

Wilderness in the City

Preserving urban natural spaces

Winter Newsletter

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In this Newsletter:

- Connector Trail Status
- Greenway Network
- Natural Resource News
- Lebanon Hills Projects
- A Legacy of Nature
- Critter Corner
- Upcoming Events



Wishing you a very Happy New Year!

May your year be filled with good health, happiness... and many visits to Lebanon Hills and other favorite destinations!

Connector Trail Status

Background

- In 2015, a Master Plan update for Lebanon Hills was approved by the Board of Commissioners and the Metropolitan Council.
- The most controversial element of the Plan, which received an outpouring of opposition from across the metro region, is the Connector Trail: a 6-mile paved bike trail, graded 5% or less, end-to-end and planned for year around use, through the interior of the park.
- The Dakota County Board of Commissioners has discretion whether or not to implement the controversial trail plan.

Current Status

Listed in the Dakota County 2017-2021 Capital Improvement Program:

- 2017 -- no action is expected on the Connector Trail during 2017.
- 2018-2021 Projects: "Lebanon Hills Regional Park Connector Trail Study".

Going Forward

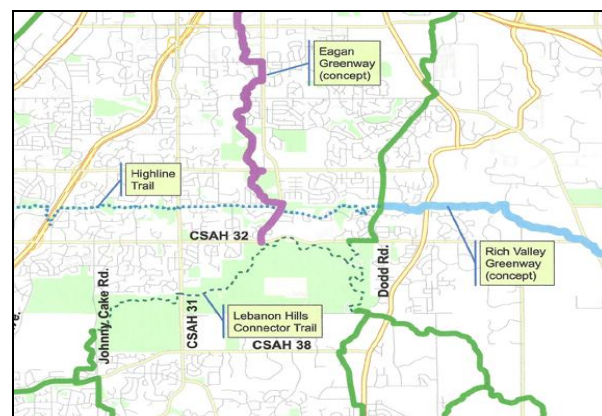
Wilderness in the City will continue to monitor and keep you informed on this project.

"*...you don't know what you've got till it's gone...*" ~ Joni Mitchell

Greenway Trails Update

Greenway Trail Networks are like highway systems for commuting bicyclists by providing non-motorized transportation corridors designed to accommodate 20-mph bike speeds (including grading of 5% or less, wide clearance for sightlines, kept free of snow/ice). This can result in extensive construction projects detrimental to surrounding landscapes, as evidenced at Spring Lake Park Reserve.

As shown in the diagram, the controversial Connector Trail within the park was proposed as a main artery of Dakota County's planned Greenway Trail Network. However, when the 2015 Master Plan was adopted, this status changed and the approved Plan states "The paved Connector Trail is not to serve as a segment of the Greenway system" (p. 184).



This was a significant change because *if* the Connector Trail is built, the design criteria has more flexibility (friendlier to the surrounding landscape). Also, the potential for Lebanon Hills to be used as a thoroughfare should be eliminated because the connector is no longer a segment of the greenway network.

Outstanding Issue to Watch in 2017

Dakota County staff and consultants are currently studying how to realign the Greenway trails around, rather than through the park. This "Central Greenway Connectivity Study" will be presented to the Planning Commission on Thurs., Feb. 23. This meeting is open to the public.

Dakota County Planning Commission -- Thurs., Feb. 23, 7pm
Western Service Center, 14955 Galaxie Ave., Apple Valley

What Next: Following this meeting, it is expected that the study will be presented to the Board of Commissioners at an upcoming Physical Development Committee meeting for approval to release the plan for public review.

Natural Resource News

Restoration Projects

In response to public input, attention and funding for restoration at Lebanon Hills has increased for buckthorn management and other enhancement projects.

Improvements taking place in the park's Preserve Zone (east of Pilot Knob) include:

1. Jensen Lake & Buck Pond Restoration.
2. Star Pond Savanna Expansion
3. Tamarack Swamp Enhancement

Wilderness in the City gratefully acknowledges the efforts of dedicated staff and the County Board for their attention to this important resource. To be successful, these efforts will be ongoing for many years.

