



Gathering public input | Brooklyn Center, MN
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

INPUT ENGAGEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

Three Rivers and Brooklyn Park share a common goal of developing a master plan that is community driven and supported, and serves new park users without displacing existing park users. To do so, an extensive engagement process was established to purposefully engage and build relationships with individuals, community groups and agency partners.

Input from these groups was critical in the development of this master plan and helped craft the vision goals and the development, resource management and operation recommendations for the park. In fact, every recommendation is the result of the engagement process.

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The over-arching goals of the public engagement process were as follows:

- Make engagement easy, convenient, interactive, thoughtful and valuable to both/all parties.
- Provide opportunities for all interested parties to participate and be heard – regardless of race, income, religion, gender, age (including youth and seniors), etc.
- Reach and engage diverse populations of the area especially those typically underrepresented in the regional park/trail system and planning/engagement processes.
- Set the stage for developing long-term relationships with under-represented populations.
- Build partnerships based on common goals with cities, agencies and non-profit organizations.

TARGETED POPULATIONS

Four main target populations were included in the engagement process. Engagement strategies were customized to best meet the individual needs of each group.

- **General public.** The general public represents the full range of potential park users. These are residents of communities near the park, with a focus on Brooklyn Park,

What are underrepresented populations?

Underrepresented populations are defined, for purposes of this plan, as primarily: people of color, households with incomes of \$50,000 or less, persons 45+ years old, persons with an education level of high school or less and secondarily: non-English speaking persons, persons with English as a second language and non-park users.

Brooklyn Center, Champlin and Coon Rapids. This group was engaged to provide insight into how to increase park use and user enjoyment.

- **Park users.** Park users are people using the park today. They are very familiar with the park and offered specific feedback about opportunities and challenges based on their park knowledge and experiences.
- **Underrepresented populations.** Underrepresented populations are typically not engaged in park planning processes and often in park participation. Extra effort was made to reach these groups and ensure their voices were heard in the planning process and that the recommendations reflect their guidance.
- **External advisory team.** Staff from the following agencies were invited to participate on an external advisory team (EAT): Three Rivers, Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, Anoka County, cities of Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Brooklyn Center and Coon Rapids, National Park Service, Friends of the Mississippi River and Mississippi Watershed Management Organization. The EAT represented a fourth perspective - that of current and potential partner agencies. This group was engaged to provide perspective on the park based on their expertise and agency's needs, goals and priorities.

ENGAGEMENT PHASES

The engagement process followed a three phased approach with the majority of the engagement occurring early in the master plan process and providing set the overall framework for the park plan. Phases included; 1) information gathering, 2) summary and recommendations and 3) public comment period. Each phase was designed to serve a specific purpose and the strategies and tools within each phase were customized to meet the needs of the phase as well as of the persons and groups engaged.

Phase 1 | Information Gathering

Purpose: The intent of Phase 1 engagement was to gather information from the public about what makes Mississippi Gateway Regional Park special, what barriers exist to its use and what improvements would make the park more enjoyable to visit and to visit more frequently. The feedback obtained during this phase was the driver of the preliminary concept diagram (Figure 9, page 14) and ultimately the natural resource and recreation development plans.

Approach & Process: The project team attended 30 community events as part of the first phase of community engagement. Over 1,200 people were reached through these events. The bulk of in-person engagement activities occurred during this phase. Seven different strategies were developed for presenting and collecting input from the public and stakeholder groups (Table 6). A list of all community events attended is available in Appendix C.

Feedback Summary: Based on the input gathered through Phase 1, the following preliminary considerations for the master plan were developed. These ideas were presented to the public during Phase 2 and refined based on public input. Additional feedback from Phase 1 is summarized in Appendix D.

- Introduce people to nature;
- Make the park a welcoming place for people of all cultural backgrounds including new visitors and experienced park users;
- Enhance connections to the river, dam and nature;
- Provide opportunities for children to play and learn about nature;
- Make the park a welcoming place for seniors;
- Make the park a paddling destination;
- Create opportunities for high adventure;
- Facilitate year-round park use; and
- Improve opportunities for picnicking.

