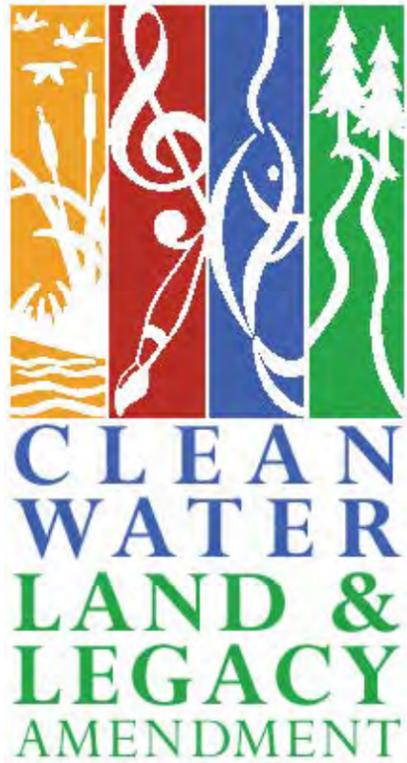




OUTDOORS FOR EVERYONE

MINNESOTA PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY FUND UPDATE—2025





Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission



Metropolitan Council
Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails

Cover Photo:

The Legacy parks and trails partner agencies work both cooperatively and independently to provide high-quality outdoor recreation throughout Minnesota for all people in all seasons. Parks and trails are for everyone to enjoy Minnesota's treasured natural resources and the many benefits of outdoor recreation. The cover photo shows young cross-country skiers on the world-class trails at Theodore Wirth Regional Park, host of the 2024 Cross-Country World Cup event.

Minnesotans treasure the great outdoors and vital natural resources – lakes, rivers, forests, prairies and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities. Parks and trails are an integral part of our Minnesota way of life, work and play. Minnesota outdoors are for everyone.

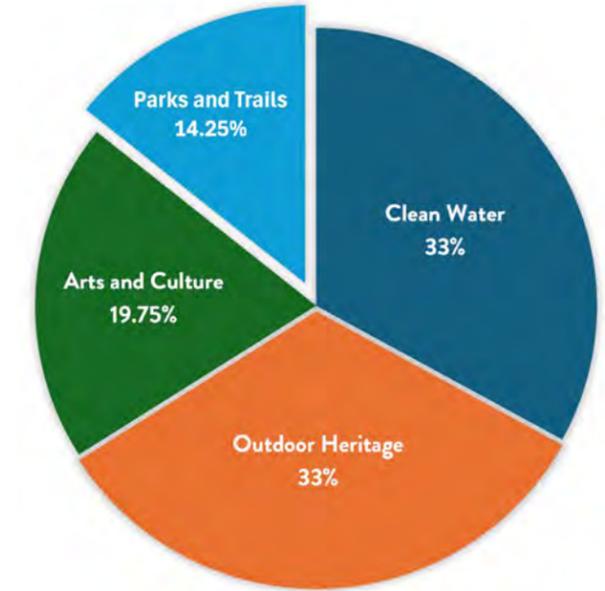
In 2008, Minnesotans voted for the *Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment* and its 3/8% increase in the state sales tax. By law, these funds supplement, but do not supplant other existing funding for the protection of natural resources, outdoor recreation, and the arts. The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund provides 14.25% of the total Legacy funds to be dedicated to state and regional parks and trails. Since July 1, 2009, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund has dedicated more than \$620 million to provide outdoor recreation to benefit everyone.



The Parks and Trails Fund supplements other funding for three parks and trails systems: the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Council, and Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission. The 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan guides investment priorities made by the three parks and trails agency partners. Legacy projects address one or more of the strategic directions, or pillars, defined by the Legacy Plan...

- **Connect People With the Outdoors**
- **Acquire Land, Create Opportunities**
- **Take Care of What We Have**
- **Coordinate Among Partners**

This Legacy Fund update highlights example projects from the parks and trails agency partners to demonstrate the breadth and depth of parks and trails improvements, enhancements, additions and activities made possible by the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. The project examples provide a glimpse of how communities have benefited from Legacy funding. *The Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment* protects and sustains Minnesota's natural resources and outdoors for current and future generations... a true Minnesota legacy.



