

## Lebanon Hills: Restoration in Progress

### Public Input Encouraged!

A draft **Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP)** for Lebanon Hills is now available for a public review and comment period through Friday, June 7.

- The natural resources management vision for LHRP is to manage water, vegetation, and wildlife to conserve and increase biodiversity, restore native habitats, improve public benefits, and achieve resilience and regionally outstanding quality, now and for future generations.
- The Plan develops approaches to set a course for sustainable native plant communities within the park, which is critical toward preserving the unique natural character of Lebanon Hills.

A link to the complete document is available at [www.wildernessinthecity.org/notices/](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org/notices/)

Your input is encouraged. Submit comments to Joe Walton, Senior Ecologist and Project Manager, [joseph.walton@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:joseph.walton@co.dakota.mn.us) or call 952-891-7507.

**Ecological Restoration:** The process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed.

### BEFORE: *Degraded*



Quality of natural resources is declining, resulting in non-functioning ecosystems and a rise in growth of a single plant (ie: buckthorn). However, nature is resilient, and by taking action now, we can reverse this downward trend.

### AFTER: *Better than we found it.*



### DURING: *Messy*



Early stages include significant clearing of woody shrub. These initial stages may look alarming, however this is only the foundation of a multi-year process which will result in healthy ecosystems.



Healthy oak savannas, woodlands and prairies, lakes and woodlands, hundreds of native plants and a wide diversity of wildlife will provide high quality nature based recreation and educational opportunities for now and future generations.

### South Metro Water Forum Sat., May 4, 9am-noon \* School of Environmental Studies, Apple Valley



Hear from speakers, talk to organizations, and meet other people who have a passion for keeping Minnesota's water clean for generations to come.

\* Doors Open at 8:45; breakfast provided

\* Registration link at [wildernessinthecity.org/notices/](http://wildernessinthecity.org/notices/)

Hosted by **Conservation Minnesota**

### 2019 GARLIC MUSTARD CHALLENGE!

It's Spring time, and with that comes GARLIC MUSTARD!



Join other volunteers and park staff to help us rid Lebanon Hills from this invasive plant. Native wildflowers, woodlands, and wildlife thank you!

Learn more and register at:  
[www.wildernessinthecity.org/volunteer](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org/volunteer)



## Lebanon Hills: Restoration in Progress

Transitioning to a healthy ecosystem requires multi-year restoration projects; initial work can look messy, and anticipation for the finished product takes patience. But once an area is restored, it will be worthy of large celebrations—ribbon cutting and all!



Map above shows current grant funded projects encompassing 691 total acres—an increase of 246 acres from previous year

- Completed = 175 acres; In Process = 516 acres
- Long-term goal = 100% of 1,869 acres restored and actively managed

### Additional Projects Include:

- Early Stages of Buckthorn Management = 1,072 acres
- Monitoring vegetation and wildlife throughout the park
- Schulze Channel stabilization and water quality surveys
- Visitor Center native planting
- Turtle nest protection
- Completion of draft Natural Resources Mgmt Plan

### Special Wildlife Notes:

- **Blanding's Turtles Update:** Since the discovery of two Blanding's turtles in 2017, the county has increased efforts into studying this species which has resulted in three more mature Blanding's turtles being found in 2018.
- **Dragonflies and damselflies:** Five Odonata surveys were conducted between June 6 and July 23, 2018. Sixteen species were recorded and over 108 individuals caught. The Odonata survey program is part of a larger effort to protect diversity by surveying plants and wildlife within the Dakota County Parks system.

### Public Involvement is Critical to Long-term Success

Prior to 2014, much of the 5,900 acres of Dakota County's "Forever Wild" parks system, including Lebanon Hills, had been left unmanaged and was in a state of decline even though Legacy funding was available for restoration.

- "The 2011-2015 CIP [capital improvement program] drastically reduces the pace of restoration to near zero acres/year." ~ 2011 Parks CIP
- "The CIP continues the reduction of new natural resource restoration activities since 2010." ~ 2013 Parks CIP

Since 2014, Dakota County has a renewed interest and commitment toward reversing this downward trend.

- Base funding for Natural Resources (system wide) has increased from \$150,000 (2013) to \$1,033,887 (2019)
- Natural Resources staffing has increased from a part time staff person in 2013 to a department with six full-time staff and additional seasonal staff.
- Through 2018, 2,684 acres have been stabilized or restored, and is anticipated to increase to 3,500 acres by 2023.

Efforts to increase restoration at Lebanon Hills and beyond followed strong public input during the Lebanon Hills Master Plan update. We are optimistic that with continued public involvement, this increased commitment toward natural resource stewardship will continue.

**Thank you for your continued support!**



## Update: Natural Gas Pipeline Expansion Project

A natural gas pipeline expansion project was recently completed at Lebanon Hills, and restoration of the impacted area has started.