Table 6: Phase 1 | Engagement Strategies

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Strategy	Description
Project Press Release	
June - July 2015	In an attempt to provide broad coverage about the master plan and opportunities for input, a press release was prepared and distributed to Three Rivers' media contacts. The press release was translated into Hmong, Somali and Spanish and distributed to ethnic media contacts.
Website & Social Media Updates	
Ongoing	A project web page was hosted on MySidewalk where questions and information about the project were regularly posted. MySidewalk pages were also available in Hmong, Somali and Spanish. Notices of upcoming community engagement events were posted on MySidewalk, Three Rivers' and Brooklyn Park's websites and/or Facebook pages. Questions were also periodically posted on Three Rivers' and Brooklyn Park's Facebook pages to engage and obtain feedback from new audiences. The MySidewalk page was updated throughout Phase 1 allowing users to easily obtain current information and provide input.
Pop-up Engagement at Parks & Events	
June - September 2015	A mobile display and survey materials were developed to collect input at community events and in parks. The materials included surveys allowing participants to share which types of park activities and park improvements were preferred. The same general materials were used at each community engagement event in order to collect consistent feedback.
External Advisory Team (EAT) Meeting	
June 29, 2015	Staff held one meeting with the EAT during Phase I. EAT members provided their feedback on community engagement strategies and ideas for park improvements.
Elected Official Meet & Greets	
July 2015	Three Rivers staff and elected officials offered one-on-one meetings with local and state elected officials. Information was shared on the planning and engagement process and participants were invited to share pertinent information from their agencies/constituents for consideration in the planning process.
Paper Survey & Preference Boards	
July - September 2016	Three Rivers created a paper survey seeking feedback about the park. The survey was available at the Coon Rapids Dam Visitor Center. Interpretive preference boards were posted at the Coon Rapids Dam Visitor Center, Brooklyn Park City Hall and Zanewood Recreation Center.
Listening Sessions	
July - September 2015	Five listening sessions were held to obtain detailed feedback from underrepresented populations. Staff asked participants to share their experiences with nature-based activities and preferences for park improvements. Staff also asked for ideas to reduce barriers and ways to welcome underrepresented populations to the park. Most listening sessions were paired with activities to introduce participants to nature-based activities.

Phase 2 | Summary & Recommendations

Purpose: Phase 2 engagement intent was to reconnect with engaged parties and connect with new parties to confirm that input was:

- Captured accurately;
- Complete and no critical components were missing;
- Correctly representing the sentiment of a broader audience; and
- Publicly and politically supported.

Phase 2 feedback solidified the preliminary concept diagram (Figure 9, following page) and actively shaped the natural resource and recreation development plans.

Approach & Process: The public engagement approach shifted from ‘collaborate/involve’ to ‘involve/consult’* during this community engagement phase. The participant engagement role also shifted from partnering with participants on the decision-making and preferred solution development, to working with participants to ensure their concerns and aspirations were understood and considered in the analysis and decision-making. As part of this phase, the project team attended community and agency events and meetings (Table 7). A list of all events and activities attended is available in Appendix E.

Feedback Summary: Analysis determined that there are four markets this park will serve; 1) existing users, 2) new users, 3) on-site group education participants and 4) off-site group education participants. Detailed profiles, recommendations and suggested park improvements for each of these markets is provided in Appendix F.

The target market exercise and feedback from engaged parties confirmed that the planning process and recommendations were moving in the right direction. Engaged participants were generally supportive and excited about the concept diagram and recreation development plan.

There were several common - and valid - questions or concerns that were shared throughout Phase 2. These considerations included: cost, funding, balance between natural resource protection and development, potential impact on adjacent properties and timing of the improvements. Staff were able to satisfactorily answer most questions, and further reviewed and revised the plan to better address concerns (proximity of development/active areas to adjacent properties, need for kitchenettes at rental picnic shelters, inclusion of bathrooms throughout the site, etc.).