One of four Legacy Funds, the Parks and Trails Fund receives 14.25% of the sales tax resulting from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The Parks and Trails Fund is dedicated to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is committed to providing quality outdoor experiences and conservation for all Minnesotans through Legacy-funded projects. Guided by the four Legacy pillars, the Minnesota DNR has dedicated Legacy dollars for both large-scale and smaller-scale projects statewide, ranging anywhere from school group transportation grants, to bison conservation efforts, to accessible mountain biking trails, to modern vault toilets. The following provides just a few examples of some Legacy projects in more detail.

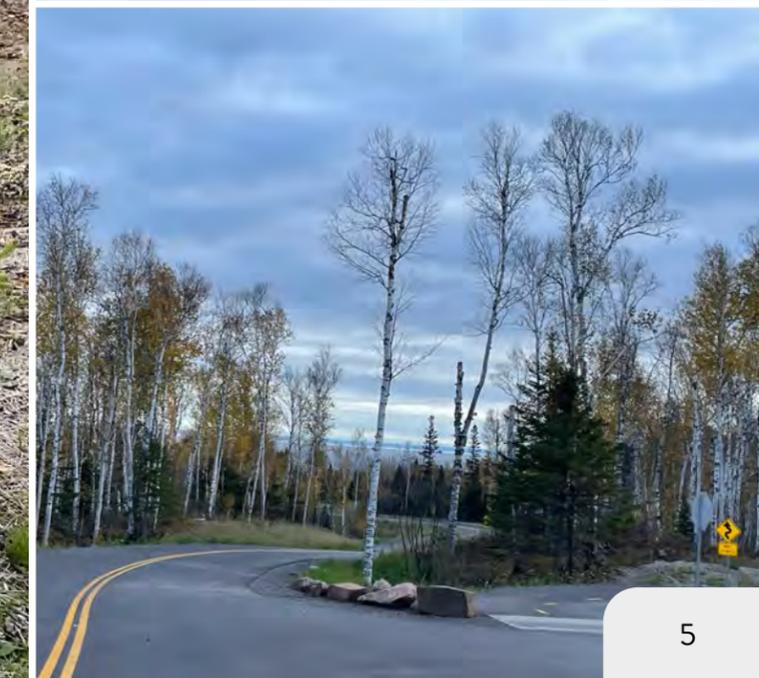
STATE PARKS AND TRAILS FOR EVERYONE

Split Rock Lighthouse State Park is one of Minnesota's most popular state parks, famous for the iconic lighthouse. Located on Minnesota's North Shore of Lake Superior, it is also one of the most in-demand locations for camping in the state park system. The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund provided \$8 million dollars to develop **Shipwreck Creek Campground** to meet camping demands in the popular area and support tourism.



Prior to this project, the only camping offered at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park was limited cart-in or walk-in camping opportunities. Legacy funded the project design, permitting, and construction of the campground, adding 46 electric, drive-in campsites nestled into the surrounding landscape.

The Shipwreck Creek Campground also serves as an important point of connection for parks and trails users. The campground connects Split Rock Lighthouse State Park with the Gitchi Gami State Trail, providing a paved trail connection and parking area, and a connection to Lake County's regional Split Rock Wilds mountain biking trails. With connection to popular trails, and equipped with a modern shower and bathroom building for campers, this Legacy-funded campground provides a destination camping experience for visitors.





Minneopa State Park

Legacy funding also plays an important role in statewide conservation efforts. At **Minneopa State Park**, \$357,000 of the Legacy Fund has gone towards a reintroduction of American plains bison. This collaboration between the DNR and Minnesota Zoological Garden builds on successful efforts at Blue Mounds State Park to preserve genetically healthy bison. This has resulted in the opportunity for Minnesotans to experience unique native landscapes and wildlife in Minnesota. Legacy funding was pivotal for this conservation effort, providing nearly 5 miles of fencing around 330 acres, cattle grates, well and watering systems, electricity, and boundary surveys among other smaller items. The Minneopa State Park herd now has 30-40 bison at any given time, thanks to the Legacy fund.



