

## Chapter 5. Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan

### Introduction

The Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan provides a blueprint for Stearns County to follow in meeting regional needs for recreation and open space and working to preserve significant natural resources. The County's role in park and recreation planning is regional – it works to meet needs and provide facilities that are broader than those of an individual city or township. The County also plays a key role in coordinating among federal and state agencies and programs, municipal governments and semi-private or nonprofit organizations such as watershed and lake associations. This plan addresses both County park and recreational facilities and the County's role within the region. It draws upon and updates prior recreation plans. The chapter includes the following sections:

- Background: The Stearns County Park and Recreation System
  - The County Park Commission
  - Previous Park and Recreation Plans
  - Park Classification System
  - Service Areas
  - Recent System Additions
  - Federal and State Open Space Programs and Facilities
  - Public Opinion Survey
  - Park Dedication Requirements
- Issues and Challenges
- Goals and Objectives
- Policies and Action Items

### Background: The Stearns County Park and Recreation System

#### The County Park Commission

The Stearns County Park Commission was created by the County Board on October 20, 1970. Its responsibilities are described as follows:

- To study and determine the park, recreation and open space needs of the County and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and the County Board of Commissioners. Recommendations include “general and specific development standards and criteria for evaluating potential sites, the extent and objectives of county participation in outdoor recreation and a program for coordination with other groups or agencies, all in conjunction with the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan.”

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- To submit an annual work program and cost estimate to the Planning Commission and the Stearns County Board of Commissioners by July 1 of each year.

The Park Commission's mission statement is as follows: *To provide natural resource-oriented parks and outdoor recreation opportunities, that enhance the quality of life of Stearns County residents through physical fitness, community building and economic vitality.*

### Previous Parks and Recreation Plans

Stearns County's first recreation plan was developed in 1970, and was comprehensively updated in the mid-1980s. The 1970 plan established park acreage needs for local, county and state levels of government:

- State: 45 acres per 1,000 population
- County: 20 acres per 1,000
- Local (City/Township): 10 acres per 1,000

The expectation was that each level of government would provide the specified acreage for their population.

Beginning in 1985, County parks and planning staff conducted background research into growth trends and issues in the County and state. Their findings included the following:

- The greatest deficiency in the outdoor recreation system is in natural resource-oriented parks, and this should be considered the County's primary goal.
- Trends in outdoor recreation are toward preservation of natural resources, environmental education, and linear recreation facilities.
- The park acreage standards of the 1970 plan should be retained.

The *Stearns County Recreation Plan* was adopted by the County Commissioners in 1989 as the recreation component of the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan. This plan was largely incorporated into the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, with minor additions. The plan inventoried the County's recreational resources, established a parks classification system, and detailed existing plans to maintain and expand recreational amenities available to County residents and visitors.

### Parks Classification System

The 1989 Recreation Plan categorizes local and county recreation facilities as follows:

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**Table 5.1. Parks Classification System**

