



Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park

Chapter 7 – Parks, Trails and Open Space



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Executive Summary

Washington County, encompassing 423 square miles of land and water surface, is the fourth smallest county in Minnesota. The physical environment is very diverse; its surface and underground features vary throughout the county. The county is framed by unique and exceptional water features - the St. Croix River forms the entire eastern border and the Mississippi River forms the southern and southwestern border. Including the rivers, important natural features are: the bluffs and ravines in the St. Croix valley; the county's abundant streams, wetlands, lakes, forests, and groundwater; and the prime farmland soils of the agricultural areas of the county.

The parks, trails, and open space protect and provide access to the aforementioned natural amenities in the region. Washington County's role is an important one as the county grows. Natural areas provide environmental benefits by preserving natural resources, reducing air pollution, and managing stormwater runoff. Moreover, parks and open space strengthen residents' physical, psychological, and social wellbeing by providing opportunities for recreation, stress reduction, and social interaction. Because the parks system clearly contributes to the health and quality of life of the region, it is important that Washington County plans and manages this land and water responsibly.



The following chapter plan summarizes existing conditions related to the parks, trails, and open space of Washington County and discusses future strategies and improvements for these public resources. The goals, policies, and strategies for the parks, trails, and open space plan have been identified in the following chapter as well as in Chapter 3. It is also of note that many additional strategies can be found in chapter 11 of this plan, which lays out implementation tools for future development.

Public Outreach Process

The Washington County Park, Trails, and Open Space chapter will guide the development of the county-controlled sites and facilities. To help inform this plan, Washington County implemented a public engagement process. The purpose for engaging the public in comprehensive planning is to understand what the community values today and how they would like to see the parks, trails, and open space system evolve in the future. Washington County would like to thank all stakeholders who were involved in the public engagement process. Chapter 1 highlights the public engagement efforts held as part of the comprehensive plan development.

Washington County Residential Survey (2016)

In 2016, Washington County conducted a survey asking residents to assess the county's performance. Residents awarded the Parks system the Top-Rated County Service, Top County Characteristic, and the Services and Facilities Most Used by Older Adults (see Figures 1 – 3).

Figure 1: Top Rated County Services

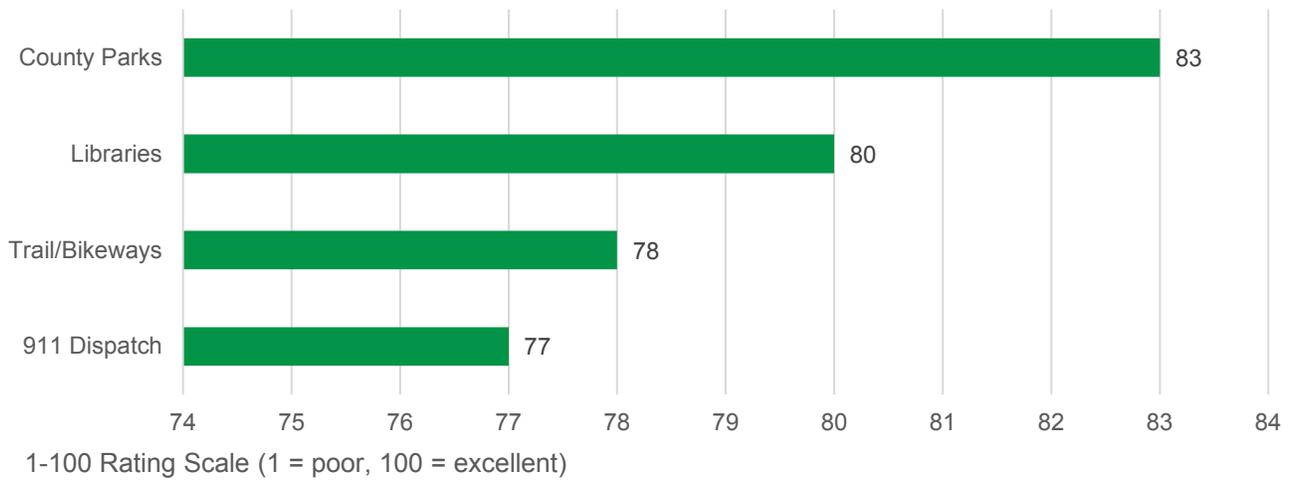


Figure 2: Top Rated County Characteristic

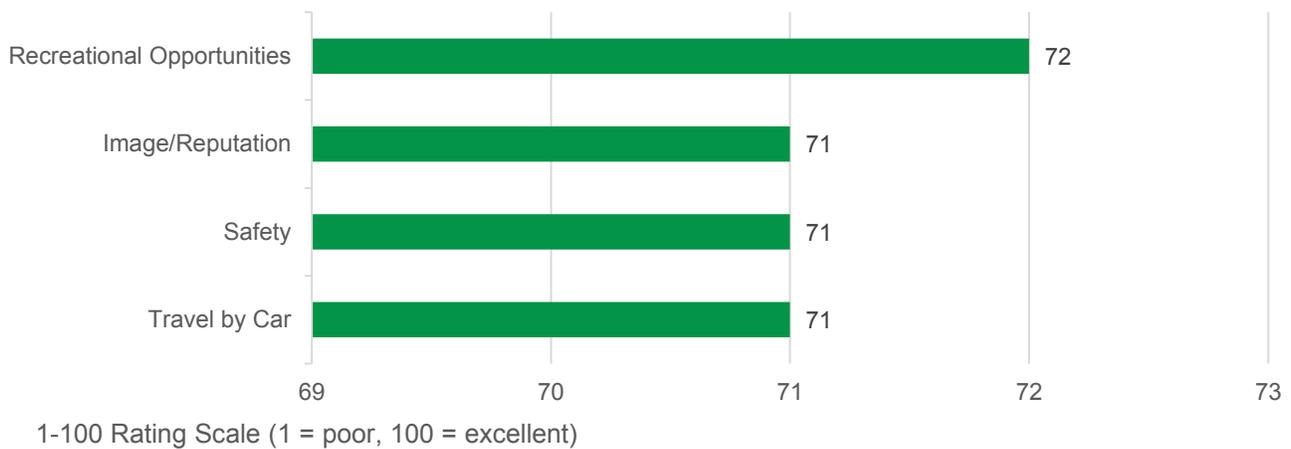
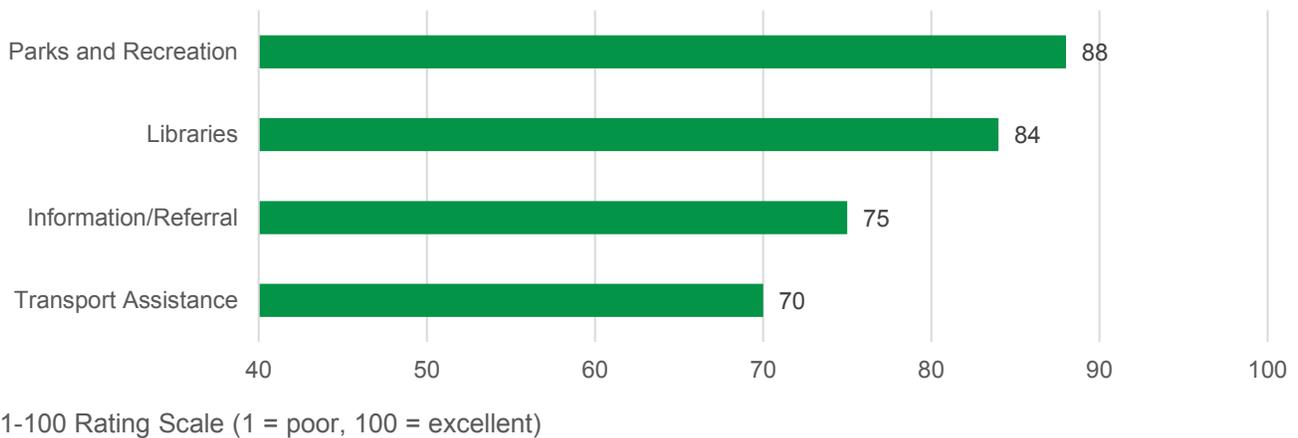


Figure 3: Services and Facilities Most Used by Older Adults



Water Consortium

Engagement also provided an opportunity to gather input from the Water Consortium, a group of stakeholders who meet to discuss issues around water resources in Washington County. At a world-café style exercise, Washington County staff gathered responses from the event’s attendees to the following questions:

- What role do parks and open space play in protecting the county water resources?
- How can parks and open space connect people to water resources?
- What would you like to see in the County parks and open space system to improve water resources?
- What does resiliency and sustainability mean to the county from a water resources perspective?

Input received informed the content of this chapter and the Water Resources chapter.

Parks and Open Space Commission

The Parks and Open Space Commission (PSOC) of Washington is a citizen advisory committee consisting of representative stakeholders from all county districts and one representative county commissioner. This commission has the role of providing feedback and guidance on the Washington County parks, trails, and open space undertakings throughout the year.

In 2017, the commission took the responsibility of being involved in guiding the parks, trails, and open space chapter of the comprehensive plan. Through a several month process, this commission participated in five workshops.

Table 1: Parks and Open Space Commission Meetings

POSC Meeting Date	Subject	Activity
May 18	Goals	Brainstorming Exercise
June 29	Policies	Policy Discussion
July 13	Implementation Strategies	Implementation Strategies Discussion
August 15	Draft Comment Period	Draft available for POSC comments
September 21	Draft Review	Review of drafted Goals, Policies, Strategies

The chapter content, especially the final goals, policies, and implementation strategies, directly reflect this group’s input.

Inventory of Current Facilities

Table 2: Inventory of Current Facilities

	Big Marine Park Reserve	Square Lake	Pine Point Regional Park	Lake Elmo Park Reserve	Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	Grey Cloud Island Regional Park	Point Douglas Park	St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	Point Douglas Regional Trail
Park Classification	PR	SRF	R	PR	R	R	C	R	RT	RT
Facilities/Activities										
Boat Launch	X	X		X				X		
Fishing Pier	X	X		X	X		X	X		
Swimming	X	X		X			X	X		
Camping				X				X		
Picnicking	X	X		X	X		X	X		
Field Games				X				X		
Play Equipment	X			X	X			X		
Natural Areas	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Restroom Facilities	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Trails										
Hiking	X		X	X	X			X	X	X
Biking (paved)	X		X	X	X			X	X	X
Biking (turf)			X	X						
Cross-country Skiing	X		X	X	X			X		
Equestrian			X	X					X	
In-line Skating	X		X	X	X			X	X	X

Park Classification: R = Regional Parks; PR = Park Reserve; SRF = Special Recreation Feature; C = County Park; RT = Regional Trail

Park and Trail Visitation

Washington County and the Metropolitan Council collect data and produce reports on who visits regional parks and trails, and how they are being used. These reports allow Washington County to track visitation and usage data overtime, and assess performance. Determining the types of users and their needs is an important step when evaluating future park and trail needs. Ultimately, this information helps Washington County make informed decisions for planning, building, and maintaining the parks and trails system.

In this section, the following reports that evaluate Washington County park and trail visitation will be described:

- Annual Use Estimate of the Regional Parks System
- Regional Parks System Visitor Study
- Washington County Park Visitor Study
- Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color

Annual Use Estimate of the Regional Parks System (2016)

The Metropolitan Council annually produces the [Annual Use Estimate of the Regional Parks System](#). This report collects visitation data within each unit and extrapolates it to produce an annual estimate for every regional park and trail in the seven-county area. Key findings from the 2016 report included:

- Washington County parks received approximately 1.35 million visits in 2016, which accounts for 2.9 percent of visits in all regional parks and trails. The table below breaks down Washington County park and trail visitation by unit.
- An estimated 56.1 percent of park visitors were from Washington County, while the other 43.9 percent came from outside Washington County to visit.

Table 3: Total Park Visits in 2016

Park Unit	Total Visits (2016)
Big Marine Park Reserve	240,700
Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	70,800
Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	208,300
Lake Elmo Park Reserve	519,900
Pine Point Regional Park	95,500
Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	95,900
St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	116,900
Totals	1,348,000

Regional Parks System Visitor Study (2016)

The Metropolitan Council also commissioned the [Regional Parks System Visitor Study \(2016\)](#) to provide benchmark data of park and trail visitor experiences at regional parks and trails. Key findings from the report included:

- When compared with other implementation agencies, Washington County park and trail users were more likely to:
 - Rate the quality of facilities, services, and recreation opportunities as very good (73 percent)
 - Visit a park closer to home (average of 9.5 miles to travel to park)
 - Arrive in an automobile (81 percent)
 - Look for information prior to visiting (18 percent)
 - Bring kids under age 10 (30 percent)
 - Report a larger average group size (average group size of 2.84)
 - Visit longer periods of time (average time spent of 3.01 hours)
 - Say that lack of free time is the primary barrier to visiting more often (83 percent)
- Disparities in Washington County park and trail visitation included:
 - Age of Washington County park and trail users (see Figure 4)
 - Household income of Washington County park and trail users (see Figure 5)
 - Educational attainment of Washington County park and trail users (see Figure 6)
 - Physical or mental ability of Washington County park and trail users (see Figure 7)
 - Race and ethnicity of Washington County park and trail users (see Figure 8)