Bison herd at Minneopa State Park



Tettegouche State Park

Connecting people with the outdoors is a priority for many projects receiving Legacy funding, as outlined by the 25 Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. This includes making sure all Minnesotans have access to outdoor recreation sites and opportunities, regardless of financial status. With Legacy-funded programs such as **The Minnesota State Parks Library Program, Transportation Grants, and the I Can! Program**, the DNR reduces or eliminates barriers for Minnesotans to access outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Minnesota State Parks Library Program provides free seven-day access passes to all state parks and recreation areas to check out from public libraries. From 2023-2025, \$18,375 Legacy dollars have supported the program to make sure Minnesotans across the state have access, regardless of income or financial position. All of Minnesota's regional public library systems currently circulate 175 passes, with plans for growth in 2025, to ensure libraries can meet the high demand for the passes.



Whitewater State Park



I Can Camp! Program

Transportation grants are another way that Legacy funds connect everyone to the outdoors. Eligible schools, youth groups and community organizations can receive reimbursement for transportation costs to attend interpretive naturalist programs at Minnesota state parks. In 2024, \$15,000 from the Legacy fund went towards transportation grants, allowing lower income communities to access high-quality interpretation and environmental education programs across the state park system.

The I Can! Program is a Legacy-funded program providing access for new parks and trails users across the state. In 2024, \$438,776 funded introductory outdoor skill development opportunities through hands-on programming and overnight experiences statewide. The I Can! Program engages new and diverse audiences in various forms of outdoor recreation, aiming to increase participants' comfort level in the outdoors. The program provides equipment and helps people build basic skills for future independent participation in outdoor activities. This program has engaged thousands of Minnesotans new to outdoor recreation in activities such as camping, paddling, fishing, mountain biking, and archery.



I Can Paddle! Program



I Can Camp! Program



Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area

State parks are not the only facilities positively impacted by Legacy dollars. **Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area** provides Minnesotans with a nearly 60-mile-long trail system that covers almost 800 acres and has over 30 purpose-built mountain bike routes to choose from. The \$1.2 million Parks and Trails Legacy investment complemented other funding sources such as bonding to make Cuyuna a world-class mountain biking destination, with expert trail design, construction, operations, and maintenance. Everyone, from beginners to pros, has the opportunity to enjoy the trail system at Cuyuna, which includes 7.5 miles of adaptive trails and 1.4 miles of accessible walking trails that connect to the local community.

Trails across the state have seen improvements and upgrades through Legacy, as a part of the strategic priorities to take care of what we have and acquire land and create opportunities. A little over \$1.8 million Parks and Trails Legacy investment has gone towards adding a new trail segment dedicated for bicyclists in **Itasca State Park**, to provide safer recreational transportation opportunities for visitors and eliminate a 3-mile shared-use segment on Wilderness Drive. This segment involves upgrading an existing natural surface snowmobile trail and

the Merschman-Thompson Trail into a paved surface to create a direct, safe, accessible connection between the Mary Gibbs Mississippi Headwaters Center and the entrance of the Ozawindib Group Center Road. Thanks to Legacy funds, bicyclists will have a dedicated bike trail, eliminating safety concerns for motorists and bicyclists alike, while providing unforgettable outdoor experiences at Minnesota's oldest state park.

The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund has played a critical role in providing Minnesotans with access to quality outdoor recreation sites and opportunities across the state. Legacy funds complement the DNR's traditional sources of funding, such as general fund and capital bonding, to enhance and accelerate support for parks and trails to benefit everyone. Whether dedicated to the construction of a new campground to meet increasing user demand, conservation efforts to preserve Minnesota's natural beauty, or grants and programming to eliminate barriers to access the outdoors, the impact of Legacy funds for millions of visitors across the parks and trails system statewide cannot be understated.



Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area



Lyon County Garvin Park

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) invests in communities across the state of Minnesota, both large and small, through Legacy grants. Areas of regional significance across the state of Minnesota have access to Legacy dollars to provide all communities with equitable access to outdoor recreation and enjoyment of Minnesota's rich natural beauty and resources. Guided by the four Legacy pillars, GMRPTC has enabled the upgrade of aging infrastructure, the protection of historical, cultural, and natural resources, and the increase in accessibility for all Minnesotans to engage in the outdoors.