We strongly encourage the County Board to continue providing staff with resources needed to assure successful restoration in areas already started, and expand efforts to include the middle and west segments of the park.

In addition to restoration improvements, there are multiple projects from the 2015 Master Plan scheduled in Lebanon Hills for completion by Sept. 2017.

Project locations include: McDonough Lake near the visitor center, Wheaton Pond near the campground, the Mountain Bike Trailhead, Holland Lake Trailhead, the A-frame at Portage Lake and the "crooked" bridge replacement at Bridge Pond.

To learn more, go to: www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks and click on "Improvement Projects".

Thank you Volunteers!

During 2016, approximately 1,200 hours were spent by volunteers on Natural Resource projects as part of monthly work nights and challenges hosted by Dakota County Parks in partnership with Wilderness in the City. Projects included garlic mustard and Japanese hedge parsley challenges, buckthorn removal, and native prairie seed collection. **Many thanks to staff and volunteers who helped to make 2016 a successful year!**

Monthly work nights provide great help to the park—and also fun social time with others! Planning has already started for 2017 Monthly Volunteer Work Nights. A full schedule will be available on our website early this Spring.



Comprehensive Natural Resource Planning Underway

Not only are natural resources in Lebanon Hills benefiting from public input, but staff and consultants are evaluating needs throughout all of Dakota County. This **Comprehensive Natural Resource Management Plan** includes a long-term vision for management of natural resources and an outline for short-term steps. Visit www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks and click on "Planning" for additional information.

Funding sources for natural resource restoration and ongoing management include the Legacy Amendment (Parks and Trails Fund) and the county's recently established Environmental Legacy Fund. As such, additional taxes or fees should not be required to fully implement the comprehensive plan, and ongoing expense will decrease once land is restored.

A presentation of the Comprehensive Plan is expected at the Planning Commission meeting on Feb. 23, and to the County Board at their Physical Development Committee meeting on Mar. 14. Both meetings are open to the public.

Dakota County Planning Commission
Thurs., Feb. 23, 7pm
Western Service Center
14955 Galaxie Ave., Apple Valley
952-891-7570

Physical Development Committee
Tues., Mar. 14, 9am
Western Service Center
14955 Galaxie Ave., Apple Valley
952-891-7570

"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we are borrowing it from our children."

~Native American Proverb

Did you know... In 2015, operations and maintenance costs for the Metropolitan Regional Parks system alone exceeded \$100 million dollars. In addition:

- The Minnesota DNR has a shortfall of more than \$300 million to take care of State Parks and Trails infrastructure.
- Minneapolis and St. Paul each have significant shortfalls for taking care of amenities in city parks.

For your consideration... for our parks system, and especially in nature based regional parks such as Lebanon Hills, when have we built enough amenities?

"A Legacy of Nature" Campaign

Ensuring high-quality nature based parklands are preserved for future generations of people and wildlife.



The Legacy Amendment

In 2008, Minnesota's voters passed the *Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment* to:

- protect drinking water sources;
- protect, enhance and restore wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat;
- preserve arts and cultural heritage;
- support parks and trails.

To accomplish these goals, tax dollars are dedicated to four funds: Clean Water, Outdoor Heritage, Arts and Cultural Heritage, and Parks and Trails.

The Parks and Trails fund receives 14.25% of total Legacy funds, of which 40% is administered through the Met Council for the **Metropolitan Regional Parks System**.

Metropolitan Regional Parks System

The Regional Parks System is part of a system of parks which includes city parks, state parks, and private facilities. Each of these others complements the Regional Parks System.

Regional Parks, such as Lebanon Hills, contain significant natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood forests, native prairies and groundwater recharging areas. In many of our regional parks, these natural resources are degraded, resulting in poor quality experiences for nature based education and recreation, as well as degraded ecosystems for wildlife.