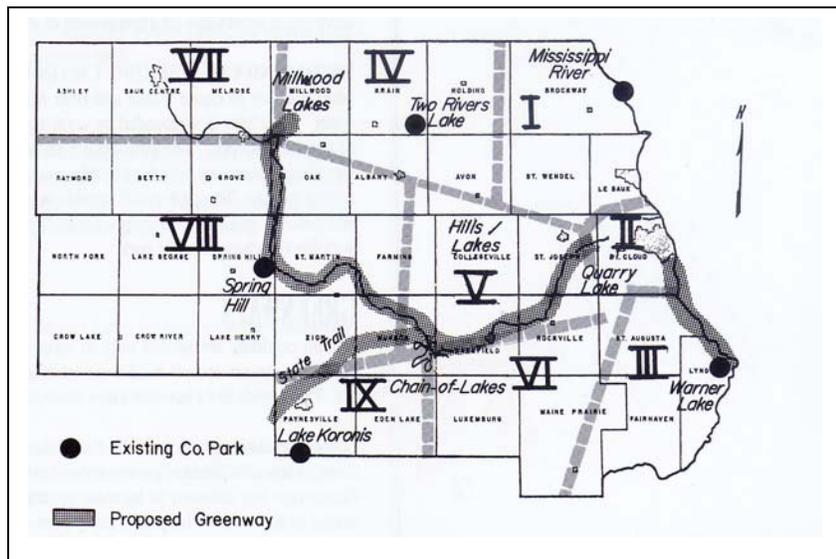
<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Attributes/Location</b>
<b>Local or County</b>				
Linear Park	One or more modes of recreational travel	--	Sufficient width to provide maximum resource protection and use; adequate length for use.	
Special Features	Area for specialized or single-purpose activities – i.e., golf course, nature center, arboretum, historic site, etc.	--	As needed for specific purpose	Appropriate to purpose
Conservancy Land	Area of natural quality, preserved for environmental or aesthetic benefits; to avert negative consequences of development	Community	Variable	Significant resources which merit preservation
Open Space	Area preserved as natural buffer within urbanizing environment	Community	Variable	Where resource provides relief from contiguous urbanization'
<b>Local Facilities</b>				
Mini-Park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific groups; most typically playground facilities	Less than ¼ mile	Less than 1 acre	
Neighborhood Park	Area for intense recreational activities such as field or court games, neighborhood centers, etc.	¼ -- ½ mile radius to serve a population of 4,000 – 5,000	10 – 25 acres	Suitable for intense development; proximity to elementary schools
Community Playfield	Area for intense recreational activities such as athletic fields, swimming pools, etc.	3 – 5 neighborhoods	25 – 50 acres	Suitable for intense development;; proximity to secondary schools and other facilities
Community Park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for low-impact outdoor recreation; could include field or court areas	3 – 5 neighborhoods	25 – 50 acres	Natural features with varied physiographic interest; proximity to community facilities

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<b>County Facilities</b>				
County Park	Area of natural or scenic quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation	3-5 communities or 10-mile radius	100 – 500 acres	Complete natural setting, preferably contiguous to water resources
County Park Reserve	Area of natural or scenic quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation, including significant wildlife habitat and trail access	Countywide	1,000+ acres	Diversity of natural resources

### Park Service Areas

The 1989 Recreation Plan identified a ten-mile primary service area for each of the larger parks, resulting in nine service areas.



When county facilities serving each of these service areas were compared to the 1980 population of each area, it was determined that most parts of the county lacked enough park acreage to meet their needs, based on a standard of 20 acres per 1,000 population. The metropolitan area (Area II) and the central and northwest parts of the county (Areas IV, V, VI and VII) were particularly lacking in park acreage.

### Recent Park Additions and Expansions, 1989 – 2007

Since the 1989 Parks Plan, the county system has expanded with the following acquisitions:

- **Quarry Park:** Quarry Park, a former granite quarry in Waite Park, has been acquired and developed for multiple uses,

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including rock climbing, scuba diving, swimming, nature trails, picnic areas, ski, snowshoe, hiking trails, bike paths, group camping and environmental education. After 1998 the park was expanded by 400 acres to its present size of 643 acres. The park is now home to the Parks Department headquarters.

- **Lake Wobegon Trail:** This 54-mile portion of the 62-mile trail, located on a former Burlington Northern rail corridor and 13 miles of the former Soo Line corridor, currently extends from the City of St. Joseph to the City of Sauk Centre. Eight miles of the trail is within Todd County. The trail also extends from Albany through Holdingford to the Morrison County line where it links to the Soo Line Trail. It is used for non-motorized recreation, and for limited snowmobile use in winter. The trail was a cooperative effort using federal, state, Stearns County and foundation funds and private contributions, with the first segment opening in 1998.
- **Rockville County Park:** This 283-acre parcel was purchased by Stearns County, working with the City of Rockville, in January 2007. Planned facilities include group picnic areas, hiking and equestrian trails, river and fishing access and canoe campsites. Improvements will include preservation of natural areas, reforestation and prairie restoration.
- **Soo Line Corridor:** This 39-mile /485 acre abandoned rail corridor extending from the Morrison County line to Brooten was acquired by Stearns County in 1999. Thirteen miles were developed as an extension of the Lake Wobegon Trail; the remaining 26 miles is currently undeveloped.
- **Beaver Island Trail:** 1.5 miles of former rail corridor was purchased in Lynden Township.

The current park system is summarized in Table 5.2 and shown in Figure 5.1. All County parks can be classified into three of the categories described in Table 5.1: “County Parks” are large multi-use sites, “Special Features” are largely water access facilities without significant upland area or trails, and “Open Space” includes protected but currently undeveloped parkland. Trails constitute a separate “Linear Park” category.