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS FOR EVERYONE

Garvin Park, located in Lyon County in Southwest Minnesota, is a regional hub for outdoor recreation. With 748 acres along the Cottonwood River, the park is popular with campers, particularly those that take advantage of the park's unique horse campground.

With consistent feedback about aging bathroom facilities and park shelter capacity, Garvin Park was granted more than \$926,000 of legacy investment to assist in critical infrastructure upgrades necessary to improve access to park facilities and replace outdated shower and toilet buildings. Legacy funding was crucial for Lyon County to make the necessary updates to Garvin Park facilities and for campers, park users and residents of the area to continue to engage in the vast outdoor recreation opportunities Garvin Park offers.



Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp, nestled along the beautiful and wild Big Fork River in Northern Minnesota is a popular campground and gathering space for visitors and residents alike. A Legacy investment of \$1 million will build a pavilion near the river for events and public gatherings. Additionally, the funds will be used to construct a kayak access below the rapids, making water recreation both safer and more accessible. The Rivers Edge Pavilion grant demonstrates that small and large communities can benefit greatly from Legacy investments to complete projects that would not be possible without this funding source.



Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp



GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Detroit Mountain Recreation Area (DMRA) has benefited from two Legacy investments in recent years. Located just outside Detroit Lakes, DMRA serves a population of more than 360,000 people in a 60-mile radius and has a large audience of alpine and Nordic skiers, snowboarders and mountain bikers. The DMRA was brought back to operation after a grass roots effort began in 2010 to rehabilitate the shuttered resort and open it to the public. With Legacy grants of around \$1.3 million, the facility was able to expand their nature play area to create safer and more affordable outdoor recreation opportunities for children. Additionally, they were able to add 3.5 miles of single-track mountain bike trails, 2 kilometers of lighted Nordic ski trails and a half-mile loop of adaptive trails, to create more access for users of all abilities. The DMRA also works closely with HOPE Inc to provide sports and recreation opportunities for people with mobility challenges, and Legacy investments have allowed the area to provide more services and enhanced access to those users.



Detroit Mountain Recreation Area



Red Wing Barn Bluff He Mni Can Park in Red Wing is another location where Legacy dollars have gone towards creating better access for visitors of all backgrounds and abilities. Working in close relationship with the Prairie Island Indian Community, the city of Red Wing has utilized a recent Legacy grant of \$527,000 to build an accessible trail to the area below the historic G.A. Carlson Lime Kiln, and a trail spur to the overlook and interpretation of the site. This grant makes it possible for visitors to safely and easily gain access to the kiln and learn about Red Wing's history, while sensitively managing and maintaining the historical and cultural significance of the area.



Red Wing Barn Bluff He Mni Can Park



Douglas County Kensington Rune Stone Park

Kensington Rune Stone Park, outside of Alexandria in Douglas County, is a historically important site that has benefitted from Legacy funding. With a grant of \$50,000, Douglas County has been able to tell the rich and complex history of the site with new interpretive displays, and an ADA accessible route to the area of the Rune Stone discovery.

In alignment with the **Connect People with the Outdoors** pillar of the 25-year Legacy Plan, GMRPTC has made grants to increase accessible options for those with mobility difficulties. Legacy funds were set aside for track wheelchair grants. Recipients of the grants were able to purchase track wheelchairs at a specially negotiated price. **Hartley Nature Center** in Duluth, **Garvin Park** in Lyon County, and **Robert Ney Park** in Wright County were all recipients of this grant and now have track chairs available at no cost to the public, helping users navigate the grounds and facilities in a safer and more accessible manner.



Duluth Hartley Park

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

GMRPTC has also worked to award grants to make programming more accessible to those with income barriers. **The city of Duluth** received a grant of \$167,000 to purchase components to create a mobile mountain bike fleet, bringing bikes and instruction to under-represented and low-income youth in the community. This grant will provide kids access to Duluth's vast trail system that would not have otherwise been able to participate due to barriers in cost and access to instruction.

Communities small and large across greater Minnesota have seen the benefits of Legacy investments in their communities. Through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, areas of regional significance across the state have been able to create more opportunities for Minnesotans to engage in the beauty and natural resources that Minnesota has to offer, much of which would not have been possible without the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.



