lake and Buck Pond. This 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 -- New scenic views are opening up in the park thanks to buckthorn management which started in 2014. Staff reports that approximately 600 acres have begun this long-term restoration effort, which is essential to the preservation of Lebanon Hills.



View along hiking trail before and after buckthorn management.

"Try to leave the Earth a better place than when you arrived."

Sidney Sheldon

\$\$ 2016 Spending for Development \$\$

Lebanon Hills -- Development Funding Approved

On March 1, Dakota County requested that Met Council approve an amendment change to an existing grant.

Original Grant: Unspent grant balance = \$641,820

- Received by Dakota County in 2011 for a 3.6-mile seasonal use trail with an aggregate surface based on the 2001 Master Plan, which had broad public support.
- This project was never implemented; Dakota County now would like to use those funds for projects based on the 2015 Master Plan, which did not have public support.

Amended Grant:

- Design, engineering, construction and construction engineering for the following:
 1. ADA-compliant paved loop trail and site improvements [undefined] around McDonough Lake
 2. ADA-compliant paved trail and site improvements [undefined] from Holland Lake Trailhead to fishing pier on Holland Lake
 3. Parking and site improvements at the West Trailhead facility.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizens attended meetings and submitted comments opposing this request, most citing that there should be an opportunity for the general public to be involved in a meaningful process during design phase *prior* to approval of funding for construction.

Concerns were expressed over recent park projects involving extensive construction and irreversible negative impacts to natural resources, especially at Spring Lake Park Reserve where construction funding was approved first, and public involvement after the fact had no impact.

Regardless, the Met Council's Community Development Committee unanimously approved Dakota County's request on March 21. **At this meeting, the Dakota County Parks Director stated that there would be opportunity for public input during the design phase for these projects.**

To help preserve the wilderness character of Lebanon Hills, it is vital that citizens to be involved during the planning and design phase of development projects.

Projects for nature-based recreation and education should have public support and compliment the parks wilderness character, which is its greatest asset.

Visitor Center: Phase 1 with public involvement...



and, phase 2 without public involvement



Beyond Lebanon Hills - State Funding Requests

Funding requests related to parks and trails are currently being considered by Legislators.

Dakota County requests include:

- \$2.2 million to partially fund a 1.7-mile trail segment of the Mississippi River Regional Trail. HF2653/SF2622
- \$2.25 million to partially fund a 3.2-mile segment of the Minnesota River Regional Trail. HF2773/SF2281
- \$824,000 for improvements and expanded parking lot at Big Rivers Regional Trail trailhead. HF3107/SF2627

Metropolitan Council Requests Include:

- \$10 million for Regional Parks and Trails Capital Improvements HF3692/SF3415
- If approved, the \$10 million will be matched by \$6 million in Met Council Bonds, and allocated to park agencies.



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: Throughout our complete park system -- city, regional, and state parks and trails -- for every dollar invested in new infrastructure, annual costs for operations and maintenance correspondingly increase. As maintenance expenses increase, budgets for other pertinent park services (including staffing, programming, marketing, outreach and management of natural resources) become strained.

Since 2000, the total annual cost for operations and maintenance of Regional Parks and Trails has increased by 80%, from \$54.8 million in 2000 to \$99.3 million in 2015. Maintenance expenses go beyond Regional Parks, including:

- Minneapolis Parks -- estimated backlog of work on park buildings and playgrounds has reached \$110 million. (Star Tribune, 3/16/16)
- State Parks and Trails -- MN DNR reports \$342 million is needed for repairs. (Star Tribune, 4/10/6)

There is also real concern for stewardship of natural resources in our parks.

- Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park gets C's, D's and even F's for water quality...water quality is a common problem to lots of lakes. (Star Tribune, 6/10/14)
- In Lebanon Hills, invasive species degrade ecosystems and prevent regeneration of native red oaks, the parks dominant native tree. As oaks decline, buckthorn and other species will dominate. Buckthorn is well-established and is the major threat. (2015 Master Plan)

Contact your elected Legislators and let them know what your priorities are for taxpayer dollars in our parks.

"What's A Greenway?"

An attendee asked this question at a recent Dakota County event, and staff answered that greenways are "linear parks". The attendee asked for an example, and staff referenced the Mississippi River Regional Trail and the Big River Trail.

In fact, "Greenway" can mean many things including:

Ecological Greenways feature significant natural corridors to provide for wildlife migration and species interchange, nature study and hiking.

Recreational Greenways are paths and trails of various kinds, often relatively long distance, based on natural corridors as well as canals, abandoned rail beds and public right of way.

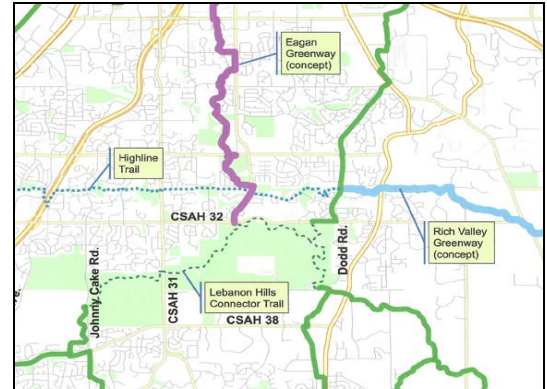
Alternative Transportation Greenways create a network for bicycle commuters and pedestrian use for residents of all ages and mobility to walk or bike to their destinations rather than taking their car.