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INSERT FIGURE 5.1, EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS

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<b>Table 5.2. Park Inventory</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Address/Location</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Recommended Park Classification</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Quarry Park and Nature Preserve	643	1802 County Road 137, Waite Park	Rock climbing, scuba diving, swimming, nature trails, picnic areas, ski, snowshoe, hiking trails, bike paths, environmental education, group camp	County Park	
Warner Lake County Park	241	1485 County Road 143, Clearwater	Boat access, fishing, group camp, nature trail, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, swimming beach	County Park	
Mississippi River County Park	209	41300 County Road 1, Rice	Boat access, fishing, picnic area, nature trail, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, ski trail, disc golf course, group camp	County Park	
Spring Hill County Park	82	31938 County Road 14, Melrose	Canoe access, canoe campground, fishing, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, river wayside, snowmobile trail	County Park	
Lake Koronis Regional Park	62	14076 Bluefield Road, Paynesville	Boat access, fishing, nature trail, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, swimming beach, trailer campground	County Park (inter-county)	Meeker County responsible for management; Stearns contributes financially
Two Rivers Lake Park site	56	N/a	Undeveloped	Open space	Plans for improvements, including fishing pier
Oak Township Park site (New Munich River Wayside)	32	N/A	Open space, canoe access, picnic area	Open space	
Upper Spunk Lake County Park	7	17626 County Road 9, Avon	Fishing, picnic area	Special Feature	
Fairhaven Mill Park	5	5001 Birchdale Road, South Haven	Boat access, fishing, historic site, picnic area	Special Feature	Owned by Wright County and located largely in Stearns; managed jointly with Wright County; costs shared 50/50.
Lake Sylvia Wayside	3	32574 County Road 17, Melrose	Boat access, fishing, picnic area	Special Feature	
St. Martin Canoe Access	1	27427 Sauk Landing Road, Paynesville	Canoe access	Special Feature	
Heims Mill Canoe Access	0.7	32324 County Road 1, St. Cloud	Fishing, canoe access	Special Feature	
Miller Landing	6	7502 County Road 138, St. Cloud	Canoe access, picnic area	Special Feature	May be relocated and expanded as part of new County Service Center plans.

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## Federal and State Programs and Facilities

Stearns County works closely with other government agencies on protection of natural and recreational resources. Other types of protected open space (shown in Figure 5.1) within the County include:

- **Wildlife Management Areas** are managed by the Minnesota DNR for wildlife production, public hunting and trapping. Stearns County contains 14 WMAs totaling over 5,200 acres. Many are located in wetlands, where they also help protect water quality.
- **Waterfowl Production Areas** are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain breeding habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. There are 39 WPAs totaling 9,133 acres within Stearns County. Another 1,051 acres of wetlands are protected by 50 easement agreements with the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- **Scientific and Natural Areas** (SNAs) are managed by the Minnesota DNR to “preserve and perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota's natural heritage, including landforms, fossil remains, plant and animal communities, rare and endangered species, or other biotic features and geological formations, for scientific study and public edification as components of a healthy environment.” (MN DNR web site) There are currently 7 SNAs in Stearns County, totaling 1,058 acres:
  - Cold Spring Heron Colony, Wakefield Township, 62 acres
  - Partch Woods, St. Wendel Township, 120 acres
  - Quarry Park (southern section of this County park), City of Waite Park, 323 acres
  - Roscoe Prairie, Zion Township, 53 acres
  - St. Wendel Tamarack Bog and Fen – 700 acres of tax-forfeit land have been released by County Board; additional acquisitions in process
  - Avon Hills Hardwood Forest – 250 acres were recently acquired in Avon Township (north unit) and 102 acres in Collegeville Township (south unit)
  - Sedan Brook Mesic Prairie – North Fork Township near Brooten
- **State Trails:** Stearns County has worked with neighboring counties and the DNR to obtain bonding funds for construction of the Glacial Lakes State Trail from Richmond

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to Paynesville (16 miles). The portion south of Paynesville is currently funded for development; it extends south through Kandiyohi County to Willmar.