Youth on Trails program in Duluth, MN



Duluth mobile mountain bike fleet



Battle Creek Regional Park

The Metropolitan Council serves as the regional planning agency that supports the ten regional park implementing agencies, to ensure all communities in Minnesota's seven-county metro area have access to the great outdoors. Aligning with the four pillars of the Legacy Plan, regional parks and trails in the metro area have benefited tremendously from the passage of the Legacy fund, with investments ranging from expanded outdoor opportunities and better connections for prioritized communities, to newly constructed visitor and gathering centers. Legacy funding is crucial in making the outdoors accessible for all Minnesotans. The following highlights provide a few key examples that showcase Legacy's tremendous impact on the metropolitan region.



METRO AREA PARKS AND TRAILS FOR EVERYONE

The Winter Recreation Area at Battle Creek Regional Park in Ramsey County attracts skiers from all over the metro area and beyond with its extensive cross-country ski trails. However, prior to the completion of this project, unpredictable snowfall made winter recreation challenging in the east metro. Legacy funds contributed \$1.6 million dollars to the Battle Creek Winter Recreation Area to provide reliable snowmaking onsite throughout the winter. Today, Battle Creek is a vibrant winter wonderland, with cross-country ski trails, a tubing and snowboarding hill, new lighting, and a winter lodge. With natural snowfall continuing to be unpredictable, Minnesotans and skiers visiting Battle Creek will be able to enjoy high-quality winter recreation opportunities thanks to the Legacy Fund.



