

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission

Funding Protocol for Regionally Designated Significant Parks and Trails

Parks and trails in Greater Minnesota are eligible to apply for funding only after their formal designation by the commission.

The very process of designation sets a high standard to achieve regional significance, therefore a thorough vetting process had already been done prior to the funding evaluation, ensuring all projects recommended for funding in FY2016 and FY2017 are of high regional value.

Funding Evaluation Protocol

- Funding requests were evaluated based on the ability to provide a high-quality experience, serve a regional population or visitor destination, enhance connectivity and/or fill a gap in a recreational opportunity
- The Four Legacy strategic directions were given high consideration; connect people to the outdoors; acquire land, create opportunities; take care of what we have; coordinate among partners
- Guiding principles and themes complementary to the above, with additional focus on projects most relevant to, and valued by, residents and visitors, and those that generate economic impact

A total of 31 funding requests were submitted for consideration and **all** requests were evaluated and placed in one of four categories. The first two categories encompass the projects recommended by the Commission for the FY2016/2017 funding cycle.

- 1- High value top priority projects that line up well compared with evaluation protocol and are ready to move forward. There are 19 funding recommendations in this category.
- 2- High value top priority prototype projects that provide test cases upon which to build support strategies for future investments. There are four funding recommendations in this category

The remaining eight funding requests were placed in one of the two following categories:

- 1- Worthy projects that match up well against the evaluation protocol but are either not ready to go and/or are less of a priority than the high value top priority projects.
- 2- Future potential projects that have baseline merit against the evaluation protocol but need additional refinement or enhancement to become higher priorities.

The funding requests in these categories are not priorities for FY2016/2017 funding cycle but may be prospects for future funding cycles with refinement of the request.

Funding Recommendation Prioritization Process

Funding application screening was performed by the Executive Director and consultant team based on the funding protocol established. The initial screening resulted in consensus of project recommendations and ranking order. A second screening was done by the Evaluation Team and consensus was reached for the recommendations.

The project recommendations and ranking order were discussed and voted on by the Commission, which ultimately voted unanimous approval for both project recommendations and ranking order.

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Designation Protocol for Parks and Trails of Regional Significance

The application process has been designed to provide *all* cities and counties in Greater Minnesota an equal opportunity to submit projects for evaluation and ranking. The process steps ensure consistent evaluations and have been specifically created to avoid conflict of interest in ranking and scoring projects.

STEP 1 – Initial Screening and Baseline Evaluation for Regional Significance

- Application for designation as a regional park or trail by a city or county
- Initial determination is made on the merit of the application

The purpose of Step 1 is determining whether an application meets the basic requirements for consideration as being regionally significant, before resources are invested in a project that may not be highly scored.

STEP 2 – Detailed Evaluation and Formal Recognition as a Regionally Significant Park or Trail

- Submittal of application for designation
- An approved park or trail Master Plan that meets the requirements set forth by the Commission. (Reference page 61 of Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan)
- Completed inventory and site features

The purpose of Step 2 is formal evaluation and scoring of a park or trail by an Evaluation Team; professionals with no connection to, or interest in, the outcome of the process.

Evaluation Criteria to Achieve Regionally Significant Designation

The criteria have been established to ensure parks and trails of *highest merit* become part of the regional system. The criteria are intended to be dynamic and change as needs evolve to build out the system.

Criteria for Parks of Regional Significance

- Natural resource based settings and a range of activities offered
- Regional use that will draw visitors and generate an economic impact on the area

Parks of regional significance must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Significant in size
- Unique or unusual landscape features, historically or culturally significant sites or characteristics of regional or statewide significance
- Provides natural resource based recreational opportunities not otherwise available in the region

Criteria for Trails of Regional Significance

- The trail is located in a regionally desirable setting
- The trail is a destination that attracts regional users by providing a high quality recreational opportunity

Other factors considered for regional trail designation are length, connections to other parks and/or trails and the lack of other trails in the area.

For the comprehensive list of definitions and evaluation criteria, refer to Section 3 in the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, pages 27-47.