Figure 4: 2016 Age Cohorts of Park and Trail Users

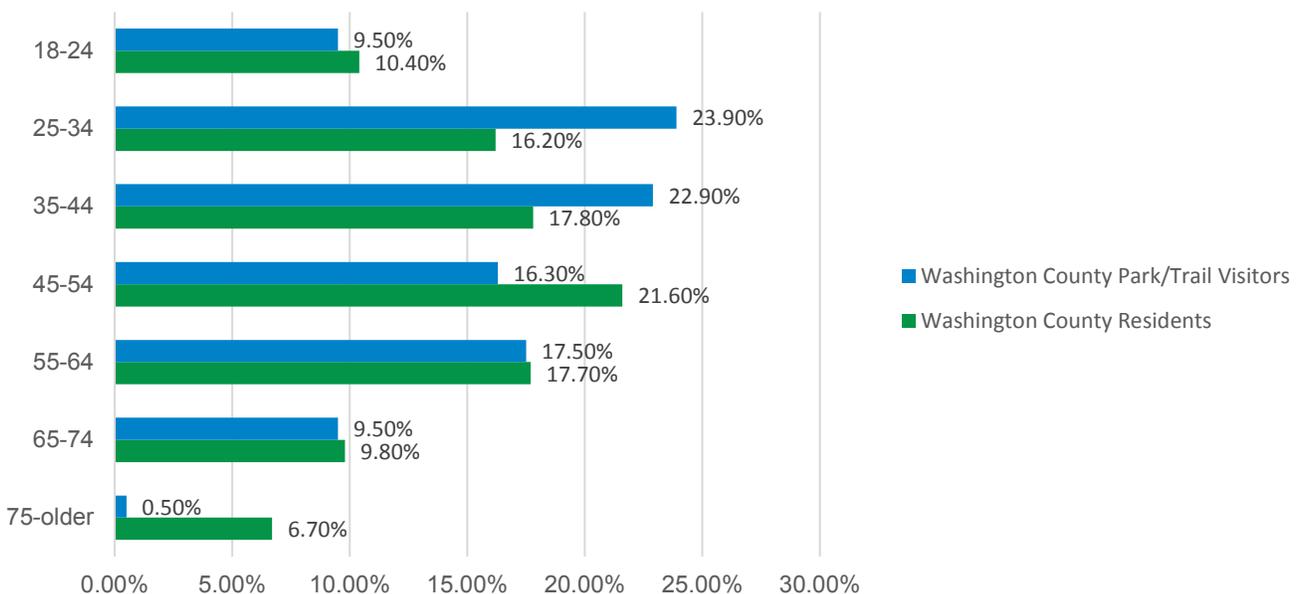


Figure 5: 2016 Household Income of Park and Trail Users

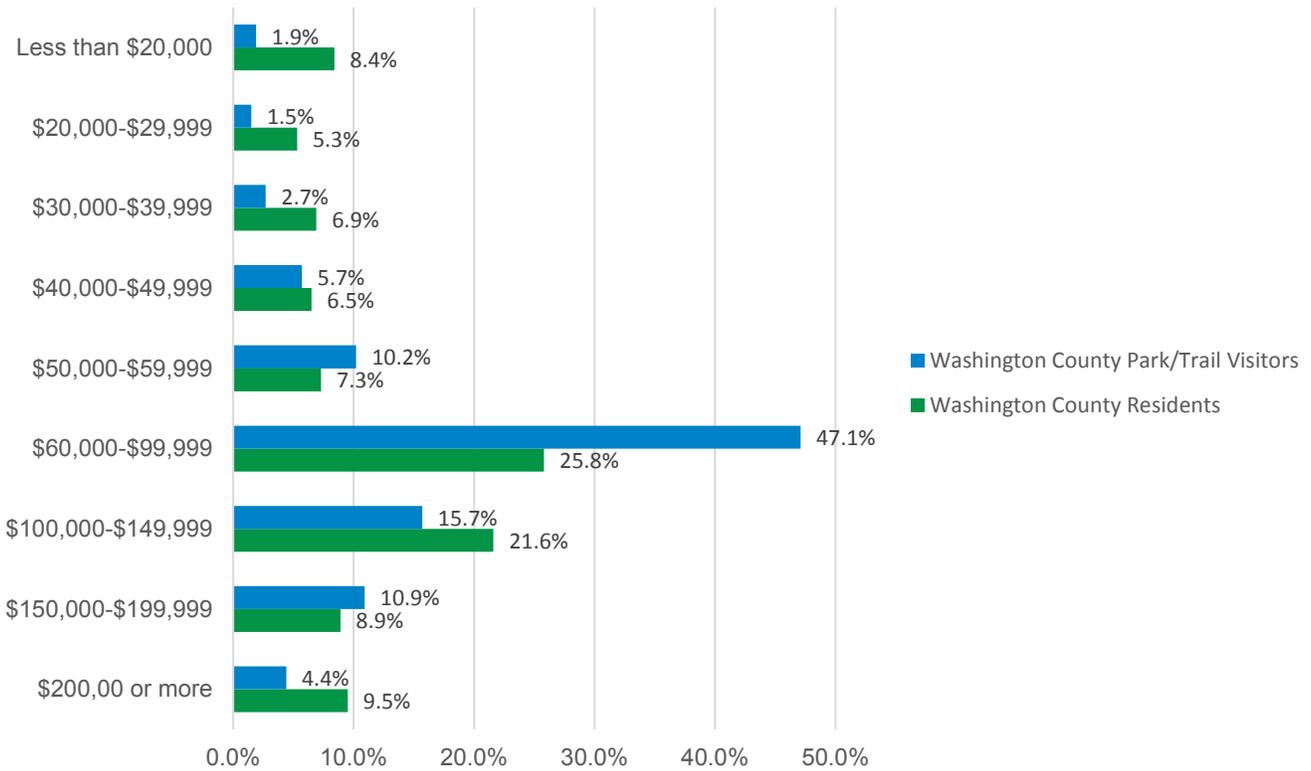


Figure 6: 2016 Educational Attainment of Park and Trail Users

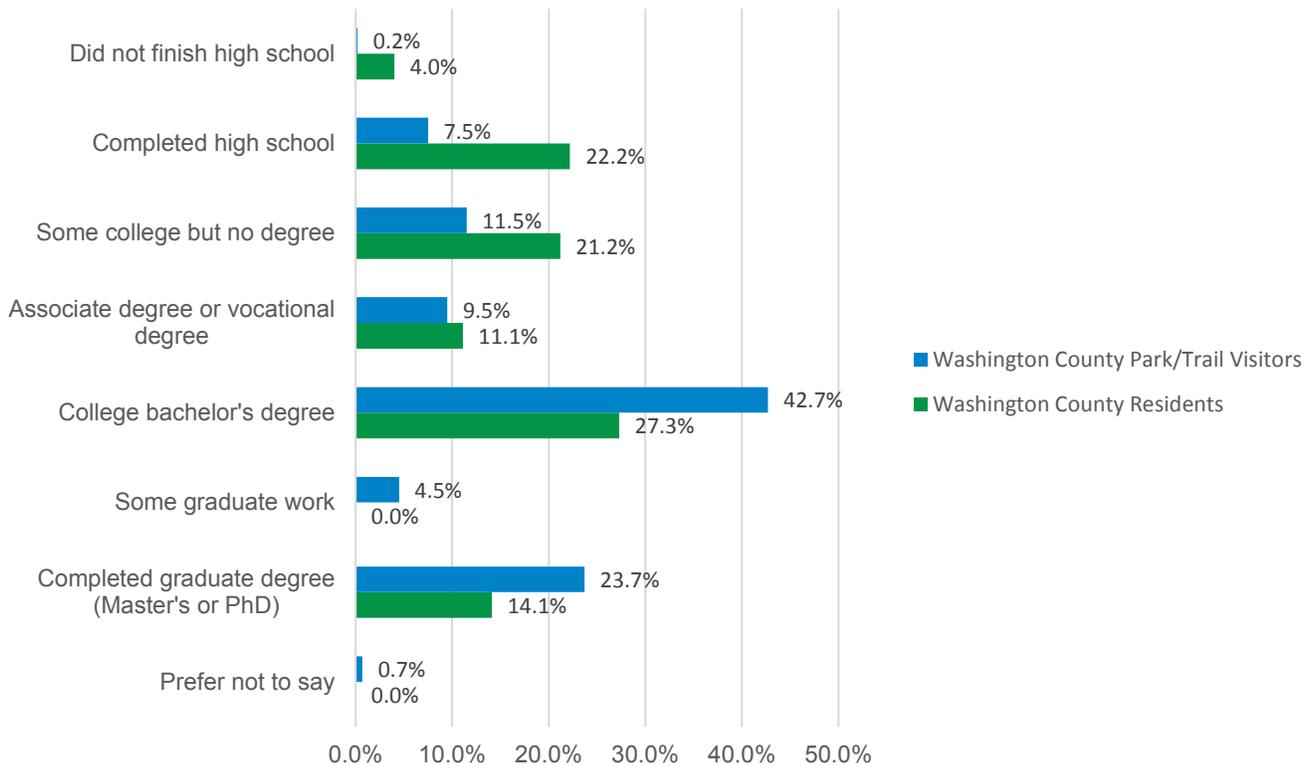


Figure 7: 2016 Physical and Mental Ability of Park and Trail Users¹:

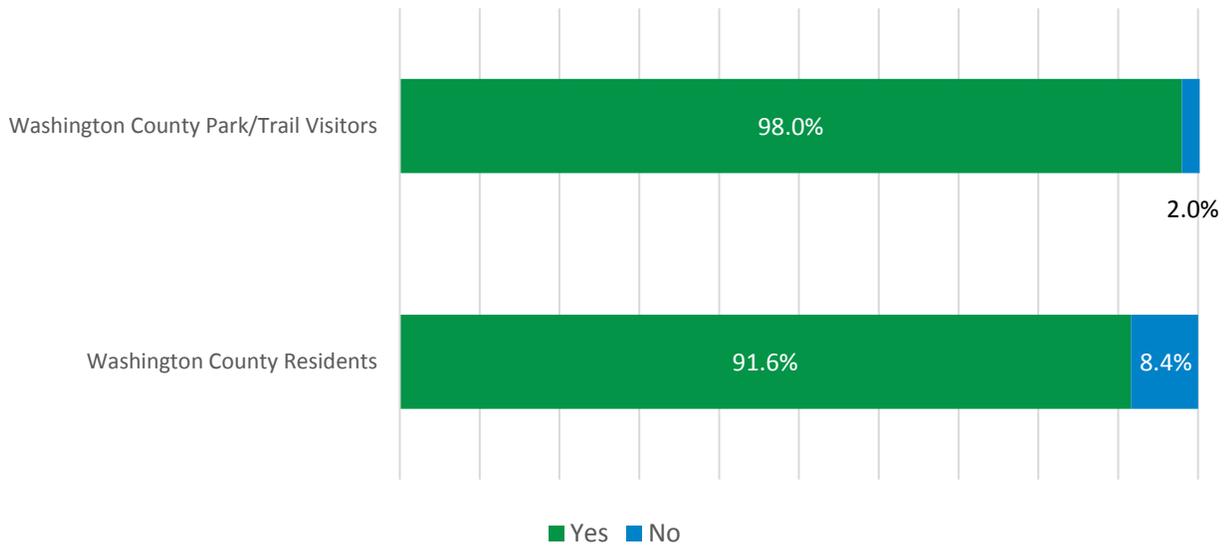
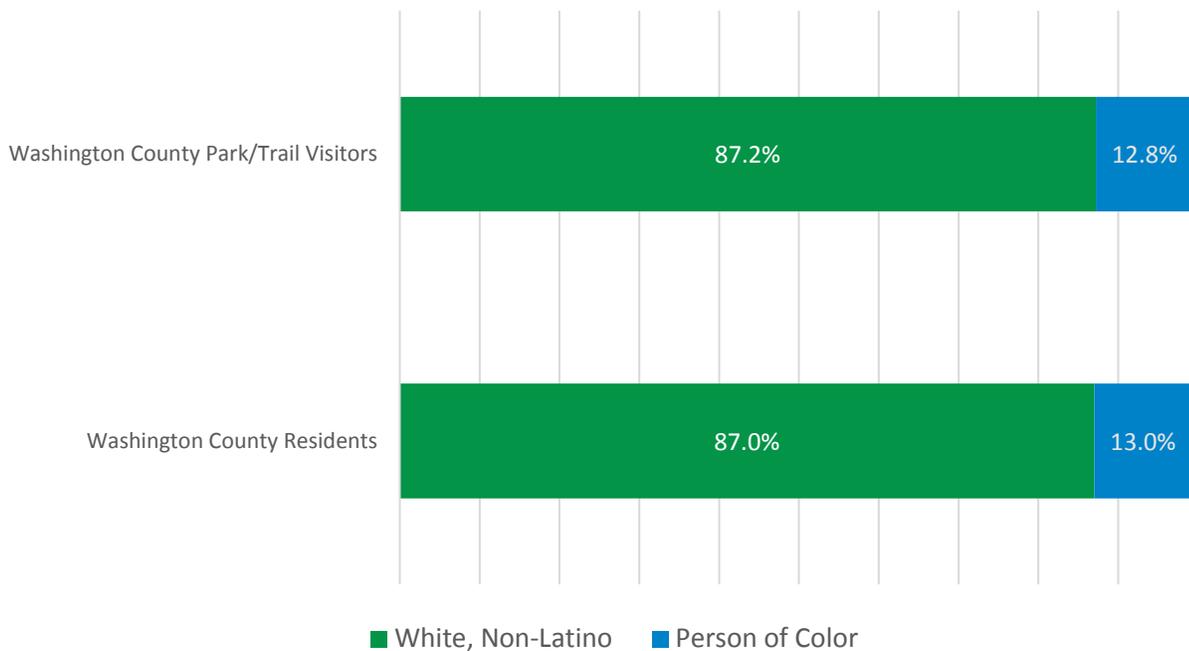


Figure 8: 2016 Race and Ethnicity of Park and Trail Users



¹ Responses reflect answers to the following question: “Does anyone in your group have a physical or mental condition that makes it difficult to access or participate in [Park/Trail] activities or services?”

Washington County Park Visitor Study (2016)

Washington County Parks conducts an independent Visitor Use Survey annually. These responses serve as another tool to measure visitation and park use. Furthermore, it gives Washington County flexibility in asking questions unique to the County (as opposed to the region as a whole). Key findings from the report included:

- Survey respondents primarily engaged in the following activities:
 - Nature walks/trails
 - Swimming
 - Boating/Fishing
 - Camping
 - Biking (paved trails)
- Programs visitors provided responses on activities they would like to see offered (or offered more frequently) in Washington County Parks:
 - Canoeing/kayaking lessons
 - Outdoor recreation for women
 - Moonlight hike/ski
 - Tree & plant identification
 - Cross country ski lessons/rental

Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color (2014)

In 2014, the Metropolitan Council staff produced the [Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color](#) report to better understand and address disproportionate or inequitable park use and identify barriers to regional park visitation among communities of color. Metropolitan Council staff partnered with several local community-based organizations and public agencies to collect demographic data and organize focus groups throughout the metropolitan region. Key findings from the report included:

- The most prominent perceived barriers to regional park system visitation among focus group participants were:
 - Lack of awareness
 - Time available
 - Fear/safety concerns
 - Lack of transportation options
 - Language barrier
- The most prominent suggestions from focus group participants to enhance regional park system visits were:
 - Increase awareness
 - Address safety
 - Enhance capacity of gathering spaces
 - Create ambassador program
 - Increase and diversify programming

Parks

Washington County’s parks system plays a key role in providing opportunities for visitors to recreate outdoors and interact with nature. But by itself, it cannot and was never intended to serve all the area’s recreational needs. The parks operated by Washington County are one component of the greater park and recreation system for the area that includes neighborhood, city, state, and federal parks and open space areas, as well as private sector facilities.



The Metropolitan Council's 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan contains a classification system for determining what facilities warrant regional status. Regional facilities emphasize high-quality natural resources, contain regionally important features, and provide for activities that tend to require large areas of land or water. Washington County, as an implementation agency, is responsible for owning and operating regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features. The Metropolitan Council supports these efforts by assisting with planning, funding, research, marketing, and advocacy.

State, local, and private recreational facilities provide additional recreational opportunities for park users within Washington County. These additional facilities are able to respond to the wants and needs of different groups of constituents. All these other facilities and services complement Washington County-operated parks to create a comprehensive system that contributes to the community’s high-quality of life.

This section will identify, describe, and map, all of the regional park components in Washington County, in addition to county, federal, and state recreation areas and open space lands that are located within Washington County:

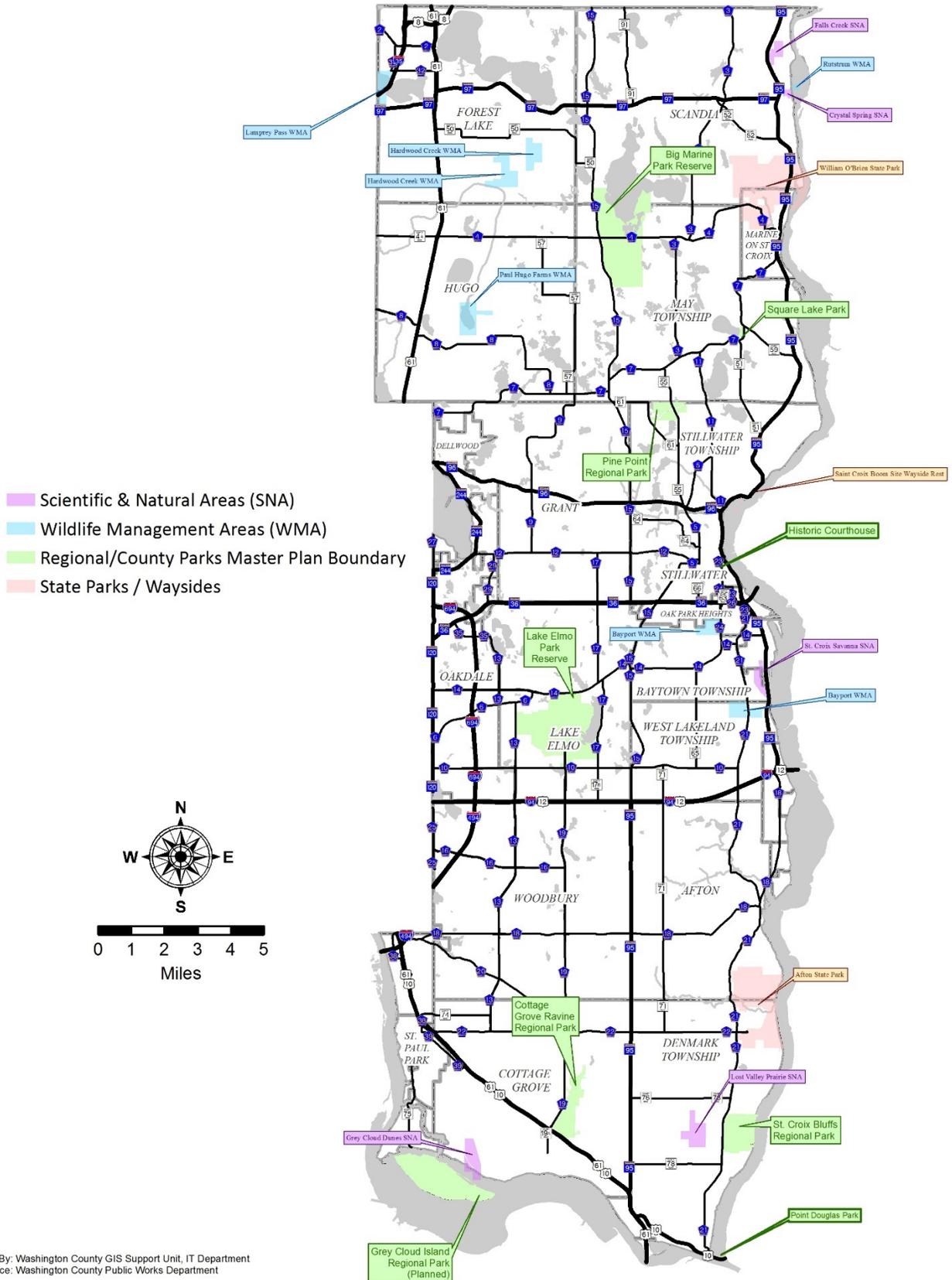
- Regional Parks
- Regional Park Reserves
- Regional Special Recreation Features
- County Parks and Facilities
- Scientific and Natural Areas
- Wildlife Management Areas
- State and National Parks

Table 4: Washington County Regional Parks

Regional Park Unit	Acres Publicly Accessible	Acres Proposed in Master Boundary	County-owned Acres	Acres to be Acquired
Pine Point Regional Park	286.8	N/A*	286.8	N/A*
Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	522.1	599.9	522.1	77.8
Saint Croix Bluffs Regional Park	583.7	704.6	583.7	120.9
Grey Cloud Island Regional Park (Planned)	0.0	1366.8	113.8	1253.0
Lake Elmo Park Reserve	2178.9	2,196.6	2178.9	17.7
Big Marine Park Reserve	204.7	1,883.8	683.4	1200.4
Square Lake Park	24.9	N/A*	24.9	N/A*
Point Douglas Park	8.6	12.4	8.6	3.8
Historic Courthouse	2.1	N/A*	2.1	N/A*
Total:	3,811.90	6,764.16	4,404.41	2,673.56

*Note: N/A = No master plan has been approved by the Metropolitan Council

Figure 9: Washington County Regional Parks System



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Washington County Public Works Department

Regional Parks

Regional parks are centered around land and water that is regionally important and would draw users from across the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan region. These parks contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built, and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities.