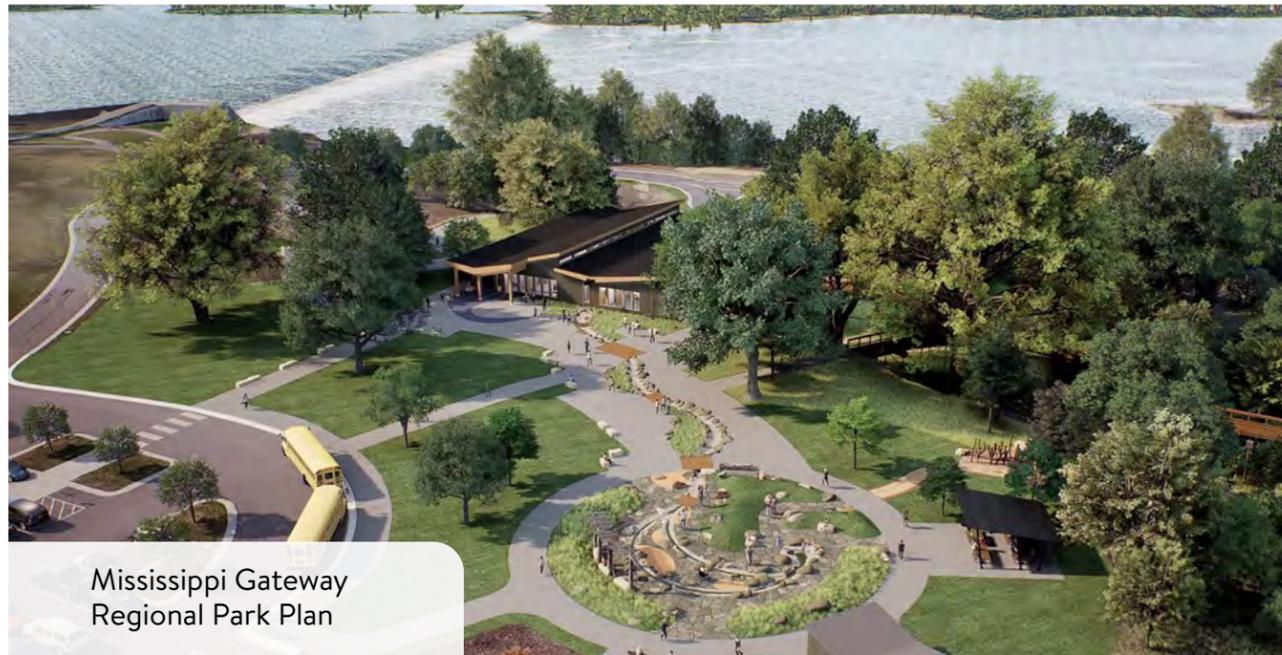
Battle Creek Regional Park

THE MET COUNCIL, METRO REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park in Three Rivers Park District is another regional park that the Legacy Fund transformed. Community members helped shape how Three Rivers Park District designed the new improvements to the park, making it a more vibrant, welcoming place for everyone to discover nature and engagement with the river. With this collaborative effort and the help of \$11.5 million in Legacy investment, Mississippi Gateway Regional Park will include a new Welcome Center, a Tree Top Trail and Tree House, enhanced nature learning nodes, ADA river access and an outdoor classroom, parking, bathrooms, natural resource restoration, and plenty of hiking trails for everyone.



Mississippi Gateway Regional Park



Mississippi Gateway Regional Park Plan

In alignment with *Connecting People with the Outdoors*, **Lake Waconia Regional Park and Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park** have been able to build new spaces for communities and visitors to gather. **Paradise Commons** is a visitor's center on the shores of Lake Waconia's waterfront. This new space is open year-round and provides restrooms, rental concessions, classroom space, a picnic pavilion, and an indoor event space. An investment of \$690,000 in Legacy funds made the construction of Paradise Commons possible.

Similarly, in Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, the new **Ravine Landing Visitor Center** provides a trailhead with a central lobby and fireplace, park offices, a rentable multipurpose space, a porch, and a covered picnic area, as well as a fire ring and accessible playground for kids of all ages. An investment of \$932,000 from Legacy helped transform this visitor center into a place for visitors to rest, connect, or plan their next adventure. Nestled in the heart of the ravine country and surrounded by the park's natural splendor, the visitor center will serve as a community connection to the outdoors for years to come.



Paradise Commons Visitor Center, Lake Waconia Regional Park



Ravine Landing Visitor Center, Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park

THE MET COUNCIL, METRO REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS



Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail



Spring Lake Park Reserve

Connecting everyone to the outdoors continues to be a major priority for Legacy investments in the metro area. With Legacy funding, **Dakota County** was able to hire its first-ever Indigenous Parks Liaison, helping incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the work of Dakota County Parks. The position aids the reintroduction of bison at **Spring Lake Park Reserve**, highlights culturally significant Indigenous sites within park boundaries, and works to establish partnerships between Dakota County and local Indigenous communities.

The **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board** used Legacy Funds to repair a critical pedestrian connection over the Minnehaha Creek, by refurbishing the historic bridge that was being undermined by frequent flooding and freeze-thaw cycles (shown on following page). Thanks to the Legacy Fund, the Park Board was able to remove the bridge structure in one piece, refurbish it off-site, and then re-install it on new, more robust footings, reestablishing the connection between the **Chain of Lakes Regional Park** and **Minnehaha Regional Park**.



Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail

THE MET COUNCIL, METRO REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS

Carver County and **Ramsey County** have prioritized use of their Legacy funding to connect broader audiences with their parks and trails. In Carver County, a \$114,000 Legacy investment supported the hiring of front line staff that lead outdoor recreation programs, provides scholarships for those in need, and provides programs to people with disabilities, as well as bolsters outreach and marketing campaigns to increase awareness. In Ramsey County, Legacy funding was invested to create more opportunities for low-income users and people from underserved communities to connect with outdoor opportunities. Programs include the Winter Recreation Sampler, fishing and archery programs, and biking opportunities.

The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund has had a huge impact on the expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities in and around the Metro area and supporting communities, ensuring that everyone has access to the outdoors. From furthering winter outdoor recreation opportunities to creating new community gathering spaces, the Metropolitan Council is working to support its partners to provide access to help all Minnesotans engage with Minnesota's outdoors.