There were two areas that received the most discussion: the dog off-leash area and a new park building proposal. The dog off-leash area was - and remains - a concern for some neighbors along the western boundary. The dog off-leash area is approximately 600 feet from the closest residential neighbor and approximately 1,000 feet from known concerned neighbors. When developed, the dog

Table 7: Phase 2 | Engagement Strategies

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Strategy	Description
Information Display	
Ongoing (Continuation of Phase 1)	A mobile display showing preliminary concepts and ideas was available at the park through the duration of Phase 2. Comments were collected via a chalkboard or staff.
Website & Social Media Updates	
Ongoing	The MySidewalk page was updated to include the proposed concept plan and illustrative renderings of the recreation development. Participants were welcome to provide feedback and seek additional information. This information was used to further refine the recreation development concept and ensure that the target market’s needs and expectations were met with master plan outcomes.
Presentations/Discussions	
November 2015 - May 2016	Staff attended seven community based organizations/commissions meetings and discussions to present the preliminary concepts and ideas. Participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback and share thoughts.
External Advisory Team (EAT) Meeting	
November 9, 2015	Staff held one meeting with the EAT. Members provided their feedback on preliminary concepts and ideas.
Elected Board/City Council Check-Ins	
November 2015 - October 2017	Staff engaged and updated Three Rivers and Brooklyn Park elected officials several times throughout Phase 2, allowing elected officials to guide the planning and recommendations process, ensure they supported the preliminary concepts and ideas and seek additional information.
Butternut Circle Neighbor Meeting	
February 2016	A handful of neighbors that live immediately adjacent to the western boundary of the western unit requested a meeting to learn more about the park planning efforts and proposed improvements. Staff held an informal meeting with interested neighbors sharing information on the project, preliminary concepts and ideas.
Neighborhood Open House	
April 13 & 14, 2016	Adjacent park neighbors were invited to attend public open houses with a brief presentation on the public engagement process, key findings and recommendation and next steps. Project boards showing the preliminary concepts and ideas were also on display in an open house format. Participants were invited to leave comments on a comment board or in a comment box.

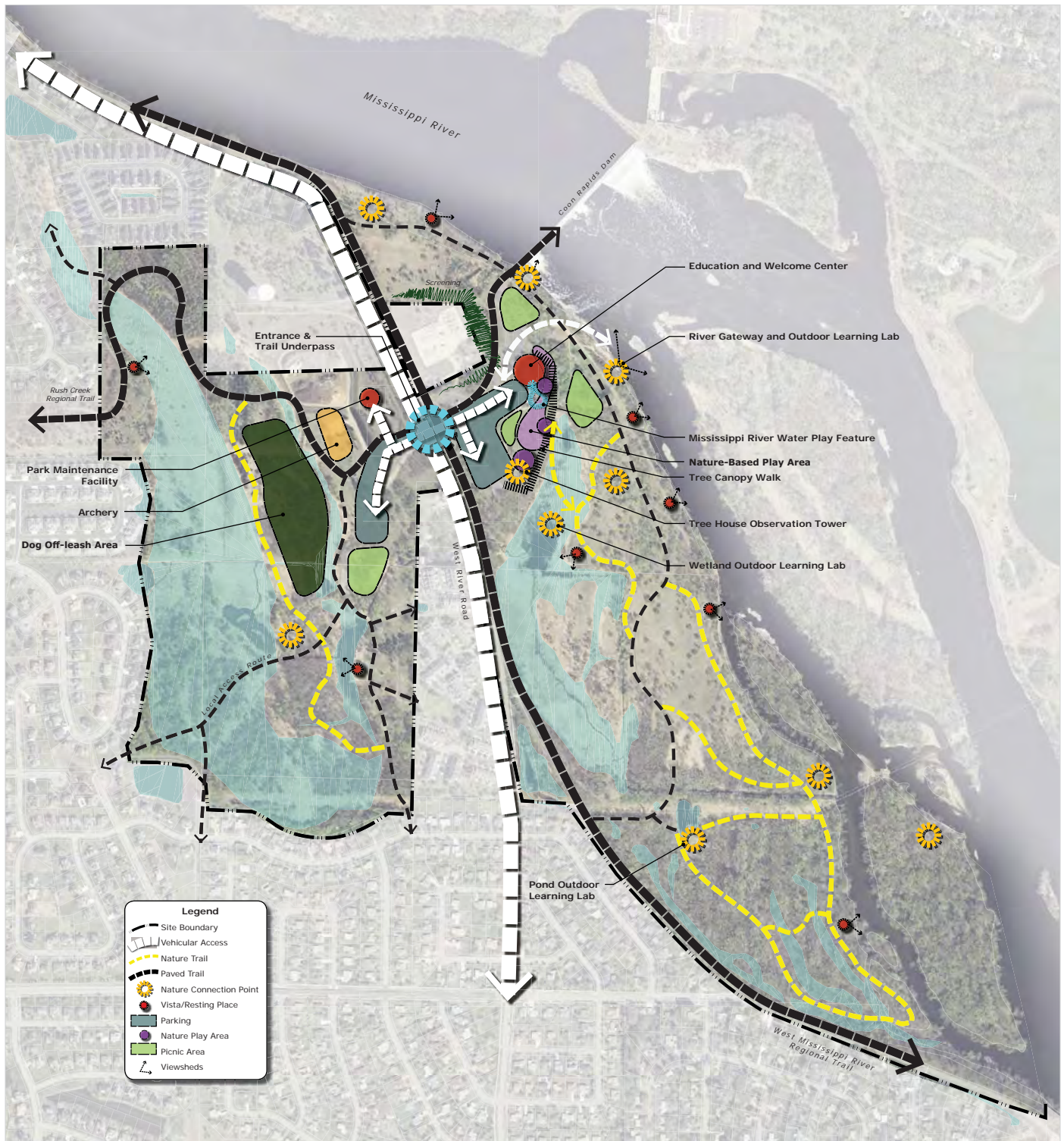
off-leash area is envisioned to be naturalized (compared to turf or solid mulch), with additional vegetative screening to reduce potential visual impacts. While there will be additional park activity in this location, it is not anticipated to significantly impact adjacent properties.

