

TwinCities.com

Nonprofit aims to add 17,000 parkland acres in 7-county area

Nonprofit wants to add 17,000 acres

By Elizabeth Mohr
emohr@pioneerpress.com

Updated: 06/13/2009 11:37:15 PM CDT

The Twin Cities region has long been touted for abundant park space, but a new organization has its sights set on acquiring even more.

The recently formed Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities will raise money to buy land, with a goal of adding 17,000 acres and 700 miles of trails to the seven-county parks system over the next two decades.

It's a necessary step, organizers say, to keep up with the region's projected population growth.

"We're going to be approaching primarily the philanthropic community," Metropolitan Council Chairman Peter Bell said. "Many times these folks don't want to get into the picking and choosing — 'Do I give money to park district A or park district B?' We think they'll like giving to a regional system."

Bell began organizing the foundation two years ago with the help of, among others, the Trust for Public Land. He has lobbied for legislation, navigated nonprofit obstacles and sought support from local park districts. Although Bell has spearheaded the effort, the foundation will operate independently of the Met Council.

A board has been assembled, made up of representatives from 10 local park agencies (including cities and counties), community members and others with a stake in parks. An executive director, Jane Johnson, was appointed in April, and the foundation moved into office space in St. Louis Park this month.

The foundation is modeled on similar groups in other areas of the country, including Texas and Seattle, though this may be the country's first regional parks foundation, said Susan Schmidt, state director of the Trust for Public Land.

Twin Cities residents say the parks system is one of the best things about living here, Schmidt said. But maintaining that system will require private money in addition to public funds, she said. Organizers of the foundation have not set a specific fundraising goal.

The regional parks system comprises parks in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties. The Met Council is charged with overseeing the regional parks system and receives public money to do so. But the money won't keep up with land purchase needs, Bell said.

In its 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan, the Met Council lays out its goal to "identify and preserve the last best natural resources and outdoor recreational opportunities," and it projects a regional population growth of 1 million people by 2030.

To meet the need for outdoor recreation for that many people, the council has identified land and trails it wants to acquire.

Northwestern Anoka County and Empire Township in Dakota County are targets for land acquisition. The council also would like to develop north-south

Advertisement



Bring the Classroom to Your Home
With a Degree Online From Florida Tech

APPLY TODAY!
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946



Print Powered By  Dynamics

TwinCities.com

and east-west trails in Dakota County and trails along the Crow River. Two county parks, Pine Point Park in Washington County and Tony Schmidt Park in Ramsey County, could be converted to regional parks.

And the group would like to expand more than 30 existing parks and trails by acquiring land within or adjacent to current boundaries.

"I think some of the process is under way already, where the park system has been working with land owners. But with the creation of a foundation, we'll be able to work more quickly (to acquire that land)," Johnson said.

Johnson, who previously was the executive director of the Library Foundation of Hennepin County, said her first goal with the Regional Parks Foundation will be to raise awareness of the foundation and its purpose, along with promoting the regional parks system. Major fundraising will likely begin in the fall, she said.

"People will say, 'Why do we need to contribute to something that the government is already paying for?'" Johnson said. "(But) I think libraries and parks are kind of similar in that way. People feel good about their investment."


Elizabeth Mohr can be reached at 651-228-5162.

MONEY FOR PARKS

If you would like to donate to the Regional Parks Foundation, contact the foundation at 952-697-3554 or 1660 S. Highway 100, Suite 500, St. Louis Park.

A Web site, regionalparksfoundationtc.org, is under construction and should be available within two weeks.

Advertisement



End-to-End Training as It Should Be: 100% ONLINE!

Earn Your Master Certificate in Internet Marketing

→ SEO & Paid Search	→ Internet Law	➔		1-800-268-9943 USanFranOnline.com/FD
→ Online Branding	→ Media Buying			
→ Web Analytics	→ Social Media			

Print Powered By  Epsilon Dynamics