This section will provide profiles of each of the following regional parks within Washington County:

- Pine Point Regional Park
- Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park
- St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park
- Grey Cloud Island Regional Park



Pine Point Regional Park

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	Regional Park
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Regional Significance:

The park serves as a trailhead to the Gateway State Trail, a major recreation destination for the region. It also features views of Louise Lake and Loon Lake. Landscape types include rolling topography, mixed hardwoods, pine plantations, prairie, and wetlands.

Existing Development:

Existing development is centered on providing access to the Gateway State Trail and opportunities for various trail users. Existing facilities include:

- Trailhead
- Picnic areas
- Paved and soft surface trails

Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted by the Washington County Board in 1989 but never adopted by the Metropolitan Council. A new master plan, approved by the Metropolitan Council, is needed to make park acquisition and development eligible for regional funding.
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Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>A master plan will guide Pine Point Regional Park’s future acquisition and development. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The 1989 master plan calls for development to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded paved and soft surface trail network • Camping (primitive) • Viewing blinds • Vegetation restoration
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Pine Point Regional Park



Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park

Existing Conditions:

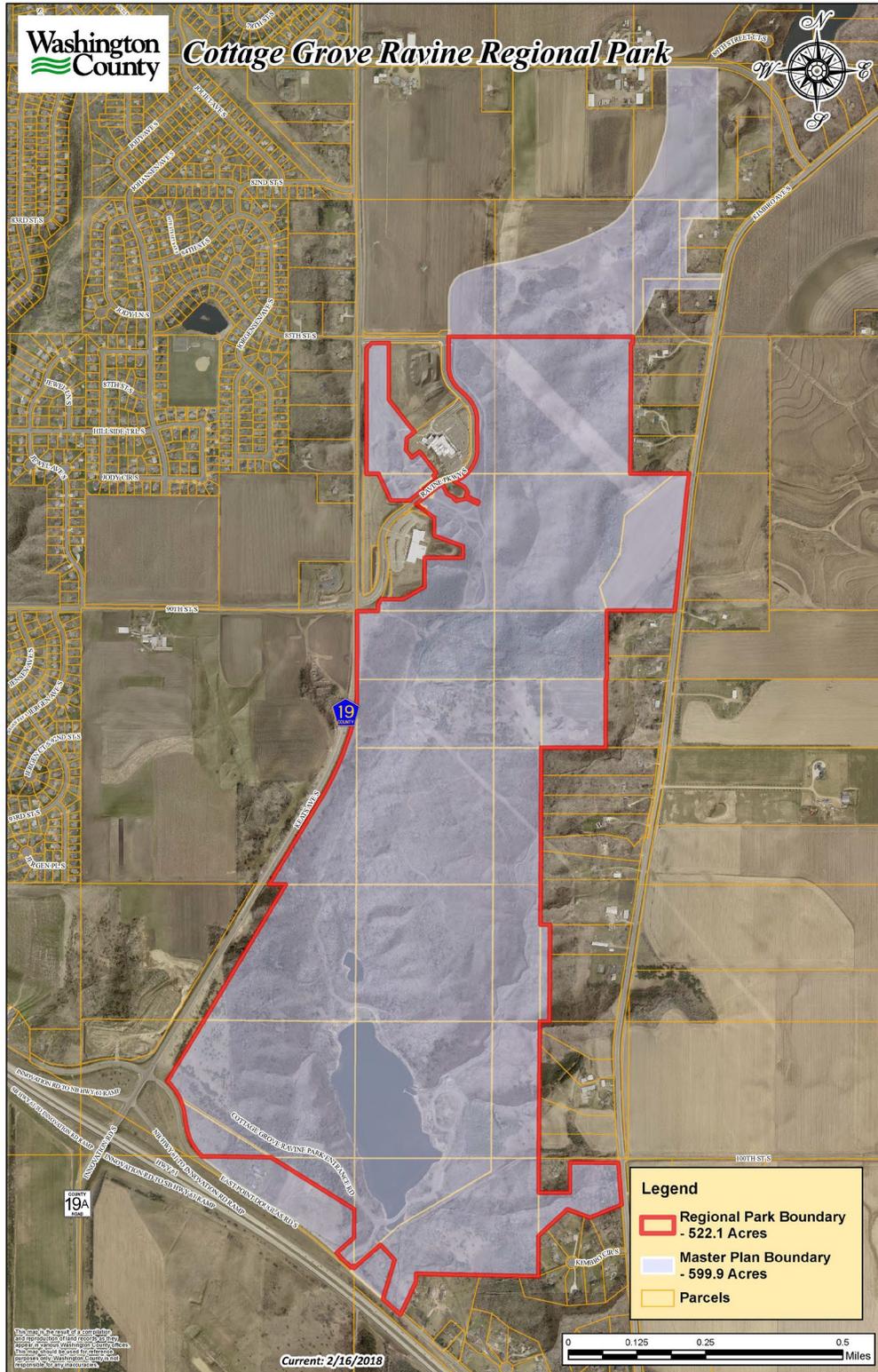
Park Classification:	Regional Park
Regional Significance:	
The park features Ravine Lake, steep topography, and wooded ravines. Landscape types include oak woodland, pine plantation, old field, and dry prairie.	
Existing Development:	
Existing development is centered on providing access to the scenic ravine landscape and recreation opportunities for various park users. Existing facilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground structure • Swimming beach • Fishing pier • Boat (non-motorized) launch on Ravine Lake • Picnic areas • Visitor contact station • Paved and soft surface trails 	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2017.



Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park’s future acquisition and development. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The master plan calls for development to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded paved and soft surface trail network (including lighted trail loops) • Trailhead facility • Playground structures • Expanded picnic areas • Observation tower • Vegetation restoration
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Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park



St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	Regional Park
Regional Significance:	The park fronts 3,800 feet of shoreline along the St. Croix River, a nationally-recognized wild and scenic river route. The landscape types consist of mesic hardwood forest, oak woodland, pine plantations, prairie restoration, cropland, traversing steep bluffs and deep ravines.
Existing Development:	Existing development is centered on providing access to the St. Croix River and a variety of other recreational activities, including camping. Existing facilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground structure • Swimming beach • Fishing pier • Boat (non-motorized and motorized) launch on St Croix River • Camping areas (modern, group) • Softball/baseball field • Sport courts (tennis, volleyball, basketball, horseshoe) • Picnic areas • Visitor contact station • Maintenance facility • Paved and soft surface trails.



Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2003.
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Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	The master plan will guide St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park’s future acquisition and development. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The master plan calls for development to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded paved and soft surface trail network • Trailhead facility • Overlooks • Beach improvements • Expanded camping facilities and areas • Expanded picnic areas • Vegetation restoration
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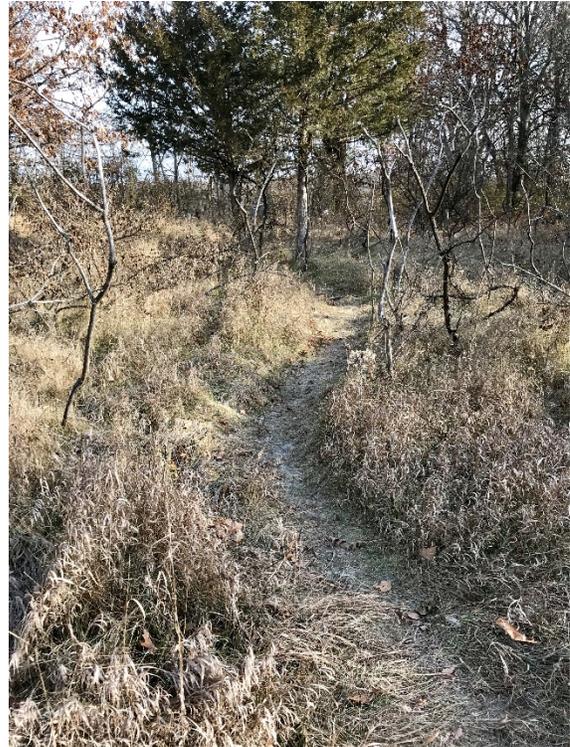
St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park



Grey Cloud Island Regional Park

Existing Conditions:

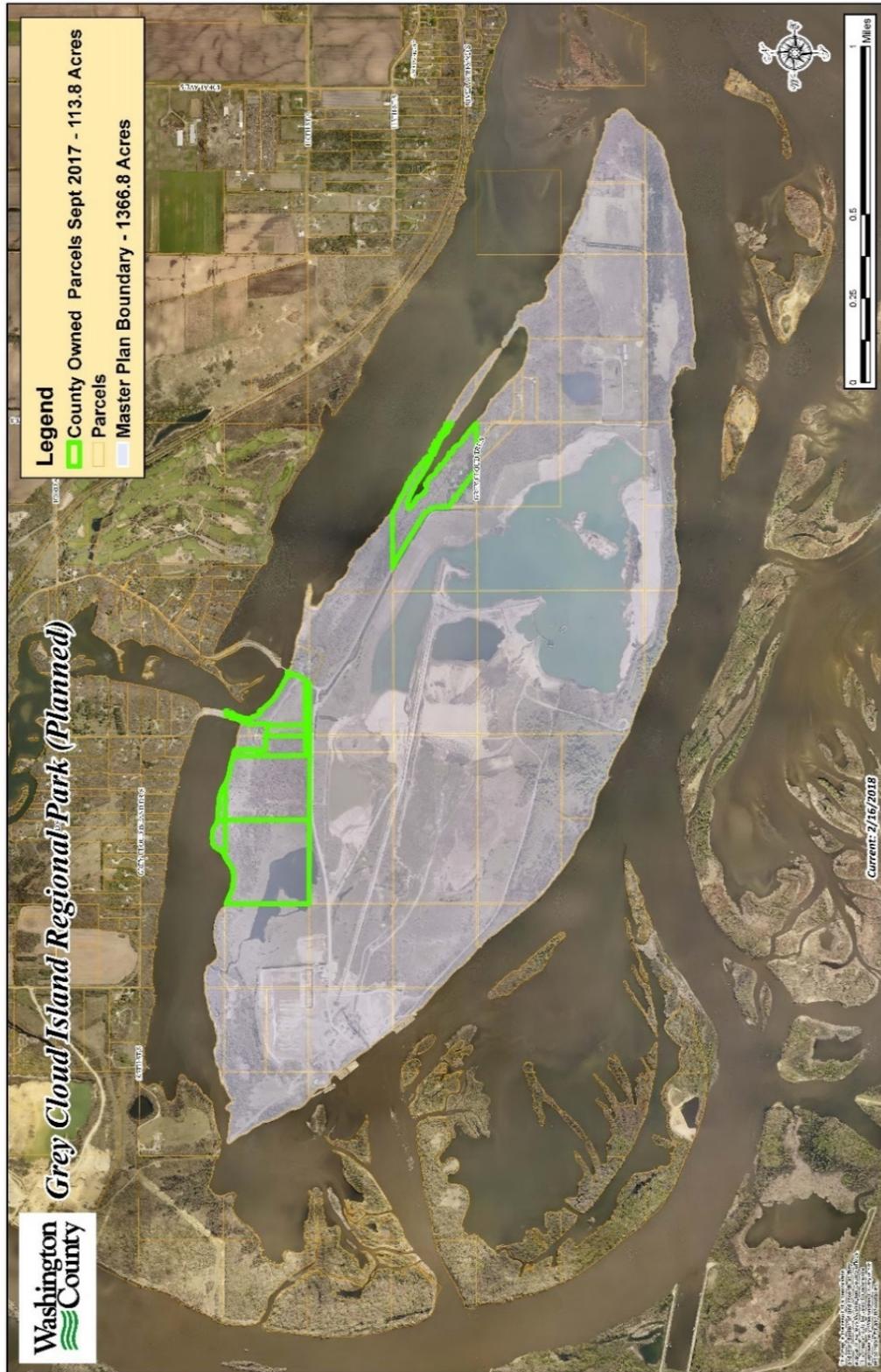
Park Classification:	Planned Regional Park
Regional Significance:	
<p>Grey Cloud Island features natural and archaeological resources that represent an important link within the Mississippi River corridor network. This park will also support wildlife habitat (i.e., Mississippi River Valley wildfowl flyway) and sensitive water basins (i.e., Mooer's Lake, Baldwin Lake, and Mississippi River shoreline). The landscape types include mixed hardwood forest and 100-year designated floodplains. The land resides in the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, as defined by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.</p>	
Existing Development:	
<p>Grey Cloud Island Regional Park has not yet been developed as Washington County is pursuing acquisition of properties within the master plan boundary on a willing-seller basis. The regional park is not yet open to the public. Existing uses on the island include gravel mining, residential, and agriculture.</p>	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 1994.



Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan is guiding Grey Cloud Island Regional Park's future acquisition. Park development within Grey Cloud Island is unlikely to occur prior to completion of mining activities that currently exist. Mining activities will impact the park's ultimate development and the configuration of its functional areas. It is likely that Washington County will assess and update the master plan adopted in 1994 before commencing significant park development. Development on Grey Cloud Island will adhere to the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area rules. More information on these rules can be found in Chapter 4, Land Use.</p> <p>Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects.</p>
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Grey Cloud Island Regional Park



Regional Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities and draw visitors from across the region. One major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres. An additional characteristic of park reserves is that they are required to manage at least 80 percent of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape.

This section will provide profiles of each of the following regional park reserves within Washington County:

- Lake Elmo Park Reserve
- Big Marine Park Reserve



Lake Elmo Park Reserve

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	Park Reserve
Regional Significance:	
The park reserve features Eagle Point Lake, Lake Elmo, and variety of topography, from gently rolling hills, to steep slopes. The landscape types consist of old field, restored prairie, mixed hardwoods, wetlands and cropland.	
Existing Development:	
Existing development is centered on providing access to over 2,000 acres of protected nature and to provide a variety of recreational uses. Existing facilities Include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swim pond • Boat (non-motorized & motorized) launch on Lake Elmo; boat (non-motorized) launch on Eagle Point Lake • Fishing pier • Camping areas (group, modern, rustic, and primitive) • Archery range • Playground structure, • Picnic and grill areas • Trailheads • Nordic Center • Amphitheater • Visitor contact station. • Paved and soft-surface trails, including lighted trail loops 	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2006.



Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide Lake Elmo Park Reserve’s future acquisition and development. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The master plan calls for development to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded paved and soft surface trail network • Expanded picnic areas • Expanded camping facilities and areas • Updated playground structures • Updated trail and recreation facilities • Updated maintenance facility • Vegetation restoration
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Big Marine Park Reserve

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	Park Reserve
Regional Significance:	
The park reserve features Big Marine Lake, an important water feature in Washington County. The landscape is composed of rolling topography, high-quality wetlands, mature oak forests, and St. Croix Valley Moraine.	
Existing Development:	
Existing development is centered on providing access to Big Marine Lake and opportunities for visitors to experience the unique St. Croix Valley Moraine landscape. Existing facilities include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground structure • Swimming beach • Fishing pier • Boat (non-motorized and motorized) launch on Big Marine Lake • Picnic areas • Visitor contact station • Paved and soft surface trails. 	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2010.



Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide Big Marine Park Reserve’s future acquisition and development. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The master plan calls for development to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded paved and soft surface trail network, including boardwalks • Trailhead facility • Camping areas (primitive, group, modern) • Archery • Expanded picnic areas • Special use facility for youth group activities • Maintenance facility • Vegetation restoration
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Regional Special Recreation Features

Special recreation features are defined as areas that preserve, maintain, and provide specialized recreational activities not generally found in the regional parks, park reserves or trail corridors. Unique managing and programming efforts are often necessary to operate these features.

This section will provide a profile of the following special recreation feature within Washington County:

- Square Lake

Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	
Existing Conditions:	
Park Classification:	Special Recreation Feature
Regional Significance:	
The park features Square Lake, a regional amenity renowned for its water quality. The lake has some of the clearest waters in Minnesota.	
Existing Development:	
Existing development is centered on providing recreational opportunities for scuba divers, swimmers, paddle boarders, anglers, and more. Existing facilities include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimming beach • Fishing pier • Boat (non-motorized and motorized) launch on Square Lake • Picnic and grill area 	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for Square Lake Park.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	Washington County will develop a master plan to guide future park acquisition and development.



Square Lake Special Recreation Feature



County Parks and Facilities

County parks and facilities are typically smaller than regional parks, but still draw visitors from across the county. These parks protect and provide access to natural and historical features valued by the county. They also provide a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation and education.