- Site preparation near Buck Pond just east of Jensen Lake began in April, and plants will be installed this spring including over 3,000 native trees and shrubs will be installed within the easement by mid-June 2019.
- Ongoing safety inspections of the corridor are expected to take place on the ground, rather than from the air as previously conducted. This will allow for certain plantings to remain, resulting in less impact of keeping the easement clear for aerial viewing as has been done in the past.
- The prairie areas surrounding buck pond is potential habitat for the Rusty Patched Bumble Bees, as well as Blanding's turtles.



*Our appreciation to the project team and Dakota County staff for their ongoing efforts to minimize impacts to this critical area.*

### Dakota County Land Conservation Plan

Dakota County is developing a new countywide Land Conservation plan to help protect natural resources throughout the County for current and future generations.

This new plan builds off the success of the 2002 Farmland and Natural Area Protection Plan, which addressed the public's interest in long-term protection of natural areas, lakes and farmland.

For information about the project and opportunities for public involvement, visit: <https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Environment/LandConservation/Plan/Pages/default.aspx>

### Ongoing Issue to Watch: Spring Lake Park Reserve

Dakota County is seeking funding for Spring Lake Park Reserve for projects based on a yet-to-be-completed master plan update which county staff is in the process of preparing. To date, there has been no public engagement, nor has input been gathered on what people desire and support for this regional park reserve.

When funding is acquired first, a meaningful public process after the fact is eroded. This was evident at this very park where, despite significant public opposition and a DNR recommendation to preserve this valuable landscape, wide swaths of mature forests were cleared, steep landscapes were graded, and sensitive bluffs exploded leaving a permanent scar highly visible to anyone on the Mississippi River.

Additionally, if funding is acquired and for various reasons intended projects do not occur or a fund balance remains, Dakota County will have discretion to re-allocate these funds for another regional park project, including potentially the controversial paved trail through Lebanon Hills. Re-allocation of funds leaves little opportunity for people to oppose funding for this unpopular project.

Wilderness in the City has provided both written and public testimony to the County Board, the Metropolitan Council, and at the Legislature, opposing funding for projects which have not been vetted through any public process. At every level, the request has moved along and is expected to be approved this legislative session.

*Going forward, we will continue to monitor these funds and the process for a master plan update, and keep you informed on how you can take action.*

## Lebanon Hills Regional Park Stewardship Events

**Garlic Mustard Challenge**  
April 30, May 2 & 11, June 6



**Japanese Hedge Parsley**  
July 11, August 8



**Native Seed Collection**  
September 12



**Help us *BUST* invasive species  
in our parks.** To learn more and register:  
[www.wildernessinthecity.org](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org)

Supporting Forever Wild Dakota County Parks

**Wilderness  
in the City**  
PRESERVING URBAN  
NATURAL SPACES

### The Metropolitan Regional Parks System

We are grateful for wise legislation in 1974 which established the Metropolitan Regional Parks System to preserve and protect the highest quality natural areas remaining in the metro region. This vision, however, is at risk.

Often referred to as *State Parks of the metro area*, the Regional Parks System now includes more than 30,000 acres of land designated as regionally significant ecological areas.

**We are borrowing this land from future generations of people and wildlife. What will be our Legacy?**



### Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment

In 2008, Minnesota voters approved the Legacy Amendment—a conservation amendment—including a **Parks and Trails Fund** to support these critical natural areas.

- The overarching vision of the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan is *natural resource stewardship and inspiring the next generation of stewards*.
- Based on 2018 findings, the DNR reports that the public's top priority for this fund remains taking care of natural resources.
- On April 10, both House and Senate Legacy committees approved \$40 million in Legacy funding for metro regional park projects which were never reviewed by either committee, including several projects which have never been vetted through any public process (ie: Spring Lake Park Reserve.)
- **Consistent with past spending, this \$40 million appropriation will mostly increase built infrastructure throughout this Nature-based park system, even when that irreversibly degrades the natural landscape and leads to increases in unfunded, but ongoing maintenance expenses.**
- This conflicts with public expectations for Legacy, and will continue until there is legislative action.

Our gratitude to **State Rep. Sandy Masin** for introducing HF2703 during the 2019 session. This bill would amend the current Legacy process for metro area regional parks to:

- rebalance spending so natural resources receive their fair share
- improve the process for project approval to eliminate ongoing conflicts
- help assure projects improve, not diminish, the ecological health of the park system

HF2703 will bring the Regional Parks into greater compliance with the 25-year Legacy Plan and better meet citizens expectations for the Legacy Amendment. It will also greatly improve transparency and accountability for how these park and trails funds are being invested. Although the bill generated much discussion, it did not pass this year.

Changing business-as-usual is not easy, but it is critical for our Nature-based parks. We look forward to continuing this discussion and working toward A Legacy of Nature.

*Learn more at [www.wildernessinthecity.org/legacy-of-nature](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org/legacy-of-nature).*



## Wilderness in the City

**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!

### Stay Informed

Visit [www.wildernessinthecity.org](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org)  
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*Interested in joining our Board?  
We'd love to hear from you!*

*Contact us at  
[wildernessinthecity@gmail.com](mailto:wildernessinthecity@gmail.com)*

**Wilderness in the City  
is a proud member of**



**Minnesota  
Environmental  
Partnership**