The **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund** provides a source of funding for restoration and ongoing management of natural resources throughout our Regional Parks System.

Parks and Trails Legacy Fund – A Closer Look

Most people who supported the Legacy Amendment cited reasons such as clean water and preserving nature as their reason for voting "yes". Yet contrary to this, the majority of parks and trails Legacy funds for the metropolitan regional parks system is being used for projects that increase built amenities and asphalt throughout our natural-resource based park system—fragmenting our forests and prairies, compromising water quality, and degrading wildlife habitat.

Current funding requests (FY2018-19) include:

- Design, Engineer and Construct: park headquarters building, parking lots and pavilions, picnic shelters, restrooms, maintenance building and a new pole shed, paved roads and trails
- Installation of backup generator systems

Previous projects funded with Legacy dollars include:

- Design and construct roadways, parking lots, sidewalks
- Design and replace mechanical filtration system for wave pool
- Reconstruct golf course clubhouse septic system
- Maintenance shop rehabilitation

Relevant to Lebanon Hills...

If Legacy Funds continue to serve as a source of funding for new construction, the Connector Trail will likely be funded in part with Legacy dollars. Consequently, annual maintenance expenses will increase at a time when budgets are already strained with regard to taking care of what we have...as well as other pertinent park services such as staffing, programming, marketing, and natural resource stewardship.

What should be our Legacy? Nature...or more stuff to take care of?

Built infrastructure requires high initial investment and an increase in ongoing expenses for operations, maintenance and eventual replacement.

Natural Resource restoration requires a high initial investment, and a decrease in ongoing expenses once land is fully restored.

If new construction is not how you intended Legacy dollars to be spent, then visit our website, www.wildlebanonhills.org, to learn what you can do to support "A Legacy of Nature."

Critter Corner

Winter: Migrate, Hibernate, or Tough It Out

Just how do your wild neighbors cope with winter's woes?



Cold temps, deep snows, whipping winds and dwindling food supplies make life tough. Hibernating or becoming dormant works for species such as woodchucks and bears, who live off stored fat during cold months. Body-chemistry changes in some frogs enable them to overwinter in a frozen state and then thaw out when

spring returns. Many insects lifespan come to an end in winter—right after they've laid eggs that will hatch when the earth is warm again.

The animals who stay awake in winter are helped by changes their bodies make in response to reduced daylight. They also adapt their behavior to survive the cold. Fur and feathers wrap the body in warm air. In winter, the length and density of deer's guard hairs and underfur both increase. Deer seek southern slopes in the day, bedding in depressions in the snow and soaking up the sun. At night, they gather in the woods, where the trees insulate them from winds and the cooler temperatures. Red foxes and porcupines grow a thick underfur. Many birds, such as goldfinches, grow 50% or more feathers in winter! On cold nights chickadees save energy by allowing their body temperature to drop ten degrees, but they still must shiver all night long to generate body heat.

You can help your wild neighbors survive by providing a steady source of fresh water in a heated birdbath. It's a small effort that provides a life-saving benefit for them and great bird watching opportunities for you!

Dakota County Board Election Results

Congratulations to three incumbents (Commissioners Tom Egan, Chris Gerlach and Liz Workman) who retained their seats, and Joe Atkins who won the open seat to replace retiring Commissioner Nancy Schouweiler. We look forward to working with the County Board toward preservation of high quality natural resources in Dakota County, especially at Lebanon Hills.

Visit our booth at these Events!

Learn more about what Wilderness in the City is doing to help keep Lebanon Hills forever wild.

Sat., Mar. 4, noon-4pm

Community Connections
Eagan Community Center
1501 Central Pkwy, Eagan

Fri-Sun, Apr 28-30

Outdoor Adventure Expo
Midwest Mountaineering
309 Cedar Ave., So., Minneapolis

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.

☐ \$25 Wildflower

☐ \$75 Lakes and Wetlands

☐ Other Amount

☐ \$50 Oak Savannah

☐ \$100 A Legacy of Nature

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.