This section will provide a profile of the following county parks within Washington County:

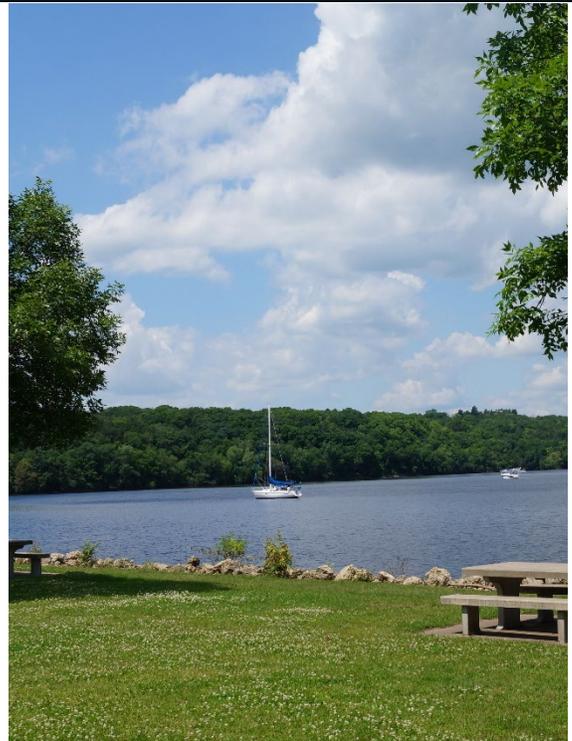
- Point Douglas County Park
- Washington County Historic Courthouse



Point Douglas County Park

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	County Park
Regional Significance:	
The park serves as a trailhead for Point Douglas Regional Trail and the planned St. Croix Valley Regional Trail. It features views of and access to the Mississippi River.	
Existing Development:	
Existing development is centered on providing access to the Mississippi River and the Point Douglas and St. Croix Valley Regional Trails. Existing facilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailhead facility • Swimming beach • Picnic area • Fishing overlook 	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2012, together with Point Douglas Regional Trail master plan. The park land resides in the Regional Park System as a regional trailhead facility.



Development Concept:

Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide Point Douglas’s future acquisition and development. The future park boundary will depend on negotiations with MnDOT regarding land to be turned over to the County at a future date (the proposed future park boundary as seen on the map represents a possible outcome). Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects. The master plan calls for development to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailhead facility improvements • Trail improvements • Picnic area improvements • Parking and access improvements • Septic system • Expanded picnic areas • Landscaping improvements
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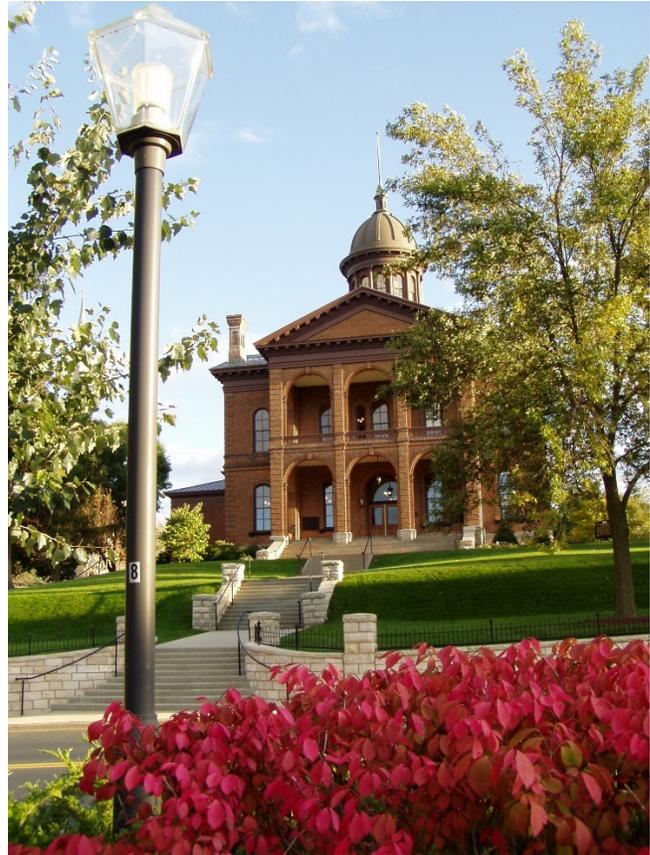
Point Douglas County Park



Washington County Historic Courthouse

Existing Conditions:

Park Classification:	County Facility
Site Significance:	
<p>The Washington County Historic Courthouse features a 150-year-old facility and grounds, which serve as hallmarks of Washington County government and landmarks for the birthplace of the State of Minnesota. The site is supported through public and private funds, user fees, and volunteer services. It is a showcase of adaptive reuse of an historic building and serves as a venue for programming.</p>	
Existing Development:	
<p>Existing development is centered on maintaining and improving the building structure and grounds, and providing opportunities for visitors to experience and learn about Washington County history. Existing facilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit rooms • Courthouse space (used for large meetings and events) • Observation dome • Memorials/statutes/plaques 	
Planning Status:	There is no master plan adopted for this site.



Development Concept:

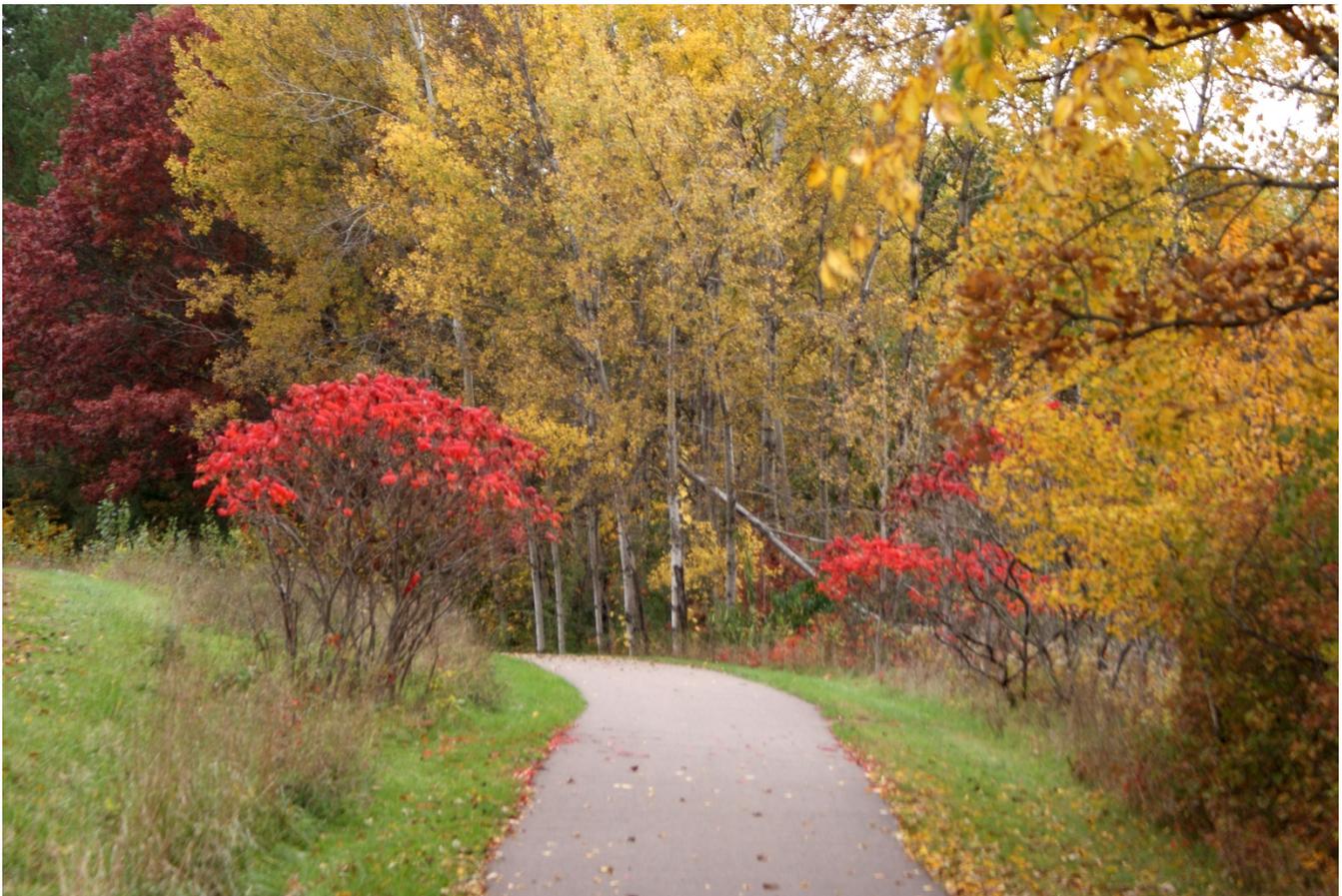
Proposed Development:	<p>The vision for Washington County Historic Courthouse is to provide a place where all visitors can connect to the county’s past. The site will continue to be available to the public to enjoy its scenery, architectural value, and sense of history. It will also continue to be a unique venue for programming and community events.</p> <p>Washington County will develop plans for the continued maintenance of the facility and grounds. The county will also pursue new programming and funding opportunities to further improve the site and visitor experience. Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of park development will take into consideration the timing of related projects.</p>
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Scientific and Natural Areas

Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) are state lands preserving Minnesota's ecological and geological diversity. They protect natural features of exceptional scientific or educational value including native plant communities, populations of rare species, and geological features of statewide significance. All five of the Scientific and Natural Areas are found in the St. Paul-Baldwin Plains and Moraines subsection of the state's Ecological Classification System. Locations of SNAs are shown on Figure 9.

This section will provide profiles of the following scientific and natural areas within Washington County:

- Falls Creek
- Crystal Spring
- St. Croix Savanna
- Lost Valley
- Grey Cloud Dunes



Scientific and Natural Areas

Falls Creek

Location:	Scandia
Size:	136 acres
Description:	Falls Creek is one of the most diverse natural areas in Washington County. Steep ravines line the intermittent stream beds. The site is unique for its stand of virgin hardwood and white pine forest, which is rare along the St. Croix River. The site exhibits an impressive show of woodland wildflowers.

Crystal Spring

Location:	Scandia
Size:	38 acres
Description:	Steep cliffs line a seasonal cold water stream and old forests stand tall on the rugged terrain at Crystal Spring. Overall the site supports high-quality red oak-basswood forest with steep slopes containing sugar maple and white pine. Butternut trees, listed as endangered in Minnesota, have also been recorded here.

St. Croix Savanna

Location:	Baytown Township, Bayport
Size:	148 acres
Description:	The St. Croix Savanna occurs along the top and side of a south-facing bluff, with scenic views of the St. Croix River. The dry savanna contains a diversity of grasses including side-oats and hairy grama, needle and thread, and prairie dropseed. Rare kitten-tails grow in near bur oaks.

Lost Valley Prairie

Location:	Denmark Township
Size:	320 acres
Description:	Lost Valley is a bedrock bluff prairie, and features a series of limestone ridges and dry swales. Ridge crests and upper slopes have a variety of grasses including big and little bluestem and Indian grass. Of special interest are Hill's thistle, a Minnesota special concern species, and state-threatened rock sandwort.

Grey Cloud Dunes

Location:	Cottage Grove
Size:	237 acres
Description:	Grey Cloud Dunes contain two sandy terraces along the Mississippi River. The terraces mark the height of the Mississippi at different time periods after the melting and retreat of continental glaciers. Rare sea-beach needlegrass and the North American (blue) racer, an uncommon Minnesota snake, may be found here.

Wildlife Management Areas

Wildlife management areas (WMAs) are part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system and are established to protect those lands and waters that have a high potential for wildlife production, public hunting, trapping, fishing, and other compatible recreational uses. Locations of WMAs are shown on Figure 9.

This section will provide profiles of the following wildlife management areas within Washington County:

- Lamprey Pass
- Rustrum
- Hardwood Creek
- Paul Hugo Farms
- Bayport



Wildlife Management Areas	
Lamprey Pass	
Location:	Forest Lake
Size:	1,267 acres
Description:	Lamprey Pass is the largest WMA outside of Carlos Avery in the North Metro area. The WMA is primarily managed for waterfowl and consists of 76 percent wetland – including two open water basins that total more than 600 acres – 16 percent woodland and 8 percent grassland/food plot.
Rustrum	
Location:	Scandia
Size:	24 acres
Description:	Accessible only by water, this area offers unique boat access hunting opportunities. Floodplain forest wildlife viewing is also available. The WMA consists of 83 percent open water and emergent vegetation marsh, and 17 percent floodplain forest.
Hardwood Creek	
Location:	Forest Lake
Size:	583 acres
Description:	Hardwood Creek WMA is part of the largest complex of native habitat remaining in Washington County. A 60-acre tamarack bog and high quality maple-basswood forest are highlights. Management efforts emphasize maintenance of small planted prairies that make up 10 percent of the area. The remainder is primarily wooded wetlands and islands.
Paul Hugo Farms	
Location:	Hugo
Size:	357 acres
Description:	Rice Lake on Paul Hugo Farms WMA is one of the largest bodies of water in the metro area to offer canoe or other non-motorized boating opportunities where motorized boat traffic is not allowed. Breeding trumpeter swans can be observed on Rice Lake.
Bayport	
Location:	Bayport
Size:	452 acres
Description:	The major emphasis is to manage for a variety of woodland and grassland wildlife. The area consists of 72 percent grassland/agricultural land, 27 percent woodland and a small amount of wetland. This is a good area to observe purple cone flowers and black-eyed Susans in the planted prairie.

State Parks, State Wayside Areas, and National Parks



The purpose of state parks is to protect and perpetuate areas of the state that illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's unique natural resources, and to provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations. State parks are operated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The Minnesota state park and trail system includes waysides areas. These are generally parcels of land too small to be full-fledged state parks, but with more cultural or natural resources than those found at highway waysides and rest areas.

Locations of these are shown on Figure 9.

This section will provide profiles of the following state parks and wayside areas within Washington County:

- William O'Brien State Park
- Afton State Park
- St. Croix Boom Site State Wayside

This section will also include profiles for the National Parks located in Washington County. These recreational destinations are operated by the National Park Service:

- St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
- Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

State Parks, State Wayside Areas, and National Parks

William O’Brien State Park

Location:	Scandia, Marine on St. Croix
Size:	1,860 acres
Description:	A variety of vegetation types, the St. Croix River floodplain, oak-hickory forests, scattered white pine areas, marshes, oak savanna, upland prairie and rolling meadows provide habitat for diverse wildlife populations at William O’Brien. The park also sits adjacent the St. Croix River.

Afton State Park

Location:	Afton, Denmark Township
Size:	1,620 acres
Description:	The park is set amongst rolling hills and bluffs, and contains woodlands, savanna, and prairie. The forests combine upland hardwoods with some pine plantations. Oak savannas and prairies are being expanded and restored through an aggressive resource management program. Park wildflowers include woodland ephemerals in the spring; butterfly weed and pucoons on the summer prairie; and sunflowers and blazing star in the fall. The park also borders the St. Croix River.

St. Croix Boom Site State Wayside

Location:	Stillwater
Size:	26 acres
Description:	The wayside overlooks a wide area on the St. Croix River where an estimated 15.5 billion feet of logs from the pine forests of the St. Croix valley were gathered and sorted before being floated downstream to sawmills between 1856 and 1914. The site was developed as a roadside recreational area in the 1930s and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966. Washington County has partnered with the DNR to make improvements to the site. The county will assess the potential role of the St. Croix Boom Site in the park system and a proposed trail connection to the Brown’s Creek State Trail.

St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

Location:	Northwest Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota
Size:	230 miles
Description:	Relatively free-flowing and unpolluted, the Namekagon and St. Croix rivers flow through some of the most scenic and least developed country in the Upper Midwest. Together they form the 230-mile-long park that offers outdoor enthusiasts a chance to enjoy a variety of recreation opportunities within easy reach of Minneapolis-St. Paul. The last 25 miles of the St. Croix River are not part of the national park, but are part of the national wild and scenic rivers system.

Mississippi National River and Recreation Area	
Location:	Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area
Size:	72 miles
Description:	<p>The Mississippi River's character changes more throughout the 72 mile stretch of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area than anywhere else along its 2,350-mile course.</p> <p>The river enters the northern corridor as a free-flowing prairie river and moves downstream to plunge over St. Anthony Falls and into the river's narrowest gorge. Eight and one-half miles later, the river exits the gorge to become the country's dominant floodplain river and part of the largest inland navigation system on earth. Through the eight and one-half mile gorge, the Mississippi drops more than 110 feet, the river's steepest descent anywhere. The river's rapidly changing character explains why the national river and recreation area has such a unique concentration of nationally significant resources.</p>

Trails

Trails owned and operated by Washington County are one component of a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network that provides recreation and transportation opportunities for trail users. The regional trail system in the metropolitan area is like the highway system, with regional and local components. The regional component consists of trails in the regional trail system, run by park implementation agencies such as Washington County, and state administered trails. These trails are complemented by shorter, local trails that may eventually feed into units of the regional trail system.

The Metropolitan Council's 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan contains a classification system for determining what trails warrant regional status. These trails must serve a regional audience and connect two or more units of the regional parks system, without duplicating an existing route. Washington County, as an implementation agency, is responsible for owning and operating regional trails. The Metropolitan Council supports these efforts by assisting with planning, funding, research, marketing, and advocacy.

It is important to note that Washington County has made progress on providing opportunities for trail users outside of the regional trail system. Many county highways not currently identified as part of the regional trail system have separated trails or wide shoulders for biking. Washington County has plans to expand this network as well (see Figure 10).

This section primarily focuses on role and function of regional trails within Washington County. A trail assessment memo was developed for a more comprehensive description of county-wide trails (see Appendix I).

