

WANTED: Dakota County Parks and Natural Resources Commission

Wilderness in the City is advocating for establishment of a public commission to focus specifically on parks and natural resources.

This new public commission would help to ensure that public priorities and input are incorporated in budgets and planning, unlike the current process.

In 2012, the former Dakota County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee was merged into the Planning Commission. Since then, the Planning Commission meets one night per month for two hours to review wide range of issues presented by Staff.

Agenda topics include transportation, solid waste management, comprehensive planning, all-hazard planning, shoreland and floodplain ordinances — and park planning — which means that since the merger, there is less time dedicated to the many pertinent issues impacting our unique and valuable Forever Wild parks system.

Public involvement toward parks and natural resource planning has diminished.

It's time to bring your voice back!

For decades, Dakota County surveys and other public input have consistently prioritized natural resources and taking care of what we have, ahead of building more recreation amenities. Today, this is not happening, and budgets continue to prioritize new construction, such as:

- a \$3 million paved bike trail and "bridge to nowhere" constructed over McAndrews Blvd. near the MN Zoo;
- a \$9 million four-mile paved bike trail constructed through Spring Lake Park Reserve, which included explosives along the ecologically sensitive river bluffs, removal of 200-ft. wide swaths of mature forest, and eminent domain proceedings;
- approval of a controversial Lebanon Hills Master Plan, including a six-mile, end-to-end, paved bike trail through the park despite unprecedented public opposition;
- underfunded maintenance for basic existing infrastructure as evidenced by long-established rutted trails and neglected picnic shelters.

This trend will continue until a commission or board *with decision-making authority* is established to focus specifically on issues and policies relating to Dakota County Forever Wild Parks.

Recent efforts to restore and manage natural resources at Lebanon Hills and other open spaces were initiated by public demand. Looking ahead, we want to ensure natural resource stewardship remains at the forefront when decisions are made.

The Future of Lebanon Hills: A Thoroughfare? Central Greenway Connectivity Study

Thank you to those who took time to provide comments on this important issue! The public comment period ended July 1 but you can still make your voice heard.

TAKE ACTION! On or before Monday, Sept. 18, tell your elected Commissioners you want them to keep the Greenway network around, not through, Lebanon Hills.

Contact information for individual Commissioners can be found on the County's website: <https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Government/Board/Pages/default.aspx>

Upcoming Public Meetings

Aug 24 - Dakota County Planning Commission will review public comments and proposed changes to the draft Study, and consider making a recommendation to the County Board.

Sept 19 - The Dakota County Board is expected to review and provide direction on the Greenway Study at their Physical Development meeting.



What's Inside...

- ✓ Natural Gas Pipeline Expansion Project Update
- ✓ Natural Resource News and Events at Lebanon Hills
- ✓ Improving our Nature-based Parks
- ✓ Critter Corner -- Dragonflies and Damselflies
- ✓ "25 by 25" Water Quality

Here's What's Happening in Lebanon Hills



Surface Water Study

Dakota County is completing a Surface Water Study in Lebanon Hills to help protect and enhance the water quality and ecosystem services within the park.

An open house is scheduled to receive initial feedback on the study and the preliminary results. Dakota County staff from both Water Resources and Parks Natural Resources will be available to talk with you.

Water Study Open House
Mon., Aug. 28, 5-7pm
Lebanon Hills Visitor Center

Volunteers Are Making a Difference!

The Natural Resource Volunteer season is in full swing at Lebanon Hills. In fact, you may have noticed some of the volunteers working in the park during recent visits. The projects underway are an important component of the native habitat restoration currently taking place in the park.

This past Spring, volunteers spend over 700 hours removing invasive Garlic Mustard from many sections of the park, and are currently in the process of removing another troublesome invasive called Japanese Hedge Parsley. Both of these invasive species are prolific growers that tend to crowd out beneficial native plants, creating a monoculture that does not support diversity for plants or wildlife. The removal of these invasive plants by volunteers is a critical piece to improving the health of the park.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the many volunteers and staff who have been part of the Natural Resource work at Lebanon Hills over the past three years!



UPDATE: Northern Natural Gas Pipeline Expansion

Construction is scheduled from August through October 2017 for a Northern Natural Gas pipeline expansion project. The project will occur along NNG's existing easement through park boundaries. Some trail re-routing is expected during this time. Northern Natural Gas has agreed to work with the County to fully complete the prairie restoration in areas disturbed by construction. Restoration will begin in Fall 2017.

In response to public concern for this project, we appreciate efforts made by Dakota County Staff and NNG to minimize impact to park resources by using construction techniques (horizontal directional drilling) instead of open cutting, full restoration of any areas impacted by initial construction, and ongoing efforts to minimizing disruption of the easement corridor throughout future monitoring.

Upcoming Environmental Stewardship Events

We are pleased to continue partnering with Dakota County Parks in these ongoing volunteer efforts. If you have not yet give in a try, we invite you to come out and join us for one of the remaining work nights/events!