The engaged public was supportive of a new or enhanced park building that would serve functions of both a nature and visitor center. Three Rivers’ elected officials engaged in robust and thoughtful discussions and analysis over the course of a full year to determine the correct building scope and program to best meet the community’s need while being fiscally responsible. Several options were explored before the final recommendation was agreed upon; Mississippi Gateway Center. This careful vetting process and approach verified that demand already exists for a new center.

*International Association for Public Participation: Public Participation Spectrum

Figure 9: Preliminary Concept Diagram

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Phase 3 | Public Comment Period

Purpose: Phase 3's intent is to inform, promote awareness and provide a final opportunity for interested parties to provide feedback on master plan recommendations.

Approach & Process: At this point in the planning and public engagement process, the participation process centered on providing the final recommendations and relevant information for interested participants to best understand the background, alternatives, opportunities/challenges and/or solutions. This stage of engagement is referred to as 'inform.'^{*} During the 'inform' stage, participants were welcomed and encouraged to share feedback, with final decision-making authority held by the Three Rivers' and Brooklyn Park's elected bodies. Due to the amount and incorporation of previous engagement which guided the master planning recommendations, this type of engagement is appropriate at this stage in the planning process.

As part of this phase, a 30-day comment period was held from January 2 - 31, 2018. The project team attended 6 community and agency events and meetings. Different strategies and timing of strategies were employed during Phase 3 of the engagement process (Table 8). A list of all events and activities attended is available in Appendix G.

Public Comment Themes & Responses Summary: A summary of the major themes heard during the 30-day comment period and how the comments were/were-not addressed in the master plan are outlined within Table 9, following page. Additional detail is available in Appendix H.

^{*}International Association for Public Participation: Public Participation Spectrum

Table 8: Phase 3 | Engagement Strategies

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Strategy	Description
Elected Board Check-Ins	
November 2017	The draft master plan was presented to Three Rivers Board of Commissioners on Nov. 2, 2017 and Brooklyn Park City Council on Nov. 13, 2017. Three Rivers Board of Commissioners approved the draft master plan for public comment and governmental review and approval on December 21, 2017.
Information Display	
Ongoing (Continuation of Phases 2-3)	A mobile display showing the final recommendations and concept plan was available at the park, Brooklyn Park City Hall and Hennepin County-Brooklyn Park Library. Written comments were collected on-site.
Website & Social Media Updates	
Ongoing (Continuation of Phase 2-3)	The project webpage was updated to include the final recommendations and concept plan. Site visitors were provided an opportunity to share feedback through the online dialog or email.
Press Release/Media	
December 2017 - January 2018	A press release to local media was distributed in December 2017, providing information on the final recommendations and concept plan and how interested parties could obtain additional information and provide comment.
Mailing	
December 2017	Staff followed up to all engaged parties in which contact information was available inviting them to review and comment on the final recommendations and concept plan.
Presentations/Discussions/Open Houses	
January - February, 2018	Two open houses were held on January 9 and 16, 2018 for community members to review the final plan and share their thoughts. In addition, the plan was presented and/or discussed at the January 23, 2018 Brooklyn Center Multicultural Advisory Committee Meeting, February 5, 2018 Brooklyn Park City Council Meeting and February 6, 2018 Champlin Parks and Recreation Commission.
External Advisory Team (EAT) Meeting	
January 16, 2018	Staff held one meeting with the EAT to review the final plan recommendations and seek letters of support for the plan.