The regional and local trail network is also supported and enhanced by the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN), which is identified as part of the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). The RBTN helps to define the region's on-street bikeways and off-street trail connections, and how the system works together to serve regional transportation trips by bicycle. More information on the RBTN's role in Washington County is provided in the Transportation Chapter.

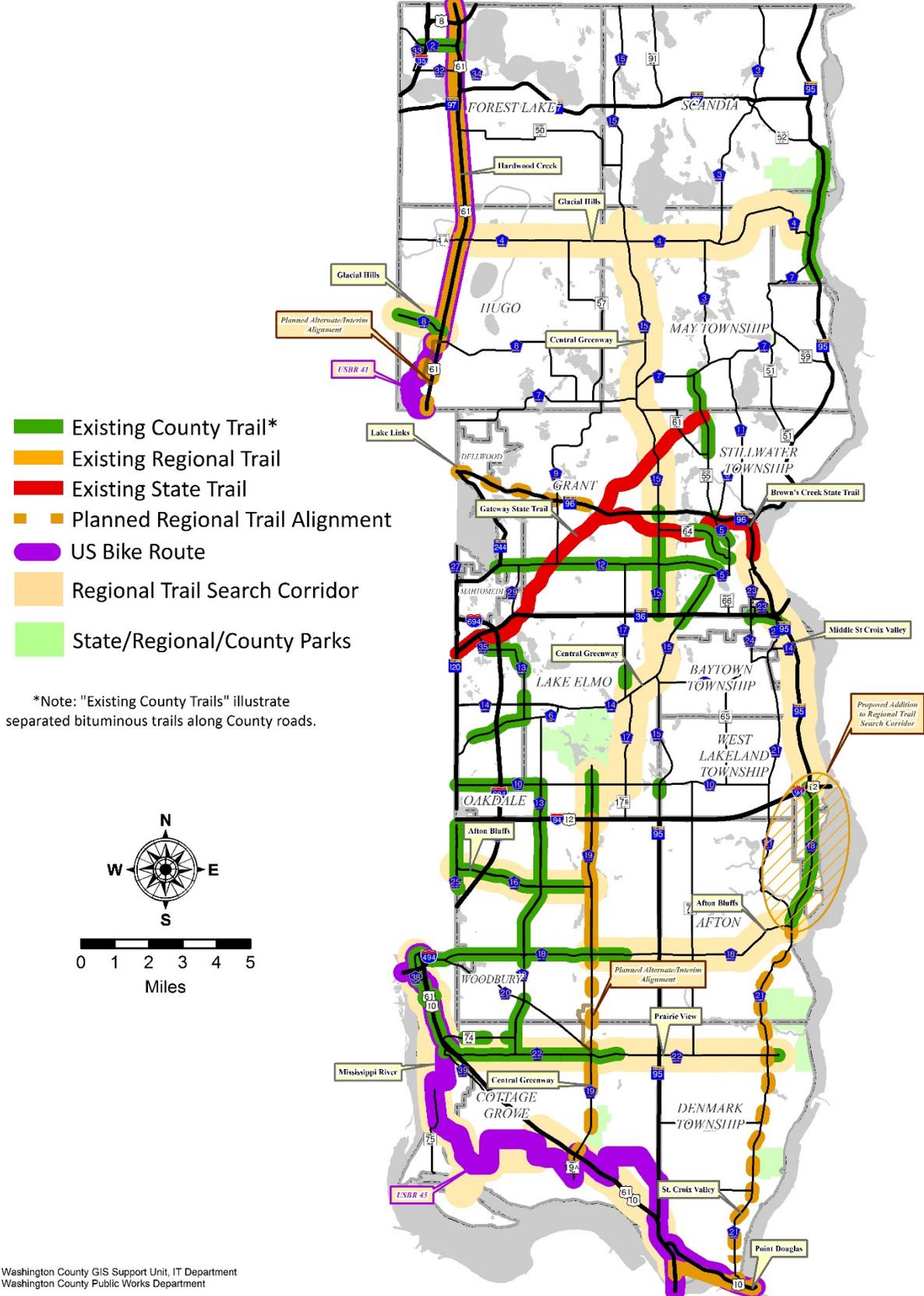
This section will identify, describe, map, and plan for all of the regional and state trail components:

- Regional Destination Trails
- Regional Linking Trails
- Regional Search Corridor
- State Trails

Table 5: Regional Trails

Regional Trail	Miles Proposed	Miles Existing	Miles to be Completed
Hardwood Creek	12	10	2
Point Douglas	2.5	2.5	0
St. Croix Valley	20.5	0	20.5
Central Greenway	TBD	5	TBD
Lake Links	4.6	0	4.6
Glacier Hills	TBD	TBD	TBD
Middle St. Croix Valley	TBD	TBD	TBD
Afton Bluffs	TBD	TBD	TBD
Mississippi River	TBD	TBD	TBD
Prairie View	TBD	TBD	TBD

Figure 10: Washington County Regional Trail System



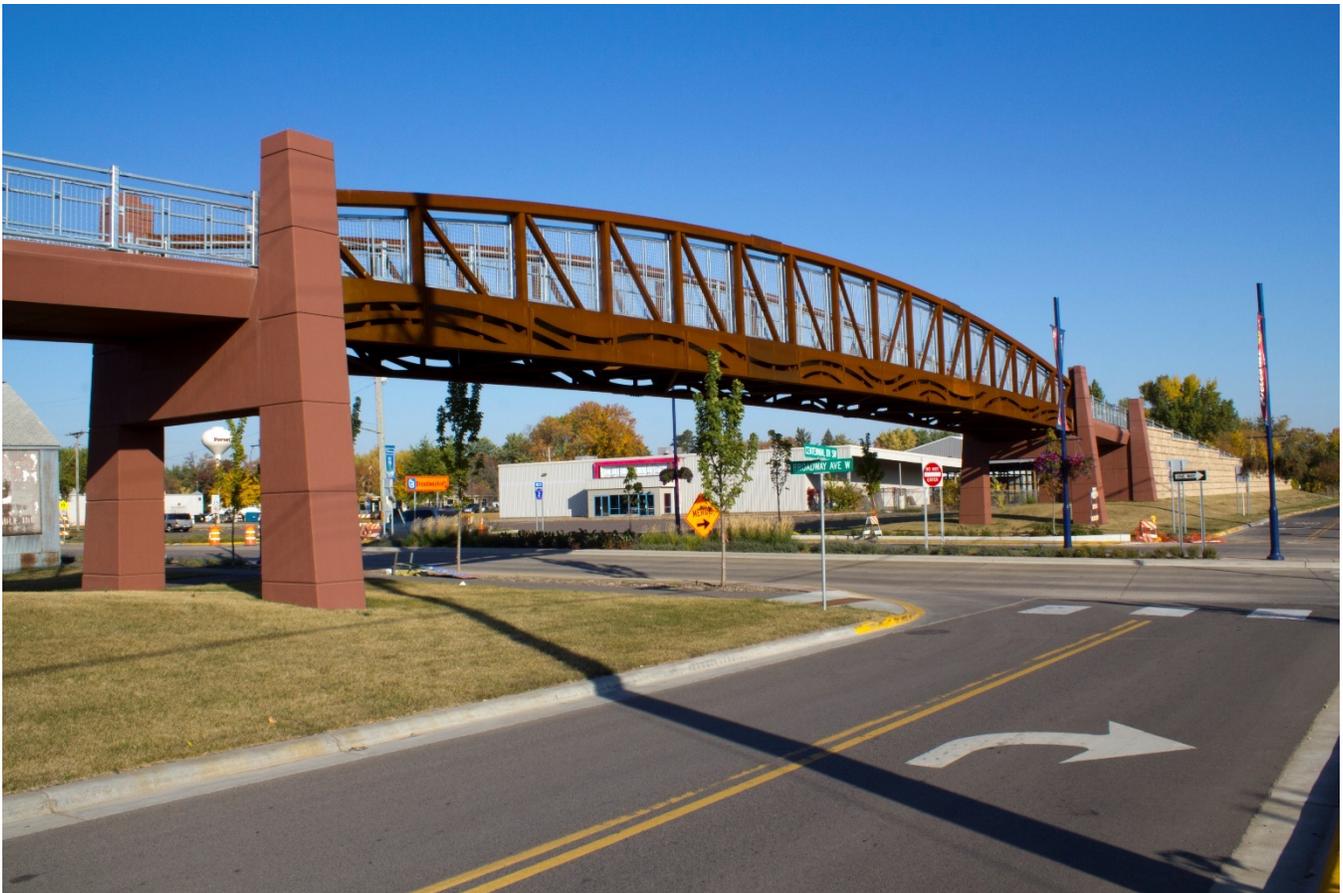
Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Washington County Public Works Department

Destination Trails

Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural resources that make the trail itself a destination. The presence of high-quality natural resources is considered when planning a destination regional trail or greenway because the setting contributes to the quality of trail recreational experience. The corridor should have no adverse impact on the natural resource base, while safely accommodating trail users.

This section will provide profiles of each of the following regional destination trails within Washington County:

- Hardwood Creek Regional Trail
- Point Douglas Regional Trail
- St. Croix Valley Regional Trail



Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Destination
Regional Significance:	
The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail is a multiple-use trail in northwestern Washington County. The trail connects to the Sunrise Prairie Regional Trail in Chisago County and will eventually link with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in Ramsey County. The trail takes visitors through residential areas, natural areas, and the commercial areas of Hugo and Forest Lake.	
Existing Development:	
The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail is on a former Burlington Northern Railroad grade which is level and wheelchair accessible. The existing trail consists of two parallel trails that run adjacent to State Highway 61, from the Washington/Chisago County Line in Forest Lake, to 140th Street in Hugo, about 10 miles. The paved portion is for hard surface trail users, while the turf portion is separated for horseback riders in the summer and snowmobilers in the winter.	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2013.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide future acquisition and trail development. The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail will be approximately 12 miles long.</p> <p>The master plan’s optimal route begins with a connection north to the Sunrise Prairie Regional Trail (in the City of Wyoming). On the south end, the trail will connect to Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park (in White Bear Township), and ultimately to the larger Ramsey County regional trail system. From the north to south, the trail follows the Burlington Northern Railroad corridor, adjacent to Highway 61, from the Chisago County border in the north, to 140th Street in Hugo. Between 140th Street and Falcon Court, an interim trail route is identified in the master plan to provide near-term means to get around a part of the corridor where rail use will remain active for an undefined period of time.</p> <p>Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of trail development will take into consideration the timing of related projects.</p>

Point Douglas Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Destination
Regional Significance:	
<p>The Point Douglas Regional Trail is a multiple-use trail in southeastern Washington County. The trail runs west along the backwaters and main channel of the Mississippi River, providing vistas of the river. The trail is a key link in the regional network, connecting to the Mississippi River Trail Bikeway, the planned St Croix Valley Regional Trail, and trails in Dakota County and St Croix County (WI). The trail will also provide vital connections to local trails, parks, schools, and businesses.</p>	
Existing Development:	
<p>The existing Hardwood Creek Regional Trail begins at the Point Douglas County Park trailhead and heads west, crosses under US Highway 10 and initially follows the south side of the highway until it ties into an old rail bed right-of-way previously acquired by Washington County. Approaching US Highway 61, the trail turns south, extending over an active rail line, and connecting to an existing trail along the east side of the highway. The trail then crosses over the Mississippi and heads into Hastings.</p>	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2012.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Point Douglas Regional Trail was developed in accordance to the master plan and is approximately 2.5 miles long. The master plan will continue to guide future acquisition and improvements, as needed.



St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Destination
Regional Significance:	
<p>The St Croix Valley Regional Trail is a planned multiple-use trail in southeastern Washington County. Once fully developed, it will link Downtown Afton, Afton State Park, St Croix Bluffs Regional Park, Point Douglas County Park and Regional Trail, and Carpenter Nature Center into Washing County’s trail system. The trail will also provide vital connections to local trails, parks, schools, and businesses.</p>	
Existing Development:	
The St. Croix Valley Regional Trail is not developed.	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2001
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide future acquisition and trail development. The St Croix Valley Regional Trail will be approximately 20.5 miles long.</p> <p>From north to south, the master plan’s optimal route starts in the city of Afton at Steamboat Park where an existing trail terminates. The planned trail follows the east side of County Road 21/ St. Croix Trail moving south, where it enters Afton State Park. The optimal trail diverts into two branches on the south end of Afton State Park. One branch follows Quadrant Avenue South, and the other follows the park entrance drive and continues south on County Road 21/St. Croix Trail. The trail branches converge at 87th Street and County Road 21/St. Croix Trail. It then follows County Road 21/ St. Croix Trail south until it enters St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park. Heading south from the regional park, the planned trail will continue along the east side of County Road 21/St. Croix Trail until 117th Street South, where it traverses through Carpenter Nature Center. The proposed route continues heading south following an old rail grade until it connects with Point Douglas County Park and Regional Trail.</p> <p>Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of trail development will take into consideration the timing of related projects.</p>

Regional Linking Trails



Linking trails are predominately intended to provide connections between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks or park reserves. These trails should also attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route, when feasible. The corridor must sufficiently accommodate trail users and should have no adverse impact on the area’s natural resource base.

This section will provide profiles of each of the following regional linking trails within Washington County:

- Central Greenway Regional Trail
- Lake Links Regional Trail

Central Greenway Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	South Segment (Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park to I-94) – Regional Linking Trail Lake Elmo Segment (I-94 to Hwy 36) – Regional Trail Search Corridor North Segment (Hwy 36 to Big Marine Park Reserve) – Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
The Central Greenway Regional Trail is a multiple-use trail that will run north-south through the center of Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations, including Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Big Marine Park Reserve, future Washington County regional trails, and the Gateway and Brown’s Creek state trails. The trail will also provide vital connections to local trails, parks, schools, and businesses.	
Existing Development:	
The Central Greenway Regional Trail is not fully planned or developed. The proposed South Segment alignment runs 9.65 miles primarily along County Road 19/Keats Avenue. The 4-mile section between I-94 and County Road 18/Bailey Road within the South Segment is developed. The Lake Elmo and North segments of the Central Greenway Regional Trail could identify existing trails as part of Central Greenway during the master planning process.	
Planning Status:	The Central Greenway – South Segment Master Plan was adopted in 2017. A master plan is needed for the Lake Elmo Segment and North Segment.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide future acquisition and trail development. The Central Greenway Regional Trail will be approximately 30 miles long.</p> <p>The South Segment of the trail is planned and the proposed alignment runs 9.65 miles primarily along County Road 19/Keats Avenue, from Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park to I-94. Two different alignments were identified for the section of trail between Military Road and Dale Road within the South Segment. Washington County will determine which alignment is best suited for trail development at a future date.</p> <p>The Lake Elmo Segment and North Segment alignments will be determined through a future master planning process.</p> <p>Implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available. Phasing of trail development will take into consideration the timing of related projects.</p>

Lake Links Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Linking Trail
Regional Significance:	
<p>The Lake Links Regional Trail is a planned multiple-use trail that extends from Ramsey County into north Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users with regional destinations in Washington County; including the Central Greenway Regional Trail, and the Gateway and Brown’s Creek state trails. The planned trail includes segments within Ramsey County, connecting to the greater regional trail network. The trail will also provide vital connections to local trails, parks, schools, and businesses.</p>	
Existing Development:	
<p>The Lake Links Regional Trail is planned but not fully developed. The optimal regional trail route segments are not under the jurisdiction of Washington County.</p>	
Planning Status:	A master plan was adopted in 2001
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	<p>The master plan will guide future acquisition and trail development. The Lake Links Regional Trail will be approximately 34.1 miles long, across both Ramsey and Washington Counties.</p> <p>The trail’s master plan designates Highway 96 as the regional trail optimal route, beginning at the intersection of Highway 244 and linking the Gateway State Trail and Brown’s Creek State Trail. The Lake Links master plan also designates local-level trails that feed into the area’s regional and state trails. The local trail optimal route within Washington County includes a loop around White Bear Lake, connecting Birchwood Village, Willernie, Mahtomedi, and Dellwood.</p> <p>The existing and planned regional and local segments of trail identified in the master plan are not under the jurisdiction of Washington County.</p>

Search Corridors

Some regional trails have been envisioned as parts of the regional trail system for several years and have been included in past comprehensive plans. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Metropolitan Council as part of a master plan, and are therefore not yet part of the regional trail system funding for acquisition and development, they are considered regional trail search corridors. Once an alignment is approved through a master plan process, they will be designated as regional trails.

This section will provide profiles of each of the following regional trail search corridors within Washington County:

- Glacier Hills Regional Trail
- Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail
- Afton Bluffs Regional Trail
- Mississippi River Regional Trail
- Prairie View Regional Trail

Glacier Hills Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
The Glacier Hills Regional Trail will be a multiple-use trail that will run through northern Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations; including, Hardwood Creek and Central Greenway Regional Trails, Big Marine Park Reserve and William O’Brien State Park. The trail will also provide vital connections to local destinations; including, trails, parks, schools, and businesses.	
Existing Development:	
The Glacier Hills Regional Trail is not planned or fully developed. A master planning process could identify existing trails as part of regional trail alignment.	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for the Glacier Hills Regional Trail.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Glacier Hills Regional Trail alignment will be determined through a future master planning process. A master plan will also guide future acquisition and trail development.

Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
<p>The Middle St Croix Valley Regional Trail will be a multiple-use trail that will run through eastern Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations, including the Brown’s Creek State Trail. The trail will also provide vital connections to local destinations; including, trails, parks, schools, and businesses. The Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor links to the St. Croix Crossing and the corresponding Loop Trail – important non-motorized transportation features within the county.</p> <p>During the next update to the Regional Parks Policy Plan, Washington County will seek to extend this Regional Trail Search Corridor south along County Road 18 to County Road 21, connecting to the planned St. Croix Valley Regional Trail.</p>	
Existing Development:	
The Middle St Croix Valley Regional Trail is not planned or fully developed. A master planning process could identify existing trails as part of regional trail alignment.	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for the Middle St Croix Valley Regional Trail
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail alignment will be determined through a future master planning process. A master plan will also guide future acquisition and trail development.

Afton Bluffs Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
<p>The Afton Bluffs Regional Trail will be a multiple-use trail that will run through Woodbury and Afton. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations; including, Central Greenway and St Croix Valley Regional Trails, Afton State Park, and Battle Creek Regional Park (Ramsey County). The trail will also provide vital connections to local destinations; including, trails, parks, schools, and businesses.</p>	
Existing Development:	
The Afton Bluffs Regional Trail is not planned or fully developed. A master planning process could identify existing trails as part of regional trail alignment.	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for the Afton Bluffs Regional Trail.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Afton Bluffs Regional Trail alignment will be determined through a future master planning process. A master plan will also guide future acquisition and trail development.

Mississippi River Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
The Mississippi River Regional Trail will be a multiple-use trail that will run through southern Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations; including, Central Greenway, Mississippi River, and Point Douglas Regional Trails, Grey Cloud Island Regional Park, and Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park. The trail will also provide vital connections to local destinations; including, trails, parks, schools, and businesses.	
Existing Development:	
The Mississippi River Regional Trail is not planned or fully developed. A master planning process could identify existing trails as part of regional trail alignment.	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for the Mississippi River Regional Trail.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Mississippi River Regional Trail alignment will be determined through a future master planning process. A master plan will also guide future acquisition and trail development.

Prairie View Regional Trail	
Existing Conditions:	
Trail Classification:	Regional Trail Search Corridor
Regional Significance:	
The Prairie View Regional Trail will be a multiple-use trail that will run through southern Washington County. Once fully developed, it will connect trail users to regional destinations; including, Central Greenway, Mississippi River, and St. Croix Valley Regional Trails. The trail will also provide vital connections to local destinations; including, trails, parks, schools, and businesses.	
Existing Development:	
The Prairie View Regional Trail is not planned or fully developed. A master planning process could identify existing trails as part of regional trail alignment.	
Planning Status:	A master plan is needed for the Prairie View Regional Trail.
Development Concept:	
Proposed Development:	The Prairie View Regional Trail alignment will be determined through a future master planning process. A master plan will also guide future acquisition and trail development.

State Trails

A state trail is described as a route that connects state or national park destinations, and provides access to significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreational areas. State trails tend to be on abandoned railroad grades and accommodate both non-motorized and motorized uses. State trails are operated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The following subsections will provide profiles of the state trails within Washington County:

- Gateway State Trail
- Brown’s Creek State Trail

State Trails	
Gateway State Trail	
Distance:	18 miles
Description:	Located on a former Soo Line Railroad grade, the Gateway State Trail is generally level and accessible to users of all abilities. The paved trail connects St. Paul to Pine Point Regional Park, and passes through a diverse cross-section of urban areas, parks, lakes, wetlands and fields in both Ramsey and Washington Counties. Trail users find rural landscapes and access to downtown Saint Paul and the State Capitol complex.
Brown’s Creek State Trail	
Distance:	6 miles
Description:	Situated on the former Minnesota Zephyr railroad grade, the Brown’s Creek State Trail is generally level and accessible to users of all abilities. The paved trail connects the Gateway State Trail in Grant to downtown Stillwater and a growing network of trails to the south and east of Stillwater. Two miles of the state trail is adjacent to Brown's Creek, a designated trout stream with a dense forest canopy and steep-sided slopes. Other segments of the trail lie parallel to the St. Croix River.

Open Space



Washington County is committed to protecting its natural resources to assure a high quality of life. This requires us to meet current needs without placing environmental, economic, and social burdens on future generations to meet their own needs. Multifaceted and collaborative approaches are underway at the county to secure this envisioned future, though more work and investment is needed to stabilize and reverse the declining health of our natural resources.

The following summarizes the existing conditions of the natural resource assets in the county.

Existing Conditions

Soils

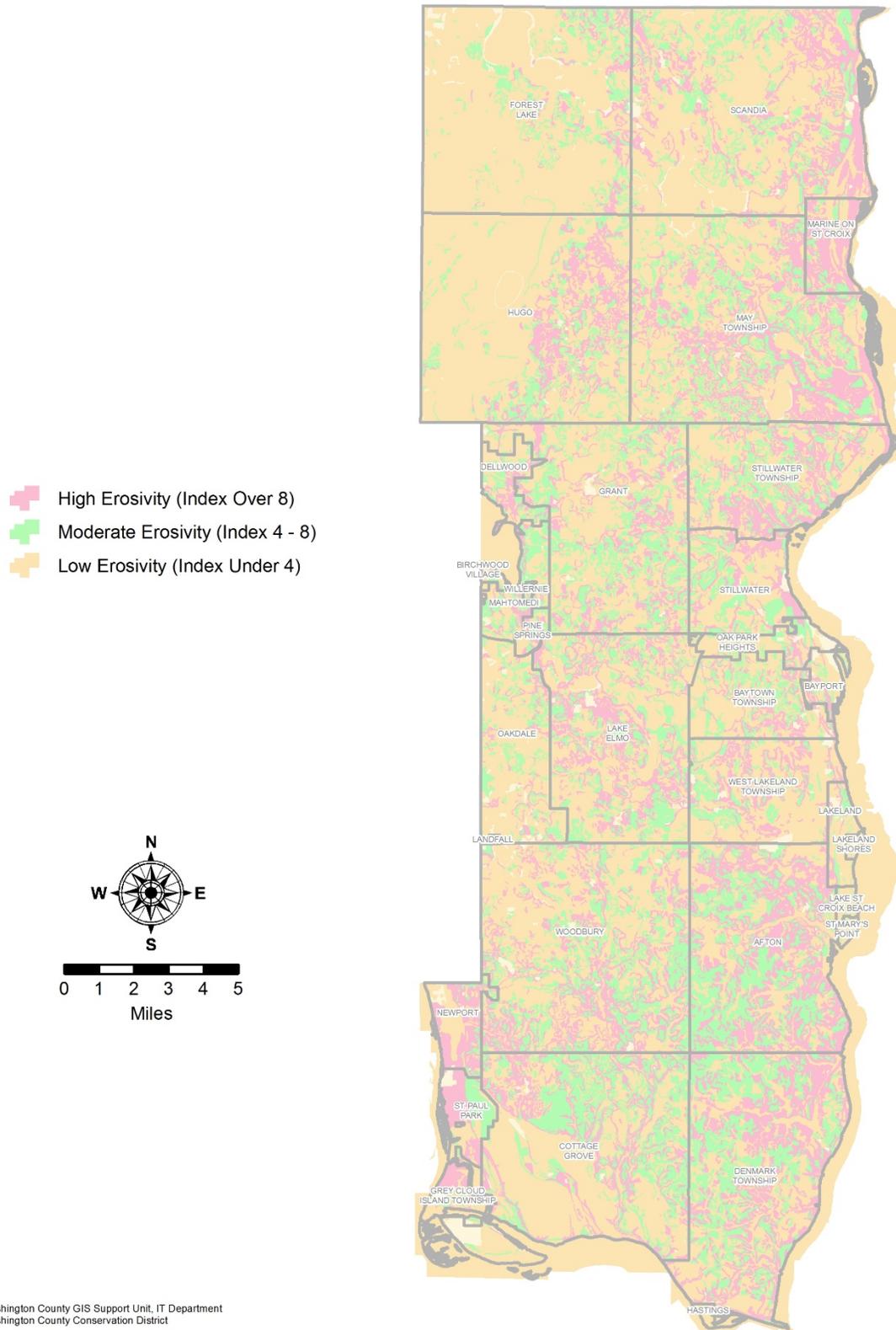
As erosion, vegetation, and other factors changed glacial deposits, a wide variety of distinct soil types evolved in Washington County. The Natural Resource Conservation Service's Soil Survey for Washington County describes 14 major and over 100 minor soil types in the county. The soils are classified according to the origination of their parent materials, coarseness, slope, and drainage. The Soil Survey includes the suitability of the soil as a source material for particular uses. Notable conditions in Washington County include:

- Bedrock within three feet of the surface can be encountered along the St. Croix River and in other scattered areas of the county.
- Wet soils with slow percolation rates are prevalent throughout the northern half of the county. These soils are periodically flooded or have a high water table.
- Steep slopes are common along the St. Croix River.

Areas with bedrock near the surface, steep slopes, wet or periodically flooded areas, or soils with slow percolation rates signal inappropriate areas for development. Though Washington County has made progress through the use of zoning, shore land and other protection tools, development efforts continue to drain and build in sensitive areas best left in a natural state.

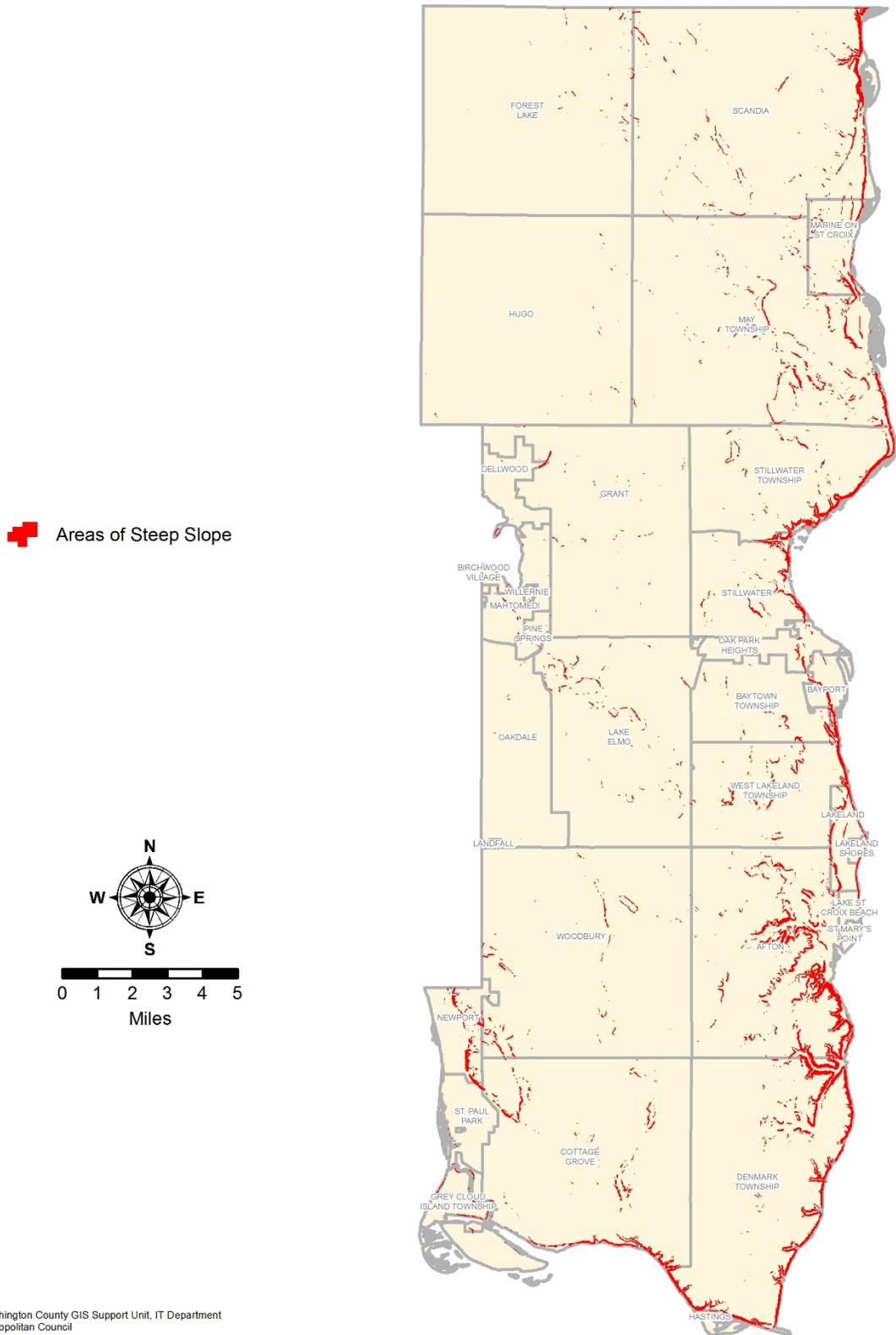


Figure 11: Erosion-Prone Slopes



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
Data Source: Washington County Conservation District

Figure 12: Steep Slopes



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
Data Source: Metropolitan Council

Though considered part of the metro area, Washington County still retains rural areas and significant active agriculture. Farmland acres in Washington County decreased by 68 percent between 1950 and 2012 from 249,600 acres on 1,642 farms to 80,901 acres on 602 farms (US Census on Agriculture).

The prime soils for farmland are predominantly located in the southern part of the county in Denmark Township and the cities of Cottage Grove and Afton (see Figure 13). Soils classified as prime farmland have a good combination of moisture-holding capacity, permeability, natural fertility, non-sloping land, and chemical composition for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops (row crops). These lands must have a suitable growing season, an adequate moisture supply, an acceptable level of alkalinity or acidity, and few rocks.

Aggregate and Mineral Resources

Outwash sand and gravel deposits are the predominant natural aggregate resource in Washington County. Deposits are located along the St. Croix River and within the cities of Woodbury and Cottage Grove. Dolomite is abundant throughout Washington County. Quarries that provide this material comprise the bulk of the carbonate used locally for building and road construction.

The majority of the sand and gravel material, as well as limestone resources, are located along the bluffs and plains near the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers (see Figure 14)

Washington County is a major provider of these resources for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Currently, the aggregate supply from the Grey Cloud mine in southern Washington County is estimated to have a potential 30-year aggregate supply and a mine in Dakota County a 50-year supply to support the seven county metro area. Additional information about mining resources can be found in the Land Use section.

Land Cover and Plant Communities

In the last ten years, the county has indeed experienced changes in the landscape. Before settlement, as much as 80 percent of the county was forested. The most recent Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) inventory completed between 2005 and 2016 found 13.84 percent of the county currently forested or woodland. The northern half of the county retains remnants of the original forests with the largest stands along the St. Croix River. The county's woodlands mostly consist of oak woods and maple/basswood forest. Stands of birch, aspen, pine, and tamarack are scattered around the county. See Figure 15 for a map of the current large blocks of forest interior in the county.

