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This project was produced and completed by The Center for Changing Landscapes (CCL) and the Department of Forest Resources, College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences and College of Design at the University of Minnesota. Funding for this project was received from the Minnesota State Legislature. Minn. Gen. Laws. Ch (64.8 § 6). Creation of a Parks and Trails Inventory, Framework, and Plan.

The project contributors include:
Mary Vogel, CCL Co-Director, Principal Investigator
Alan Ek, CCL Co-Director
Mae Davenport, PhD, Co-Investigator, Assistant Professor
Ingrid Schneider, PhD, Co-Investigator, Professor
Cindy Zerger, Research Fellow & Project Manager
Brian Schreurs, GIS Analyst
Andrew Oftedal, Research Assistant
Egle Vanagaite, Research Fellow
Alex Smith, Research Assistant
Lisa Filter, Research Assistant
Andrea Date, Research Assistant
Lisa Picone, Editor

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For alternative formats, please direct requests to:
Center for Changing Landscapes
151 Rapson Hall
89 Church Street
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612.624.7557

Special thanks to:
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Explore Minnesota Tourism, the Metropolitan Council, and the 10/25 Parks & Trails Legacy Plan Steering Committee.

A very special thanks to Laurie Young, MnDNR, for her partnership and support.
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Introduction

The University of Minnesota’s Center for Changing Landscapes (CCL) was directed by the Minnesota Legislature to “create a long-range framework for an integrated statewide parks and trails system that provides information on the natural resource-based recreational opportunities available throughout the state” (Laws of Minnesota, 2009).

CCL and partners conducted an inventory of existing, planned, and proposed regionally significant, state and federal natural resource-based recreation areas in Minnesota; and of recreation social science research and monitoring efforts conducted in Minnesota and published since 2000. The inventory is a snapshot of the status of natural resource-based parks and trails in Minnesota, intended to be a useful tool to help citizens, local, regional, and state officials make decisions about establishing and developing parks and trails.

Five region-specific profile reports, a series of thematic maps, and a contextual profile of each region were generated based on data from the inventory.

The inventory was the baseline for an in-depth assessment of recreation opportunity supply and demand that considers:

// Existing geographic distribution of recreation resources and settings across the state.
// Current population estimates and recreation participation trends.
// Future population projections and recreation participation trends.
// Proposed or planned enhancements to recreation resources across the state.
Methodology

// Two inventories were conducted: one assessing the physical settings for outdoor recreation and one assessing recreation experiences.

// The physical setting inventory is ongoing, using the best data available obtained by both CCL and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

// The data gathered for the physical settings inventory included existing printed and electronic information, augmented where necessary with other kinds of data, including oral descriptions.

// The data for the recreation experience inventory were compiled from a review of literature and reports, with input from various stakeholders.

Physical Setting Inventory

Data collection for the inventory of the physical setting began in September 2009 and will continue through spring 2011. This summary report includes all information gathered by October 2010.

The inventory is based upon the best information available. Significant efforts were made to create accurate data from data sources that were incomplete, and/or inconsistent. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation acreages and American Indian Tribal lands are not included in the inventory at this time.

Responsibility for gathering data was divided between CCL and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR Division of Parks and Trails was responsible for gathering current federal and state data while CCL was responsible for gathering current regionally significant, regional, county, and local data. Material gathered included maps, planning documents, park studies, guidebooks, databases, facility inventories, promotional materials, web postings, and oral descriptions from local officials when printed or electronic information was not available. CCL, Explore Minnesota Tourism, Metropolitan Council, and the DNR worked together to develop a data schema that provided a uniform repository for point, line, polygon, and non-spatial information. Attributes and attribute definitions included in the database were agreed upon by project partners and reviewed by the 10/25 Parks and Trails Legacy Planning Committee (see Appendix A for attribute information). The geodatabase consists of maps of parks and trails and other recreational environments and tables that document park and trail acreages, mileages, alignments, and attributes. In order to reflect current activity associated with park and trail development, items mapped include existing, planned, and proposed parks and trails. Existing parks and trails are those that are built; planned are those that have an official status such as an authorized state trail or a park that is part of a comprehensive plan; and proposed are those that are in the works, but have no official status.

With the inventoried information, CCL created county-scale maps and made them available for review and comment at the 17 public meetings hosted by the DNR and the Citizens League and facilitated by the Citizens League during the spring of 2010. The maps were also posted on CCL’s website (http://ccl.design.umn.edu/mnpat.html) in May 2010 for review and comment. Recreation providers, citizens, and project partners provided additions, corrections, and feedback.

In addition to an inventory of natural resource-based recreation opportunities, CCL staff conducted literature searches; conducted field observations and documented sites at state, federal, and regionally significant parks and trails; conducted an extensive review of park and trail planning documents; and conducted informal interviews with a number of providers to understand the various systems and their facilities.

Participation in 10/25 Parks and Trails Legacy Planning Committee meetings, 10/25 Legacy Plan work groups, community input sessions, as well as public events and meetings, provided opportunities for CCL to discuss the status of current recreation opportunities with citizens, providers, public officials, and advocacy groups. This form of stakeholder engagement also allowed for feedback on the inventory project.

Recreation Experience Inventory

The recreation experience inventory was conducted systematically, following a specific protocol to ensure consistency in data compilation, analysis, and reporting. The inventory was conducted on existing data. No new data were collected for the inventory.

The recreation experience inventory protocol was developed based on a review of relevant recreation literature and planning documents and responds to the framework objectives outlined by the Minnesota Legislature. An intensive literature review of recent recreation social science research, monitoring reports, Minnesota State Demographic Center reports, and U.S. Census reports was conducted. Also, input was obtained from the Department of Natural Resources, the Office of Explore Minnesota Tourism, the Metropolitan Council, local units of government, park and trail groups, the public, and other stakeholder groups through public review of the document; reports were posted online May 2010 for feedback and shared in public meetings and participation at select 10/25 Parks and Trails Legacy Planning Committee meetings.

The resulting data were compiled and synthesized to identify reported frequencies of select activities, experiences, and/or physical attributes. Data are presented in the five regions used in the DNR’s social science research and monitoring program: Northwest, Northeast, Central, South, and Metro (See Appendix B for map of regions).