Champlin-Brooklyn Park Academy 4th graders providing input during Phase 1.
Source: Three Rivers Park District



Zanewood Recreation Family Night engagement.
Source: Three Rivers Park District



Brooklyn Center Secondary 'bike to park' picnic and engagement.
Source: Three Rivers Park District

Table 9: Public Comment Themes & Responses

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Public Comment Theme	How Theme Addressed in the Master Plan
General support for the plan	No changes necessary.
Encourage and support park access via foot, bike and bus	Mississippi Gateway Regional Park sits the convergence of two regional trails: West Mississippi River and Rush Creek Regional Trail as well as along bus route 766. Additional language was added in Section 6: Design Guidance to more purposefully recognize this goal (access the park via foot, bike and bus). In addition, language was added to indicate support for improved bus access on weekends as the current route is weekday only, improved bus shelter facilities and clear connections between the bus stop and park.
Clearer rationale for natural resource protection	Additional text was added in Section 6: Design Guidance to more purposefully explain the desire for natural resource protection and restoration as it is an important component of the plan.
Tension between providing access and connection to nature with natural resource protection	<p>This tension will continue to exist through the design, development and operation phases of the park. As a regional park, a strong emphasis is placed on providing outdoor recreation opportunities within in a natural setting. The vision and goals of this park speak to making the park more accessible to the public and doing so in a manner that is gradual and comfortable to new visitors that have no to little experience in nature.</p> <p>This will undoubtedly change some of the existing use patterns and alter areas of the park that previously saw little visitation.</p> <p>The intent is to balance development and natural resource protection. To do this, the plan calls for three distinct areas of development/natural resource protection. This will allow for a gradual transition from the built environment to the natural environment, providing some areas of the park that are more fully developed and host the majority of the park activity and others that are more resource based with little impact on the landscape and minimal park visitor activity. The intent is for users of varying degrees of comfort in nature to have a spot that meets their needs. For new visitors in particular, the park is also envisioned to serve as gateway facility with the hope of providing positive experiences and fostering an interest in visiting additional Three Rivers parks which have a stronger natural resource and less development focus.</p> <p>In addition, as the park is furthered designed and ongoing consideration to protect and enhance resources will occur at a very site specific scale and with each development initiative.</p> <p>Section 6: Design Guidance already included a thorough discussion on the overall goal and rationale of providing gradual, comfortable access to the park; however, additional language was added to ensure that thoughtful design consideration and best management practices to protect natural resources is carried forward in the design phase and at the site scale.</p>
Incorporating sustainable, ecological best management practices	As the park transitions from the master plan stage to the design phase, park designers will continue to look for ways to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential development impacts on the park and it's resources and utilize sustainable, ecological best management practices. Additional language was added in Section 6: Design Guidance to better acknowledge this intent.



Children enjoy exploring nature at Mississippi Gateway Regional Park.
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

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SUMMARY EXISTING CONDITIONS

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park currently exists as a location with growing opportunities for nature-based recreation and education. The park was generally developed about 40 years ago with minimal park improvements occurring in the recent past (\$16 million dam reconstruction in 2014-2015 exception). The park as a whole, is in need of a complete refresh.

KEY FEATURES

Unique physical characteristics often define parks. Mississippi Gateway Regional Park possesses prominent and distinctive features that provide an identity that distinguishes it from other parks.