Wed., Aug. 9, 6-8pm - Bumble Bee Watch
Thurs., Sep. 7, 6-8pm - Native Seed Collection
Sat., Oct. 7, 9-11am - Buckthorn Haul
Sat., Oct. 14, 9-11am - Buckthorn Haul

To learn more and register for these events, go to www.wildernessinthecity.org/volunteer/

Special Wildlife Sighting



This Blanding's turtle, a threatened species in MN, was recently observed in Lebanon Hills. Efforts to protect and restore the habitats of this species continues in wetlands, nesting sites and corridors in which they move between.

A Nature-Based Parks System

For your consideration...

- Regional Parks, such as Lebanon Hills, contain significant natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood forests, native prairies and groundwater recharging areas.
- These large, open spaces provide unique opportunities for low-impact, nature-based recreation, educational opportunities, and wildlife habitat.
- In the metropolitan area, Forever Wild parks complement services and amenities found at our many city parks and recreation areas, and other county parks systems.

Our "Forever Wild" Regional Parks system has the potential to become world-class nature-based parks system. However with every application of pesticide, addition of impervious surface, use of salt for ice control, that potential is diminished.

“The value of nature as an essential aspect of our health, creativity, intelligence, and wellbeing is often overlooked. Yet when nature is diminished, so are we.”

~Richard Louv

It's not about what it is, it's about what it can become." ~ Dr. Suess, The Lorax

Instead of isolated areas of turf being mowed and treated with pesticides,



we could add native grasses and wildflower gardens that attract pollinators and inspire park visitors.



Instead of using salt as a de-icer on roads and walkways, we can protect our water quality and wildlife when we use sand or other alternatives, including caution signs or temporary trail closures.



Instead of adding more asphalt and other impervious surfaces that negatively impact waterways with run-off that contains pollutants,



we could use environmentally friendly surfaces.



What will we leave the next generation? More stuff to take care of...or A Legacy of Nature?

Wilderness in the City is collaborating with others to support A Legacy of Nature. We believe that taking care of urban natural areas, especially within our unique and valuable Forever Wild parks system, must be a priority to help ensure a legacy of high-quality natural areas for future generations of people and habitat for wildlife.

Learn more about how you can support A Legacy of Nature at www.wildernessinthecity.org

Critter Corner - Dragonflies and Damselflies



Dragonflies spend a majority of their life as aquatic larva living in lakes, rivers, ponds streams and other wetlands. Different species have unique needs when it comes to water conditions, aquatic environment, and purity.

This makes dragonflies a great indicator species when it comes to water quality.

Because warmth is needed for activity and an efficient metabolism, most dragonflies disappear to protected perches on cool days or

when the sun disappears behind a cloud. Despite the fact that insects are “cold blooded,” many dragonflies maintain an internal temperature as high as 110 degrees F. This is accomplished by the burning of calories during physical exertion and by staying in the sun. A cold dragonfly preparing to get the day started will shiver its wings to create heat in its thorax until it has warmed itself enough to take flight.

Some dragonflies, such as the Ebony Boghaunter, Stygian Shadowdragon and the blue darners have adapted to cooler weather as a method of allowing early- or late-season emergence or to take advantage of the plethora of insect life that becomes active at dusk. Some species will be seen flying well after sunset on moonlit evenings or under street lights.

In hot, sunny weather it is important that dragonflies don't overheat. Cooling strategies include becoming less active, moving into shade and changing their body position, thereby reducing the surface area exposed to solar heating and, perhaps, to reflect light and heat away from their bodies.

Provided by Minnesota Dragonfly Society. Learn more at www.mndragonfly.org

Community Water Meetings

You are invited to join the discussion and provide your input on what we can do locally to improve Minnesota's water quality 25% by 2025.

Conservation MN and Wilderness in the City will hold six community meetings for discussion and we will submit ideas generated to the Governor's office to help shape the goal of improving water quality 25% by 2025.

Rosemount - Tues., 9/5, 7-9pm
Steeple Center, Room 202

Burnsville - Thurs., 9/7, 6-8pm
Burnhaven Library

Apple Valley - Sat., 9/9, 10am-noon
Apple Valley Community Center

Eagan - Thurs., 9/21, 6-8pm
Rasmussen College, Rm 116

Inver Grove Hts, Tues., 9/26, 6-8pm
Inver Glen Library

Lakeville, Thurs., 9/28, 6-8pm
Heritage Library

See you there!

Become a Supporting Member!



Wilderness in the City

Yes! I want to help preserve the wilderness character of Lebanon Hills for future generations of people and wildlife.

\$25 Wildflower \$50 Oak Savannah Other Amount
 \$75 Lakes and Wetlands \$100 A Legacy of Nature

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone (optional): _____

**Donate online at www.wildernessinthecity.org or submit checks to
Wilderness in the City at P.O. Box 211453, Eagan, MN 55121.**

Wilderness in the City is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. All 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.

Support natural resource stewardship projects and build a community of stewards.

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