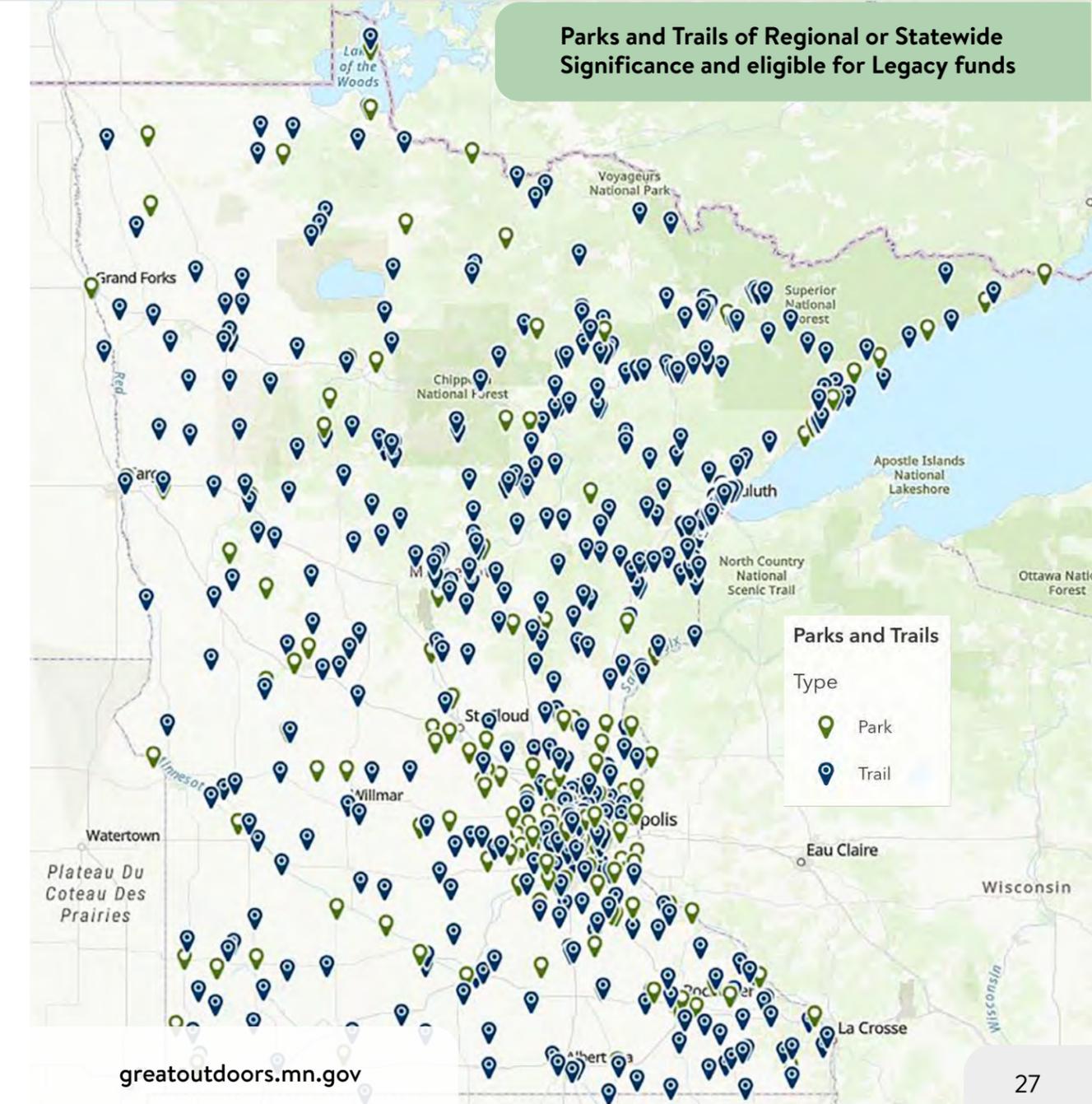
Lake Waconia Regional Park



OUTDOORS FOR EVERYONE...A TRUE MINNESOTA LEGACY OF NATURAL RESOURCES, CONSERVATION AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Since its first appropriation in 2010, the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment has generated more than \$620 million dedicated to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance. The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund has been a true game-changer for parks, trails and for Minnesotans to benefit from conservation and world-class outdoor recreation opportunities.

Guided by a 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan and ongoing citizen engagement, treasured natural resources and experiences connect everyone to the outdoors to inspire a legacy of stewardship for the natural world and to provide fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, physical and mental health and well-being. Minnesotans experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, reinforcing our identity as an outdoor culture.





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