Mississippi River

The Mississippi River is the most significant natural resource feature of the park and all other natural resources within the park are connected to it. The river changes seasonally - and often daily. In the spring, the river often is in a flood state with a higher elevation and faster moving water, whereas in late summer the water level is lower and slower - revealing its rocky shoreline near the Coon Rapids Dam and sandy banks further south. During lower water times, it is also possible to wade across the river and access several islands located adjacent to the park. It is a special place to see and interact with one of our Nation's most significant natural and cultural resources.

A large recreation pool sits on the upstream side of the dam and a network of channels of varying sizes and water flows sits on the downstream side. The recreation pool shoreline is steep with a wooded embankment overlooking the recreation pool and the downstream shoreline is generally flatter with rocks and sand with pockets of low, steep embankments.

Coon Rapids Dam

Another key feature of the park is Coon Rapids Dam. The dam was reconstructed in 2014 - 2015 with a State of Minnesota \$16 million appropriation. The modifications allow the dam to act as a fish barrier and prevent invasive migration upstream which threaten the health and sustainability of the State's important fisheries. The Rush Creek Regional Trail over the dam connects Hennepin and Anoka counties and their extensive regional trail systems.



Coon Rapids Dam provides regional trail access across the Mississippi River.

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Late summer Mississippi River water levels expose the rocky shoreline.

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Natural Resources

The overall scenic and natural qualities of the park are also key features and provide an opportunity for many park users to enjoy the natural world close to home. The park includes floodplain and upland forests, wetlands, open meadows and river shoreline - which, collectively, offer a varying landscape and unique outdoor experiences.

BOUNDARY, OWNERSHIP & ACREAGE

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park (267 acres) is located in the northeast corner of Brooklyn Park, Hennepin County, along the Mississippi River. Vehicular access to the park is gained via West River Road and multi-modal access includes West Mississippi River Regional Trail, Rush Creek Regional Trail and Mississippi River Regional Trail (Anoka County) and limited bus service during the five day work week. The park is effectively divided into two units; the East Unit located east of West River Road and the West Unit located west of West River Road (**Figure 10**). The East Unit is officially part of the Metropolitan Council Regional Park System. The West Unit is not part of the Metropolitan Council Regional Parks System.

East Unit

The East Unit (170.5 acres) is bound by the river to the east and West River Road along the north and west edge, and 97th Avenue along the southern boundary. West Mississippi River Regional Trail runs along the western and southern borders reinforcing the park boundary and providing a buffer and transition space between the developed world and the park interior. The East Unit is comprised of acreage owned by Three Rivers, Hennepin County forfeited land and a park easement held by Brooklyn Park over private property. The intent that the property rights held by the Brooklyn Park and Hennepin County would be transferred to Three Rivers at no cost.

East Unit Ownership	Acres
Three Rivers (fee title)	165.3
Private Property (Brooklyn Park holds easement)	2.6
Hennepin County Forfeited Land (effectively held by Brooklyn Park)	2.6
Total	170.5 acres

West Unit

The West Unit (96.5 acres) boundary is more challenging to describe as private property often falls between parkland and a parallel road. In general the West Unit is bound by West River Road to the east, 98th Avenue to the south, Chestnut and Butternut Circles to the west, and the Rush Creek Regional Trail to the north. The West Unit is entirely comprised of acreage owned by Brooklyn Park.

West Unit Ownership	Acres
City of Brooklyn Park (Fee Title)	96.5
Total	96.5 acres

EASEMENTS

The long-term plan for the park also includes reconfiguring Rush Creek Regional Trail easements and long-term lease agreement for the maintenance facility with Brooklyn Park. The regional trail easements would become part of the official Rush Creek Regional Trail boundary and the maintenance facility lease boundary would become part of the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park boundary upon conveyance of property rights.

The East Unit and the dam were previously owned by Northern States Power and an electric substation is still located on East Unit's western edge. As such, there are numerous utility easements

Figure 10: Park Boundary Map - East & West Units

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 11: Easements

Source: Three Rivers Park District



This is a conceptual diagram of known and assumed easements at the time of the master plan. Additional investigation may be needed prior to significant development and natural resource projects to ensure consistency between the easement language and the planned projects.

located within the park boundaries (Figure 11). These easements are restrictive in how the parkland may be used in respect to both natural resource management and recreation development. In addition, the overhead lines detract from the desired user experience of a natural resource-based park. The master plan calls for working with the utility easement holders to explore opportunities to narrow, realign, upgrade and/or remove utilities as opportunities present themselves in an effort to minimize the impact of the utilities to the greatest extent possible.