Greenways and Lebanon Hills

Dakota County's planned greenways, in accordance with Met Council Policy, will essentially combine Recreational and Alternative Transportation functions. It is important to note that design criteria for commuter bike trails include paved surfaces for year-around use, 5% grade or less, sightlines and curve radius for bike speeds of 20mph.

When Dakota County officials proposed the controversial Connector Trail through Lebanon Hills, which was planned as the hub of their greenway trail network, public input received over a two-year period was overwhelmingly opposed.

As a result, the Board approved changes to the 2015 Master Plan, which now states: "Greenways bring people to the park, but will not continue through the park. Greenway connections will be made around the outside of the park."



Outstanding Issue to Watch
 The County Board has not yet approved any changes to the planned greenway network. Trails designed for higher speed bicyclists come to Lebanon Hills and still are shown to link directly to the controversial connector trail, resulting in a greenway not only to, but through, the park.

 A consulting firm was contracted by the Board to evaluate and designate trails around Lebanon Hills for bicycle transportation (commuters and fitness cyclists). This study is referred to as the "Central Greenway Connectivity Study" and is expected to be completed in 2016.

WHAT'S YOUR PRIORITY?
 Did you know...Dakota County's 2016 Parks and Trails Budget includes:

 \$16,416,211 (70%) for New Greenway Trails and
 \$551,000 (2.34%) for Natural Resources.

Update on Natural Gas Pipeline Proposed through Lebanon Hills

Northern Natural Gas Company (NNG) is proposing a new 20-inch diameter natural gas pipeline to be installed through an existing easement in Lebanon Hills. An open house took place in October 2015. More than 400 citizens have submitted comments to the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee (FERC) expressing concern about negative impacts to Lebanon Hills and requesting that alternate routes be considered.

Wilderness in the City appreciates the efforts made by Dakota County Parks staff to negotiate terms that minimize construction impact, and also the response shown by Northern Natural Gas and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to citizens concerns.

Thank you to Clean Water Action Minnesota for partnering with us to build awareness of this issue.

Through the efforts of many, we are hopeful this unfortunate situation will not leave any lasting expansive development footprint in Lebanon Hills.

Dakota County Parks staff has had an ongoing dialogue with NNG, and has negotiated terms which staff feels will limit negative impact to natural resources in Lebanon Hills. NNG, acknowledging public concern for Lebanon Hills, has tentatively agreed to terms including:

- Instead of open trench, the pipeline will be installed by horizontal directional drilling (HDD) through 96% of the park; this implies that there will be no surface impact along 96% of the pipeline alignment.
- Where there are open drill sites, native prairie restoration will take place.
- The easement corridor will be re-vegetated with trees and shrubs to minimize any permanent clearance corridor.

On March 8, NNG presented the project to the Board of Commissioners in their Physical Development Committee meeting.

- The Board authorized staff to prepare an agreement with NNG based on the negotiated terms.
- Staff will present the agreement to the Board at a future meeting to consider authorization to execute the agreement.

NNG is expected to formally file an application in June 2016, and if approved by FERC, construction is expected to take place in 2017.

2016 Elections

Elected Dakota County Commissioners are the decision makers for development project, natural resource stewardship and all other pertinent park services at Lebanon Hills and other County parks and open space.

This November, four Dakota County Board seats are up for election:

- **District 3** -- Lilydale, Mendota, Mendota Heights, Eagan precincts 1-7 and 9-12.
- **District 4** -- Inver Grove Heights precincts 2-7, Eagan precincts 8 and 13-17, Rosemount precincts 1-2, 4 and 6-7.
- **District 5** - City of Burnsville.
- **District 7** - Apple Valley, Rosemount precincts 3 and 5.

To find your County District, go to <http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/>

Election Filing Dates

Filing dates to run for office are **May 17 through May 31, 2016 at 5pm.**

Wilderness in the City will provide information on all candidates for County Board in upcoming newsletters and also on our website.

Outdoor Adventure Expo - April 22-24
www.outdooradventureexpo.com

We are excited to once again be participating in the Twin Cities largest gathering of outdoor enthusiasts! Visit the Expo and learn more great ways to get active outdoors this summer.



Stop by our booth and learn more about what we are doing to advocate for urban natural areas.

"A society is defined not only by what it creates, but by what it refuses to destroy."

John Sawhill



Wilderness in the City Advocacy * Stewardship * Outreach



Become a Supporting Member!

Yes! I want to help *Wilderness in the City* protect urban natural areas and the wilderness character of Lebanon Hills for future generations of people and wildlife.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Wildflower | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Oak Savannah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Lakes and Wetlands | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 A Legacy of Nature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Amount | |

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City/State: _____ Zip: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone (optional): _____

Checks payable to **Wilderness in the City** can be sent to **1130 Tiffany Pt., Eagan, MN 55123.**

Wilderness in the City is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations are 100% tax-deductible.

Thank you for your support!

Our Mission

Wilderness in the City is dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural urban areas for future generations of people and wildlife.

What We Do

Advocate for preservation of urban natural spaces for the benefit of future generations of people and wildlife.

Promote Lebanon Hills as a unique destination.

Support natural resource stewardship projects.

Engage the next generation of stewards.

Inform you when decisions are pending and how you can take action.