Figure 13: Prime Farmland Soils

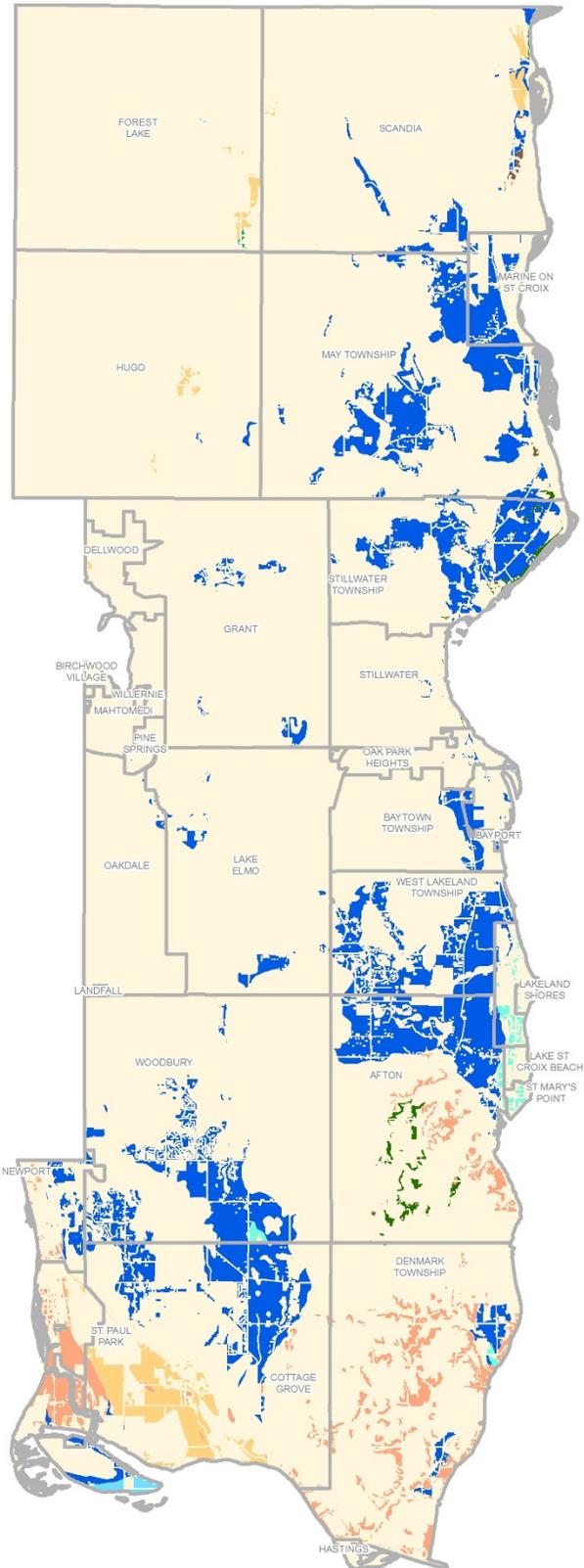
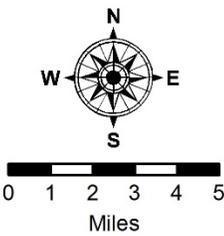


Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Metropolitan Council

Figure 14: Prime Aggregate Resources

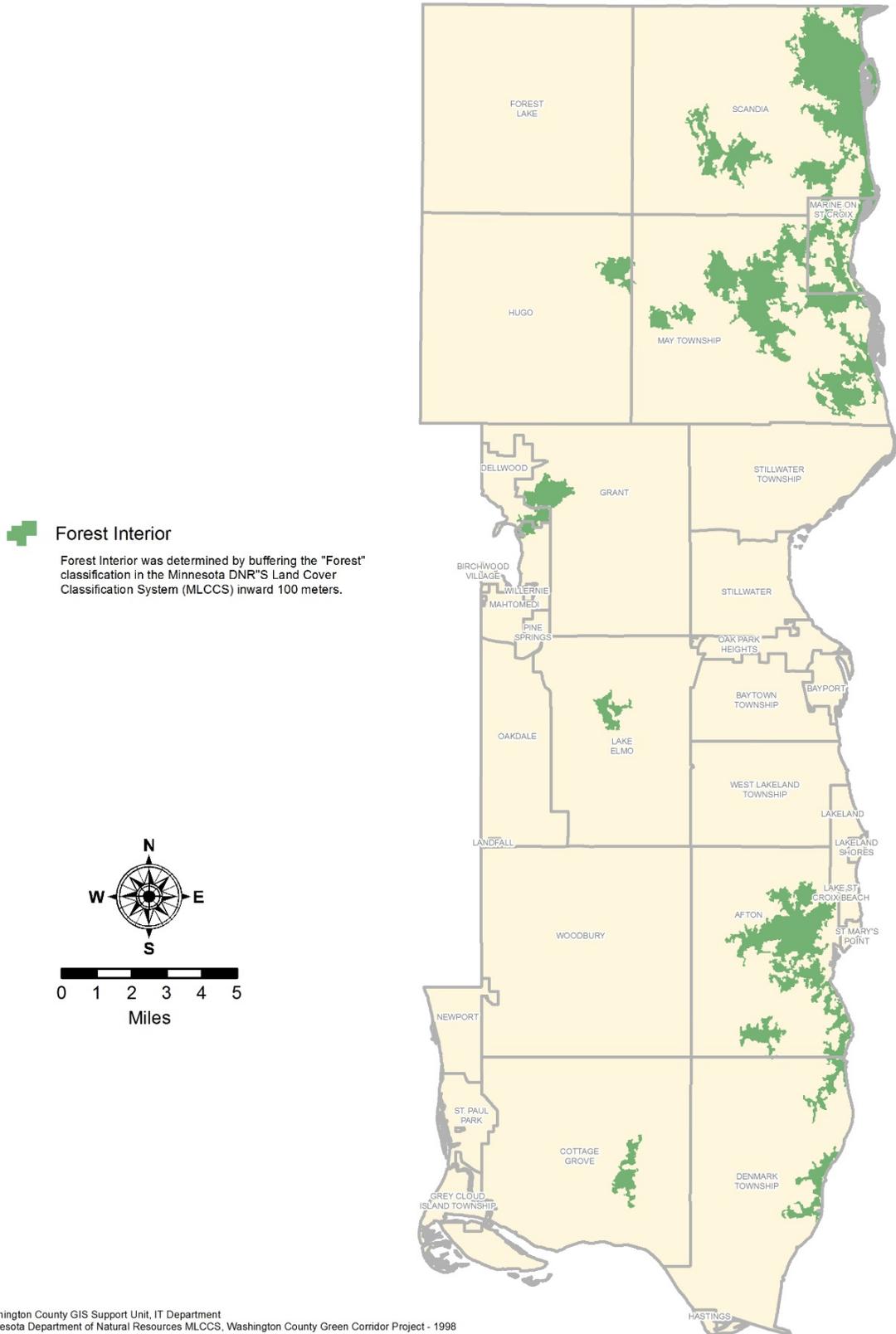
Aggregate Deposit Classification

-  Class A - Prairie du Chien Dolostone > 30 ft thick
-  Class B - Prairie du Chien Dolostone >10 <30 ft thick
-  Class C - Prairie du Chien Dolostone < 10 ft thick
-  Class 2 - Des Moines Lobe Sand and Gravel > 20 ft thick, poor to moderate quality
-  Class 3 - Des Moines Lobe Sand and Gravel > 20 ft thick, moderate to good quality
-  Class 4 - Superior Lobe Sand and Gravel > 20 ft thick, good to excellent quality
-  Class 5 - Des Moines Lobe Sand and Gravel 10-40 ft thick, poor to moderate quality
-  Class 6 - Des Moines Lobe Sand and Gravel 10-40 ft thick, moderate to good quality
-  Class 7 - Superior Lobe Sand and Gravel 10-40 ft thick, good to excellent quality
-  Class 10 - Des Moines Lobe Sand and Gravel > 40 ft thick, moderate to good quality
-  Class 11 - Superior Lobe Sand and Gravel > 40 ft thick, good to excellent quality



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Metropolitan Council - 1997

Figure 15: Forest Interior

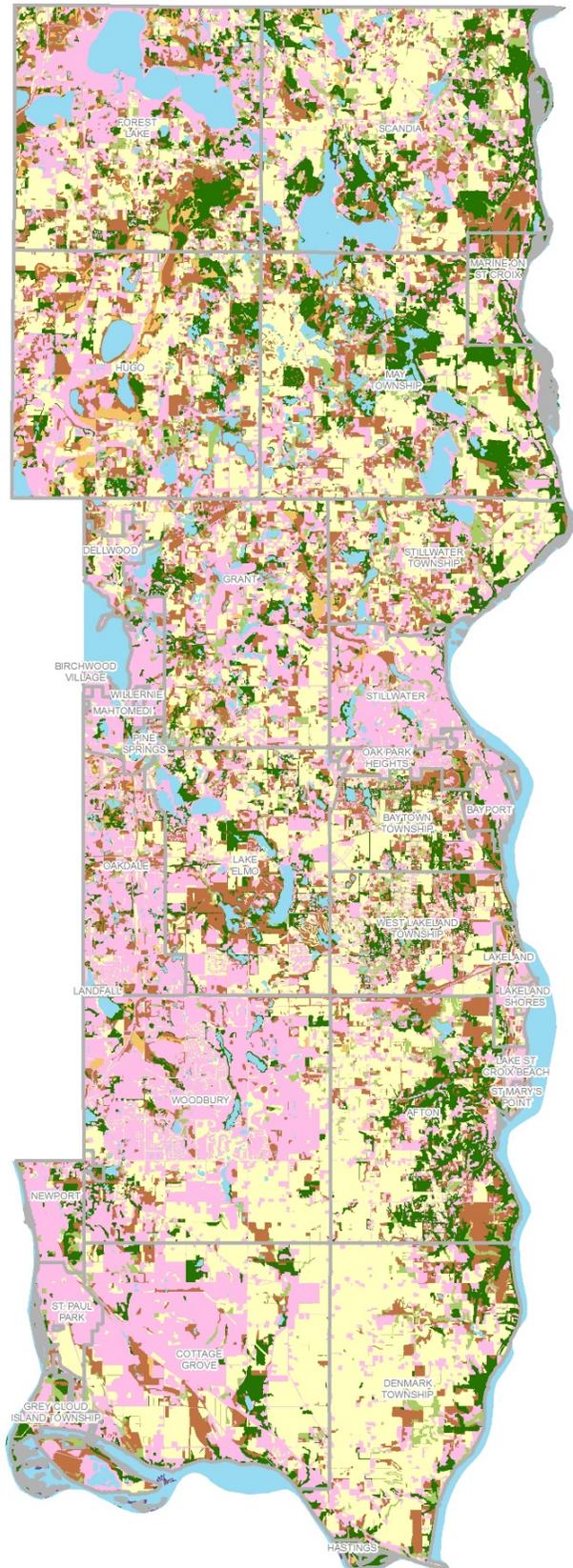
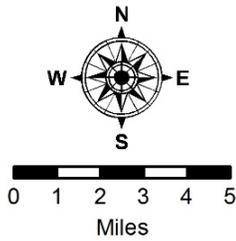


Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources MLCCS, Washington County Green Corridor Project - 1998

Figure 16: MLCCS Land Cover Types

Minnesota Land Cover Classification System

- Undefined
-  Impervious surfaces
-  Cultural vegetation
-  Forests
-  Woodlands
-  Shrublands
-  Herbaceous
-  Non-vascular veg.
-  Sparse vegetation
-  Water



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
Data Source: Washington Conservation District 12/12/2017

The MLCCS identified the following land cover types in Washington County. Figure 16 shows the location of each type.

Table 6: MLCCS Land Cover Types in Washington County

Cover Type	2005		2016		Net Change	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Light Density Development (4-25% Impervious)	34,606	12.78%	35,873	13.25%	1,267	0.47%
Medium Density Development (26-75% Impervious)	24,674	9.11%	27,105	10.01%	2,431	0.90%
High Density Development (76-100% Impervious)	11,505	4.25%	12,294	4.54%	789	0.29%
Cropland	56,244	20.77%	50,170	18.53%	-6,074	-2.24%
Forest & Woodlands	37,463	13.84%	38,334	14.16%	871	0.31%
Wetlands	28,550	10.54%	28,259	10.44%	-291	-0.11%
Grasslands	25,331	9.36%	25,109	9.27%	-222	-0.08%
Exposed and Transitional Lands & Mines	3,975	1.47%	4,066	1.50%	91	0.03%
Planted and Maintained Grasses	20,972	7.75%	21,886	8.08%	914	0.34%
Planted Trees & Nurseries	6,852	2.53%	6,974	2.58%	122	0.05%
Open Water	20,790	7.68%	20,886	7.71%	96	0.04%
Total	270,962*	--	270,956*	--	--	--

*Acreages were calculated within ArcMap and may not be identical to other data sets due to differing coordinate systems and source data. The six-acre discrepancy is due to rounding during analysis. Data source: Washington Conservation District.

There appears to be a trend of development of cropland with a combined 24 percent being developed to some degree, which is especially prevalent in the Lake Elmo, Stillwater, Woodbury, and Cottage Grove communities. An additional 18 percent is either in the process of being developed (transitional) or has been mined for sand and gravel. Nearly 20 percent has also been reclassified as grasslands. This should be viewed with some caution, however, as those new grasslands may be occasionally hayed rather than remaining in an undisturbed state. The same may be said of the 27 percent reclassified as planted or maintained grasses. Another finding to consider is the 291-acre change in wetlands. This is an artifact of changes in classifications to more accurately represent water bodies.

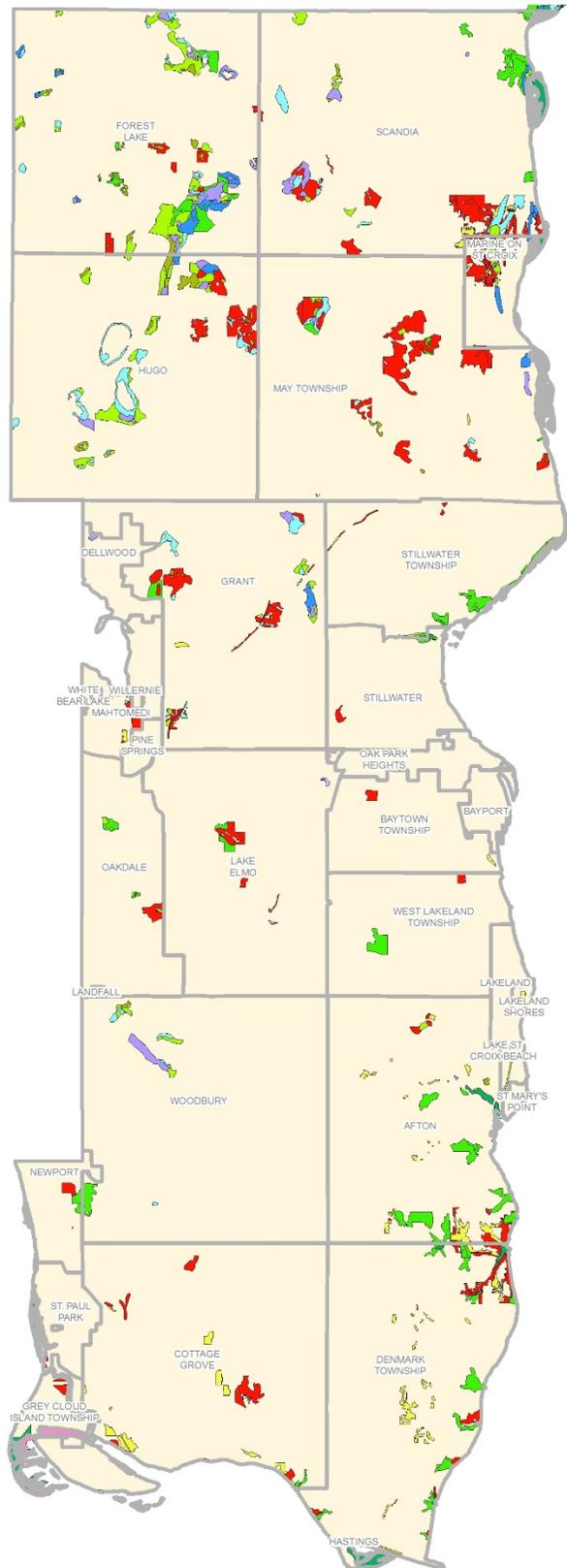
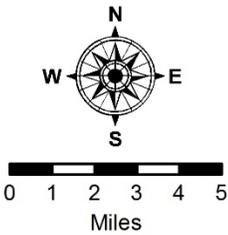
As a result of human activities such as logging, farming, and development, most of the county's native vegetation has been developed or converted to row crops. Figure 17 shows the county's land area containing native vegetative cover.

Other important native vegetation exists in small remnants of native prairie and in a variety of wetland areas such as fens, marshes, swamps, and bogs. Restoration efforts are increasing and many prairie and forest communities are being restored on public and private lands.

Figure 17: County Biological Survey

DNR Native Plant Communities

-  Acid Peatland System
-  Cliff/Talus System
-  Fire-Dependent Forest/Woodland System
-  Floodplain Forest System
-  Forested Rich Peatland System
-  Lakeshore System
-  Marsh System
-  Mesic Hardwood Forest System
-  Open Rich Peatland System
-  River Shore System
-  Rock Outcrop System
-  Upland Prairie System
-  Wet Forest System
-  Wet Meadow/Carr System
-  Wetland Prairie System
-  Complex community



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Water



Washington County recognizes that healthy ground and surface water are essential for life and healthy communities and is committed to protecting this valuable resource. Information on the county’s water resources can be found in the Water section (LINK to Water Resources Section).

Animals and Insects

Current data also suggest an overall dramatic pattern of decline in animal and insect diversity and abundance in many parts of the world. The decline of honeybee populations has received widespread public attention in recent years, in large measure because of their vital role in pollinating food crops. Insects play a central role in a variety of processes, including pollination, plant eating and nutrient cycling and providing a food source for higher trophic levels such as birds, bats, other mammals and amphibians. Ongoing loss of animal and insect diversity and abundance provokes cascading effects on food webs and jeopardizes ecosystem services. Recognizing the significance of this, Washington County will assess strategies to minimize impact to animal and insect habitat.

Washington County Land Acquisitions and Conservation Easements

Future generations deserve healthy environmental commons – soil, water, air, climate, insects, and animals. Land acquisitions and conservation easements are two approaches used by the County to assure the commons are protected and cared for generation after generation in perpetuity.

History of Washington County Land Protection Efforts

Time Line

- 1970s & 1980s

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service acquired scenic easements along the St. Croix River. Scenic easements are agreements between a landowner and a government agency to protect and preserve views of scenic river districts or byways. These easements typically are held in perpetuity and are a thin corridor along the shore or bluff tops. Nearly all the scenic easements in Washington County are located along the St. Croix River in the communities of Afton, Scandia, and May, and Stillwater, and Denmark townships.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the landowner and a conservation organization, whereby the landowner agrees to limit or prohibit development and other activities on the land for the purposes of protecting the natural characteristics of the land. The land typically remains in private ownership and future landowners are bound by the terms of the conservation easement in perpetuity. Washington County or a nonprofit conservation organization typically holds and enforces the conservation easement. Each conservation easement is unique, specifically tailored to the natural characteristics of the land and to the particular situation of the landowner. Easements are filed with county land records.