### Public Opinion Survey

The public opinion poll conducted by Decision Resources in 2006 for Stearns County showed the following findings regarding parks and recreation:

- Walking and biking trails continued to be the top most requested outdoor recreational facility, with 14% of respondents; swimming pools were the second choice (12%)
- The most heavily used Stearns County Park facility used by residents was the Lake Wobegon Trail, with 30% of respondents using the trail.
- The poll indicated that 83% of the respondents felt that the facilities available in county parks satisfied their household needs.
- Sixty-eight percent of respondents felt Stearns County Parks was fulfilling its mission.

The survey indicated the public's interest in further park and trail development:

- The Soo Line corridor was favored for trail use (hiking and biking) with 37% of respondents.
- 54% would support a tax increase for hiking/biking trails on the corridor.
- 68% opposed a tax increase for ATV use on the corridor.
- 54% would support a tax increase to extend the Lake Wobegon Trail to the Mississippi River.
- The typical level of additional taxes that residents would support for park and trail purchase and development is \$13/year per household.

### Park Dedication Requirements

Following new state statutory requirements, Stearns County adopted Ordinance 334, instituting a parkland dedication fee as part of the County subdivision process. The ordinance establishes a fee of \$1,000 for subdivisions of 3 or more lots, or up to 10% of the undeveloped tract's value, whichever is less. (Plats of 1-2 lots are charged a maximum fee of \$250 per lot). Seventy-five percent of the funds collected must be spent in Township of origin, unless there is an agreement otherwise, and may be used only for capital improvements. No agreements are currently in place.

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## Issues and Challenges

The following issues have been drawn from discussion of current planning initiatives with Park staff and Citizens Advisory Committee members, a number of whom are also members of the Park Commission.

**Park Acquisition Planning.** Opportunities for parkland acquisition can occur at any time, in a variety of locations, and funds are not always available for land acquisition at such times, making it difficult to plan for systematic expansion of the system.

**Regional Park Planning and Funding.** Although the Central Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coordinating Board was established by the State Legislature in 1999, state funds have not been allocated to this regional agency.

**Local and Regional Priorities.** The County receives a wide range of requests from local governments for assistance in pursuing park and trail projects, but it is difficult to prioritize these without a more detailed regional parks plan.

**Park Dedication Requirements.** The absence of cooperative agreements between the County and local units of government means that park dedication fees cannot yet be used for projects that benefit more than one jurisdiction.

## Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1. Provide park and open space areas throughout the County to meet the active and passive recreational needs of current and future residents and to protect significant natural resources and scenic features.**

- Objective 1. Adopt a park acreage standard of 25 acres of parkland per 1,000 population, consistent with standards used in the Twin Cities Metro area.
- Objective 2. Continue to acquire County park sites and expand existing sites in areas of high growth or demonstrated demand.
- Objective 3. Partner with cities, townships, adjoining counties and state agencies to broaden the potential pool for park acquisition and improvement. (The recent acquisition of the Rockville County Park is an example of such a partnership.)

**Goal 2. Provide a regional trail system, in collaboration with other government agencies and interest groups, in order to support a variety of recreational activities, offer alternative transportation modes, and support tourism and economic development.**

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- Objective 1. Emphasize County trail systems as a resource which the County is in a unique position to provide. Consider natural and/or man-made linear resources such as roads, streams, utility corridors, rights-of-way and drainage ways as opportunities for trail development.
- Objective 2. Ensure that County trail systems serve a larger, regional purpose by providing connections to regional and state trails in adjacent counties.
- Objective 3. Look for opportunities to connect County trails to city parks and neighborhoods and community facilities such as schools, libraries and commercial/service centers.
- Objective 4. Continue to improve and expand specialized trail systems, including the 600-mile snowmobile trail system. Seek to expand the ski touring trail system in County parks and other open space lands.
- Objective 5. Integrate water-based routes into the County park and trail system, through designation and improvement of canoe and boating routes and improvement of boat-in campgrounds and access points.

**Goal 3. Continue to work with state and federal agencies, local governments and conservation interests to expand or improve regional and County parks and trails, and to protect significant natural resources that may not be suitable for active recreational use or public access, but which are important for scientific or other public purposes.**

- Objective 1. Pursue the acquisition and/or expansion of priority Scientific and Natural Areas.
- Objective 2. Work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to encourage creation of separated bicycle paths and other facilities as part of road construction or improvement projects.

**Goal 4. Coordinate with all Stearns County departments to ensure that all County policies for protection of significant natural areas and for park and trail improvements are consistent with the goals and objectives of this Plan.**

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## Policies and Action Items

**1. Update the 1989 Recreation Plan to address the County's existing facilities, current user needs, priorities and opportunities.** The 1989 plan established a framework for the growth of the park system by establishing service districts and identifying specific park improvements. While this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan presents a broad picture of the current system, a more detailed update is needed to justify capital improvements and coordinate with other jurisdictions. An updated Park, Recreation and Trails Plan would include more detailed treatment of many of the policies and action items listed in this chapter:

- Updated parks acreage standards and park service districts
- Acquisition of new regional parks in underserved areas
- Expansion of existing County parks
- Expansion of the regional trail system
- Assistance with local trail planning efforts
- Coordination with Federal and State open space protection and recreation programs
- Coordination with other County departments and County policies, such as transportation
- Coordination with townships regarding parkland dedication and acquisition fees
- Coordination with cities on park and open space protection efforts

**2. Adopt a new standard for parks acreage.** The County park and trails system has grown in size from 527 acres in 1985 to 1,986 acres in 2006. The standard for County park acreage used in the 1989 and 1998 plans was twenty acres per 1,000 residents. The current Metropolitan Council standard for regional parkland is twenty-five acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents, based on more current research.<sup>1</sup> This standard should be adopted as the standard for both Stearns County and the St. Cloud Area, since the County system is essentially the regional system, and competes with other regional systems such as those in the Metro area, for funding. This would require approximately 2,450 additional acres of parkland by 2030, to serve the projected population of 177,370.

**3. Protect sensitive natural areas through planning and zoning.** High priority natural areas include sites identified in the County Biological Survey, with special protection to high priority sites,

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<sup>1</sup> . Cited in "A Regional Park System for Minnesota's New Urban Areas" (Legislative Commission on MN Resources) by George Orning, U of M Forestry. 2006.

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abandoned granite quarries and granite outcrops. Methods for protection should include:

- Designations in the Land Use Plan that recognize the presence of sensitive natural resources, using designations such as overlays that apply across a variety of underlying land uses (see Chapter 3, Land Use Plan).
- Use of GIS data (for example, the County's Resource Suitability Model) when assessing sites for rezoning or development proposals.
- Use of zoning techniques such as overlay districts and performance standards to ensure that these resources are protected (see Chapter 10, Implementation).

**4. Use the current parks classification system.** Table 5.2 categorizes County parks according to the classification system shown in Table 5.1. Note that smaller water access sites without many upland facilities are classified as Special Feature sites.

**5. Continue to pursue acquisition of new regional parks in underserved areas.** As discussed in the background section of this chapter, large regional parks are not distributed across all of the previously defined park service areas evenly. In particular, the Central, North Central, Northwest and South Central service areas remain under-supplied with parkland, in spite of growing development pressure in many of these areas. High priority 'search' areas for future additions to the current County park system include the following, shown in Figure 5.2:

- **Millwood Township Lakes area:** This area was identified in both the 1970 and the 1989 Recreation Plans as needing a county park. Priorities include preservation of natural lake shoreland from development, and providing facilities for swimming, shoreline fishing, group picnicking, and possibly camping.
- **Sauk River Chain-of-Lakes area:** The Sauk River joins twelve lakes together, resulting in over 3,000 surface acres of water, surrounded by a variety of shoreline types ranging from rolling hills to granite outcrops. This area was identified in the 1989 Recreation Plan because of the high recreational use and relative lack of regional facilities on the Sauk River chain. A park could complement existing commercial recreation operations and protect natural shoreland from increasing pressure for subdivision and development. Facilities could include shoreline fishing, picnicking, and possibly primitive camping.

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- **Hills and Lakes Area:** Some of the County's most scenic terrain and highest water-quality lakes are located in this area, also identified as the Avon Hills. A park in this area should include a swimming beach on a lake of adequate size to endure a dry weather cycle, as well as trails and other resource-based recreational facilities. The park would preserve rapidly diminishing natural shoreland from subdivision.
- **Swimming Beach** between St. Cloud & Kimball Prairie – This facility was identified in the 1989 Recreation Plan as a special feature for the South Central area, serving the population in St. Augusta (specifically the Luxemburg Townsite area) and Maine Prairie, since this area is located some distance from the proposed Sauk River Chain-of-Lakes park search area. Water quality is a particularly important factor in selecting a swimming beach.