- 1990s

Washington County Land Trust (later reincorporated to become the Minnesota Land Trust) began acquiring conservation easements throughout the county. Conservation easements are used to protect natural, scenic, or open-space values of properties. These easements typically are held in perpetuity and prohibit or greatly restrict development of the property.

- 2000

Washington County began actively protecting its most precious remaining resources through its Purchase of Development Rights Program after receiving a small grant from the State of Minnesota that resulted in protection of 203 acres of corridors of green space in the County.

- 2006

Washington County residents voted in favor of a Preservation of Water Quality, Woodlands and Other Natural Areas bond referendum. It authorized the County to spend \$20 million to acquire land and interests in land to improve water quality of rivers, lakes and streams; protect drinking water sources; purchase parkland; preserve wetlands and woodlands; and help protect land along water bodies from development. This occurred two years before passage of the Clean Water, Land and “Legacy Amendment” to the state constitution in 2008 that set aside state funds for clean water, improved parks and outdoor habitats and a stronger cultural sector.

A scenic easement is the right to control the use of land (including the air space above such land) within the authorized boundaries of a component of the wild and scenic river system, for the purpose of protecting the natural qualities of a designated wild, scenic, or recreational river area, but such control shall not affect, without the owner’s consent, any regular use exercised prior to the acquisition of the easement. Each easement is unique, specifically tailored to the natural characteristics of the land and to the particular situation of the landowner. Easements are filed with county land records.

In 1972, Minnesota enacted the Lower St. Croix Wild and Scenic River Act to protect the river and its values. The St. Croix River is in the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

Land and Water Legacy Program History

The 2006 referendum outcome became branded as the Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program (LWLP). To further define priority areas for investment, an extensive natural resource assessment, analysis and mapping process of undeveloped natural areas using the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System and other datasets was undertaken. The data helped identify the top ten high priority natural areas in the county in addition to the high prioritization of land along the St. Croix River (see Figure 18). As a result of this process, the Washington County Board of Commissioners also established the following more defined general priorities beyond those established by the 2006 referendum:

- County parkland, including recreational trails
- Lands adjacent to waterways, recreational trails, parks, and other public facilities
- Lands adjacent to already protected lands
- Lands serving multiple public purposes and allowing public access
- Projects that leverage additional dollars from other sources.

It was determined that ideal Land and Water Legacy Program projects are also accessible or visible to the public, create ecological connections and corridors of natural space, are adjacent to a major lake, stream or river, and contain high quality natural features. It was further determined that projects brought forth by local governments could be elevated to high priority status if identified in a land protection plan. The county’s POSC participates in reviewing and making recommendations on projects under consideration for LWLP funding. The County Board formally approves all projects.

Since the referendum’s passage, the county has worked only with voluntary landowners and organizations to purchase or accept donations or interests in high priority land directly or in partnership with cities, townships, public agencies and nonprofit conservation groups. To date, almost \$9 million of Land and Water Legacy bond funds, leveraging more than \$14 million in non-county funds, have been spent to protect 484 acres of the county’s most precious natural resources. Parcels purchased for inclusion in the county’s park system are typically paid for with a 25 percent contribution from the Land and Water Legacy Program and 75 percent contribution from the Metropolitan Council.

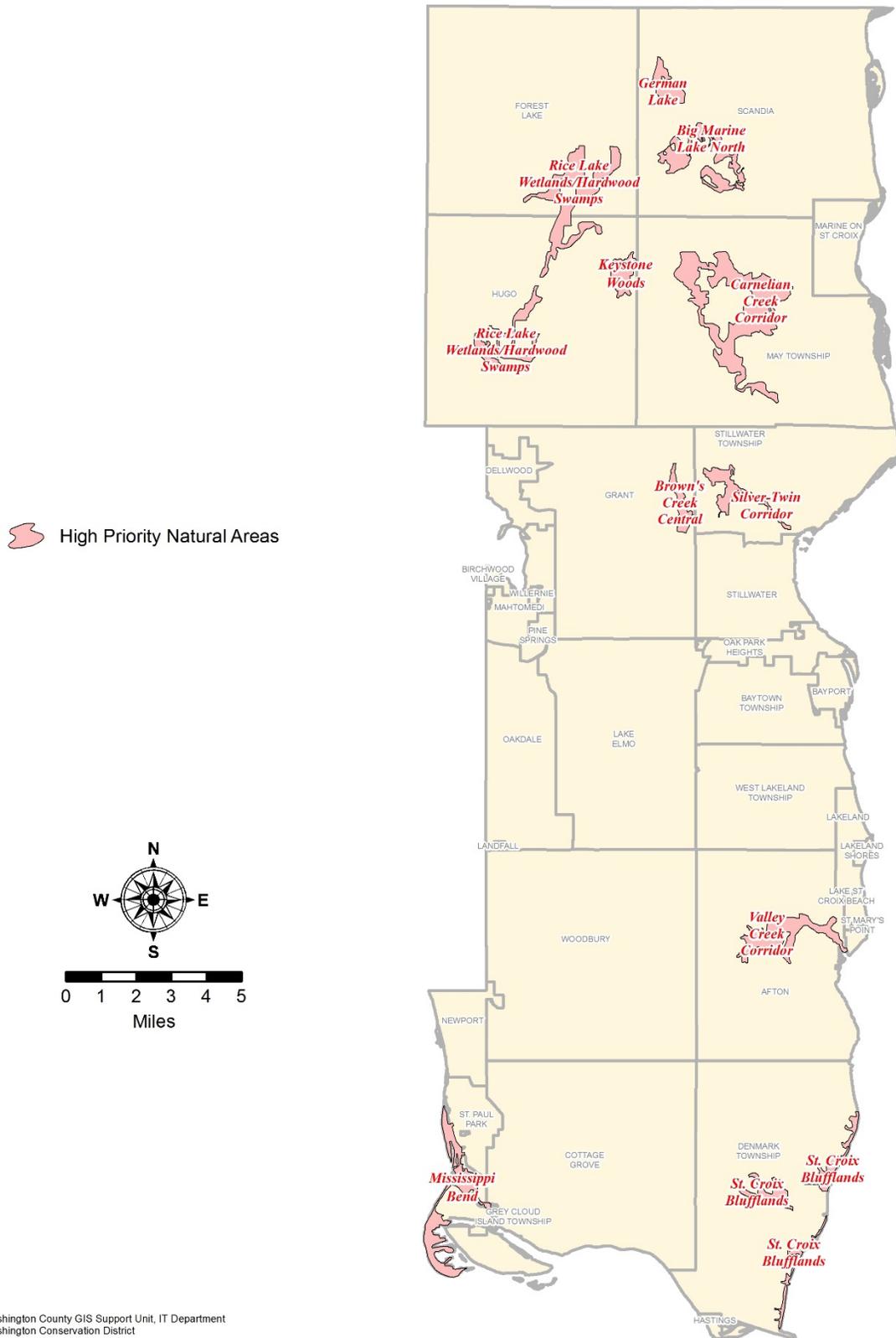
Land and Water Legacy Program funds have been used to protect 484 acres, including 297 acquired acres (153 acres of these for inclusion in the county parks system) and three conservation easements on 187 privately held acres. Seven conservation easements over 203 acres were also acquired through the Purchase of Development Rights Program, the predecessor of the Land and Water Legacy Program.

Washington County Protected Lands

The County continues its efforts to implement residents’ mandate to work with partners and landowners to place additional land into protection through willing-seller acquisitions and easements.

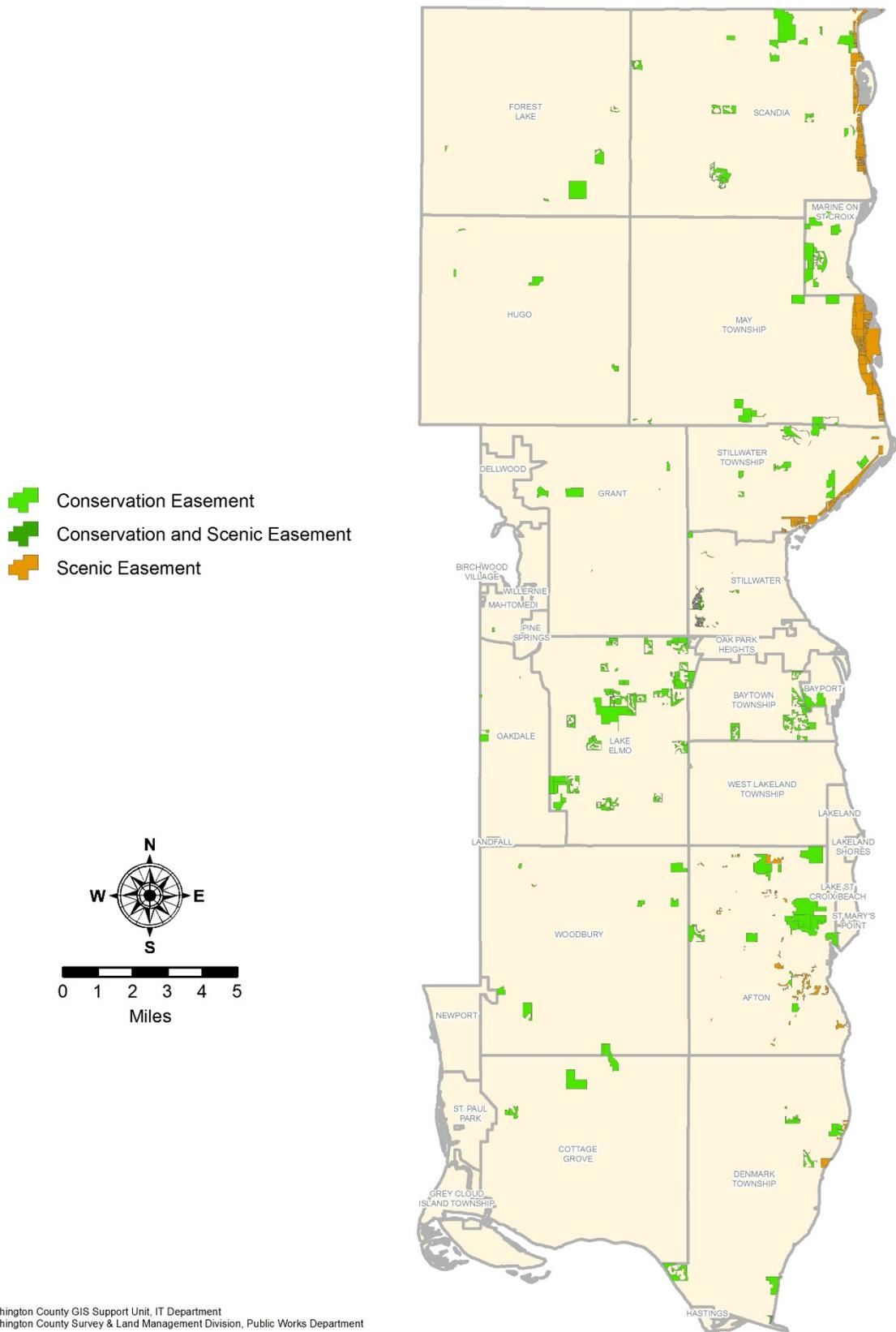
- Department of Natural Resources – 3,425 acres
 - 126 acres in conservation and scenic easements
- National Park Service – 2,402 acres
 - 687 acres in fee ownership
 - 1,715 acres in scenic easements
- Washington County Parks and Regional Reserves – 4,404 acres
- Nature centers – 741 acres
 - Carpenter Nature Center 425 acres
 - 80 acres in conservation and scenic easements
 - Warner Nature Center 316 acres
- Conservation and scenic easements – 7,761 acres
 - As of 2018, a total of 577 conservation and scenic easements are recorded in Washington County.
 - Figure 19 shows the location of these easements.

Figure 18: High-Priority Natural Areas



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Washington Conservation District

Figure 19: Conservation Scenic Easements



Prepared By: Washington County GIS Support Unit, IT Department
 Data Source: Washington County Survey & Land Management Division, Public Works Department

Goals, Policies, and Strategies

To guide future decision making and county actions, goals, policies and strategies have been developed specific to the parks, trails, and open space element. The following pages outline three goals with corresponding policies and strategies that set the course for the county’s future. Chapter 3, Goals, Polices, and Strategies, also provides the information contained within this section, along with the goals for the other plan elements. Chapter 11, Implementation, provides tools that can be utilized while working to achieve these goals.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Goal 1: Plan, build, and maintain growing network of parks and trails that serve our communities and the greater region.	
Parks, Trails, and Open Space Policy	Parks, Trails, and Open Space Strategy
Prioritize investment in infrastructure and facilities to ensure safe, high quality experiences for park users.	Continue to assess condition of infrastructure and facilities.
	Provide timely and quality maintenance of existing infrastructure, facilities, and equipment.
	Assess, rank and fund new park and trail infrastructure and facilities.
Plan and build the park system to serve the needs of a growing and changing county and region.	Plan and adopt new park master plans; including, Square Lake Special Recreation Feature and Pine Point Regional Park.
	Assess the role of sites not currently a part of the regional or county park system for future inclusion in the park system.
Plan and build the trail system to link our regional parks and connect communities to local and regional amenities.	Plan and adopt trail master plans; including, Central Greenway Regional Trail (central segment) and St. Croix Valley Regional Trail (middle segment).
	Adopt a bicycle and pedestrian plan to address county recreation and transportation needs.
	Consider trail investment a priority in developing the capital improvement plan.
	Assess county policy on trail maintenance.
Incorporate principles of public health and sustainability into park and trail planning, operations, and maintenance.	Plan parks and trails to support healthy lifestyle choices.
	Incorporate active living by design in projects to support county health and wellness initiatives.
	Incorporate green infrastructure, pollinator-friendly habitat, sustainable landscaping and public art in projects, where feasible.
	Increase energy efficiency in facilities, operations, and maintenance.
	Whenever feasible, evaluate and implement operational best practices to reduce adverse impact of salt, pesticide, and fertilizer use to natural resources.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Goal 2: Protect, enhance, and provide access to precious public resources – our land, water, and open space – through conservation and stewardship.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Policy	Parks, Trails, and Open Space Strategy
<p>Prioritize investment in the protection and management of high quality open space.</p>	Provide for ongoing investment to protect open space through land acquisition programs, such as Land and Water Legacy Program.
	Use Land and Water Legacy Program Conservation Priorities document to guide investment for the conservation of open space.
	Pursue land and right-of-way acquisition within and adjacent to regional parks and trails master plan boundaries.
	Continue partnering to expand open space acquisition and stewardship capacity.
	Develop and implement a plan to manage proper maintenance of conservation easements.
	Assess county policy on public access to protected open space.
	Evaluate strategies to protect agricultural resources and rural character within the open space system.
	Consider development of county conservation areas and greenways.
<p>Preserve, conserve, and restore natural resources by implementing sustainable practices that promote biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.</p>	Develop a comprehensive, strategic park natural resource management approach.
	Develop and implement sustainable forest management plans that address wildlife habitat, forest health, and future forest adaptation.
	Develop and implement sustainable agricultural practices on existing cropland fields.
	Develop and implement land management practices that include effective and innovative methods, such as conservation-based grazing.
	Enhance natural areas through active restoration.
	Use integrated pest management practices in invasive species management efforts.
	Mitigate impacts to high-value trees, wetlands, and other natural resources in all projects.
	Collaborate with governmental units and non-governmental organizations on land and water stewardship efforts. Coordinate partnerships to involve the community in the maintenance of parks and open space.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Goal 3: Provide opportunities for all people to connect to the outdoors by cultivating a welcoming environment, providing robust programming, and building partnerships.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Policy	Parks, Trails, and Open Space Strategy
<p>Engage the community in planning, stewardship, and programming through strategic partnerships and communication.</p>	<p>Conduct public engagement that minimizes barriers to participation and seeks input from a broad audience of community members.</p>
	<p>Develop educational opportunities and interpretive tools to spread awareness of County natural resource stewardship and sustainability efforts.</p>
	<p>Adopt a marketing and park visitor services plans to promote county parks, trails, and programs.</p>
	<p>Pursue mutually-beneficial partnerships that increase exposure to park and trail system.</p>
<p>Deliver a broad range of programs that provide opportunities for the public to experience the parks, trails, and open spaces.</p>	<p>Continue to use public-private partnerships in developing park programming.</p>
	<p>Expanding recreational opportunities and programs to grow park use in all seasons.</p>
	<p>Develop programs that provide the opportunity for visitors to connect with the county’s history.</p>
<p>Strengthen equitable usage of parks and trails, across age, income, race, ethnicity, national origin, educational attainment, and ability.</p>	<p>Target demographic groups underrepresented as park users in planning and programming efforts.</p>
	<p>Collaborate with the Metropolitan Council and other organizations on identifying implementable steps to strengthening equity within the parks and trails system.</p>
	<p>Use equity tools, such as Metropolitan Council’s equity lens, to evaluate projects.</p>
<p>Provide efficient and high-quality visitor services through innovation, technology, and trained staff.</p>	<p>Pursue technology upgrades, such as electronic pay stations, that will improve staff efficiency and service.</p>
	<p>Engage with the public on programs, events, and services through social media and other online tools.</p>
	<p>Measure and use visitor experience data to make informed decisions on park services.</p>
	<p>Continue efforts to provide staff with the training and resources to aptly serve an increasingly diverse audience of park and trail users.</p>