Other large tracts of natural lands that may become available will also be considered for acquisition, based on their locations and resource quality.

### **6. Pursue expansion of existing County parks as appropriate.**

The following County parks have been identified for expansion in order to better serve park users and protect the integrity of existing resources and biological communities within each park:

- **Warner Lake Park:** Expand to the southeast to buffer the existing swimming beach and woodlands from potential development.
- **Mississippi River Park:** Expand to the north to capture scenic bluff view of the river.
- **Quarry Park and Nature Preserve:** Expand to the south to include open field for general park facility development.
- **Spring Hill Park:** Expand to the north and west to include additional river frontage and play area within the park.
- **Two Rivers Lake Park:** Expand to the north to include more lake frontage, protect ravine and create a trail connection to the Lake Wobegon Trail.
- **Rockville County Park:** expand upstream.

**7. Continue to develop a regional trails system that links local trails, regional parks, and other activity centers, and that will foster economic development in trail communities.** Stearns County will continue to collaborate with cities, townships, adjacent counties, the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization, and state agencies in developing local trail projects. Priority trail projects are

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those that connect with existing or planned County parks and trails and those that expand the regional nature of the existing trail system.

Planned trails are shown in Figure 5.1. County and regional trail projects currently in the planning stages include:

The **Lake Wobegon Trail** is the primary regional trail in Stearns County, and is now connected to the Central Lakes State Trail through Todd, Douglas, Grant and Otter Tail counties, to the cities of Alexandria and Fergus Falls. The trail should be extended east to the Mississippi River in cooperation with the cities of Waite Park and St. Cloud.

- **Brooten/Albany (Soo Line) Rail Corridor:** This rail corridor is not proposed for regional trail use at present, but select segments should be developed for specific uses, including hiking, biking, horseback riding and snowmobile use. These segments will be identified through further study and discussion with cities and townships along the corridor.
- The **Glacial Lakes State Trail** is planned to ultimately extend about 40 miles from the City of Willmar in Kandiyohi County to Richmond. Segments south of Paynesville are complete or planned for construction in 2007. Stearns County will continue to encourage funding of trail development from south of Paynesville to the east side of Richmond.

In addition to these specific projects, all power line easements, drainage ditches and abandoned rail corridors provide linear opportunities for potential trail facilities. These land features should be considered as potential recreational or habitat corridors.

### 8. Support and assist in developing key Local Initiative Trails.

These trails are being pursued primarily by individual cities or local government partnerships. The County will collaborate where feasible in developing trails that function as part of the regional system, including the following:

- **Beaver Island Trail:** This trail currently is being developed between St. Cloud and Warner Lake Park.
- **Koronis Trail:** This trail is being extended around Lake Koronis, and should include a connection to the Glacial Lakes State Trail
- **Rocori Trail:** This trail is proposed to extend from Richmond (connecting to the Glacial Lakes Trail) to Rockville, and ultimately could extend to Waite Park

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- **River Country Trail:** Primarily in Wright County, this trail is proposed to extend from Warner Lake Park to Clearwater, connecting to the Beaver Island Trail.

Any potential trail route that expands the regional nature of the existing trail system will also be considered for County funding or technical assistance.

### 9. Continue to partner with Federal and State programs that protect open space, wildlife habitat, or enhance recreational resources. These programs include the following:

- **Scientific & Natural Area Program:** Stearns County will continue to work with the DNR to acquire and expand priority SNAs, including the St. Wendel Tamarack Bog and Fen, the Avon Hills “Big Woods” Hardwood Forest, a calcareous fen near Spring Hill and a tamarack bog in Fairhaven Township. These areas were identified as significant remnant natural communities in the 1999 Minnesota County Biological Survey.
- **Canoe & Boating Routes:** The Sauk River was designated as a canoe & boating route in 2006 by the State Legislature. Stearns County will work with the DNR to improve boat-in campgrounds and access points along the route.
- **Public Water Access program:** Stearns County will support new accesses, including a proposed site on East Lake in Richmond.
- **Winter Grant-in-Aid Trail Program:** The County will continue to sponsor the snowmobile trails and ski trails that are enrolled in this program.
- **Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):** The County will continue to support the expansion and establishment of WMA’s in the county.
- **Minnesota Department of Transportation Rail Abandonment Program:** The County will assist in securing any future abandoned railroad corridors for potential public recreation facilities. This should be coordinated with the Stearns County – City of St. Cloud Regional Rail Authority.
- **Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA):** The County supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s goal of 14,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas in the county.
- **Scenic Byways Program:** This state/federal program should be explored as a funding source for bicycle facilities along the Great River Road, a National Scenic Byway, and part of the National Mississippi River Trail.

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**10. Coordinate park and recreation policies with those of other Stearns County departments** to ensure that policies, regulations and public improvements are consistent with the goals and policies of this plan. Actions include:

- Encourage the protection of non-SNA quality remnant natural areas, abandoned quarries, and granite outcrops which support unique plant species through County zoning and subdivision regulations.
- Continue to work with the County Highway Department to develop new county/regional trails.
- Work with the County Highway Department when new bridges are proposed over designated canoe routes, in order to identify potential canoe landing sites.
- Continue to implement the goals and routes defined in the 1996 Bikeway Plan.
- Incorporate separated bicycle paths within transportation routes being newly planned. Encourage new construction to include bicycle facilities (Pinecone Road and the proposed Southwest Arterial Alignment south of Quarry Park are examples).
- Encourage the continuation of blacktopping shoulders in the urban area to make “bicycle-friendly” facilities and communities.
- Accommodate grade-separated facilities for bicycles when bridges are reconstructed.

**11. Coordinate with townships regarding parkland dedication and acquisition fees:** Seek agreements with individual townships on the creation and expansion of regional and local parks through flexible use of the parkland dedication funds. Such agreements could allow funds to be spent either within defined service areas (to be determined in consultation with the townships and cities) or on County-wide park and trail capital improvements. This step would provide many more opportunities for County-township partnerships to improve local and regional parks and trails.

**12. Coordinate with cities on park and open space protection efforts.** Assist cities in the conservation of large tracts of forests and woodlands or natural lands. For example, work with Waite Park on the creation of a “Chain of Granite Lakes” outdoor recreation facility, as the granite quarries north of Quarry Park & Nature Preserve are abandoned and reclaimed.

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Figure 5.2

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**Table 5.3. Summary of Implementation Actions**

<b>Phasing Priority</b>	<b>Implementation Actions</b>	<b>Lead and Coordinating Agencies</b>
<b>Short-term</b>	Update the 1989 Recreation Plan	<b>Park Department</b> Environmental Services Park Commission
<b>Short-term</b>	Adopt a new standard for parks acreage.	<b>Park Department</b>
<b>On-going</b>	Protect sensitive natural areas through planning and zoning.	<b>Environmental Services</b> Park Department
<b>On-going</b>	Continue to use current parks classification system	<b>Park Department</b> Park Commission
<b>On-going</b>	Continue to pursue acquisition of new regional parks in underserved areas.	<b>Park Department</b> County Board of Commissioners
<b>On-going</b>	Pursue expansion of existing County parks as appropriate.	<b>Park Department</b> County Board of Commissioners
<b>On-going</b>	Continue to develop a regional trails system	<b>Park Department</b> St. Cloud APO Cities and townships Other funding partners
<b>Short to medium term</b>	Assist in developing key Local Initiative Trails	<b>Park Department</b> Cities and townships Other funding partners
<b>On-going</b>	Continue to partner with Federal and State programs that protect open space, wildlife habitat, or enhance recreational resources.	<b>Park Department</b> <b>DNR</b> <b>Fish &amp; Wildlife Service</b> Other agencies
<b>On-going</b>	Coordinate park and recreation policies with those of other Stearns County departments	<b>Park Department</b> <b>Environmental Services</b> <b>Public Works</b>
<b>Short to medium term</b>	Coordinate with townships regarding parkland dedication and acquisition fees	<b>Park Department</b> Township boards Park Commission
<b>On-going</b>	Coordinate with cities on park and open space protection efforts.	<b>Park Department</b> Cities Park Commission