ADJACENT LAND USES

Residential neighborhoods - namely River North, Eidem and Willowstone - surround Mississippi Gateway Regional Park to the north, west and south. These neighborhoods are currently planned to remain predominately low-density residential with a few pockets of medium density residential – both of which are compatible adjacent land uses to local and regional parkland. The area to the east of the park includes the Mississippi River and Anoka County's East Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. These features and land uses are compatible with and support, Mississippi Gateway Regional Park's vision and long-term plans. There are three instances where an existing or potential adjacent land use may negatively affect parkland or the public's enjoyment of the park and they are described and illustrated in Table 10 and Figure 12.



Anoka County's East Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park is physically connected to Mississippi Gateway Regional Park via the walkway across the dam.
Source: Anoka County

Figure 12: Adjacent Potential Land Use Conflicts

Source: Three Rivers Park District

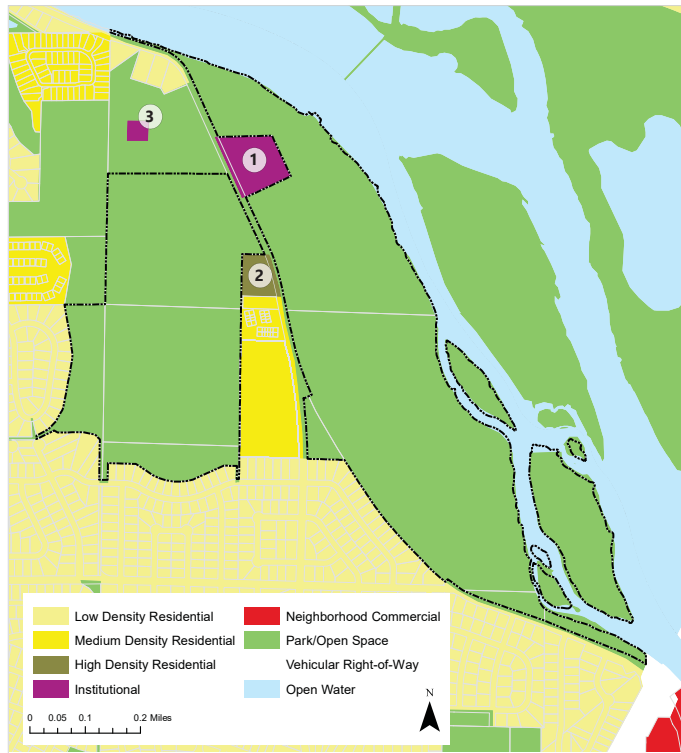


Table 10: Adjacent Potential Land Use Conflicts

Source: Three Rivers Park District

#	Description	Background/Solution
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided for institutional Existing electric substation (owned by Northern States Power) Location description: North end of East Unit, Adjacent to West River Road. 	<p>The existing electric substation is visually incompatible and takes away from the desired user experience of a natural resource-based park. In addition, the overhead power lines running to and from the facility prohibit certain use and enjoyment of parkland.</p> <p>There are no plans to move this facility as it is cost-prohibitive; however, the master plan calls for further screening the facility from parkland and working with the owner when opportunities arise to minimize the impact of the overhead lines on the park.</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided for high density residential Existing single family residential Location Description: East side of West Unit, Centrally located within the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park context, Adjacent to West River Road. 	<p>A pocket of land (3.55 acres) is sandwiched between West River Road (to the east), the park (to the north and west) and existing medium residential (to the south). This area includes two parcels – both currently have a single family home as well as several out-buildings. The 2030 Land Use Plan calls for this area to become high density residential.</p> <p>Three Rivers does not oppose this proposed land use, but recognizes that when not developed properly, conflict between high density residential land uses and natural resource parkland may occur. To ensure compatible development, Three Rivers and Brooklyn Park are committed to working collaboratively with the existing owners or future developer. In addition, if the opportunity to include these properties within the master plan boundary presents itself through a willing-seller arrangement, and if supported by Brooklyn Park and Three Rivers, the park boundary will be adjusted to include these properties.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided for institutional & park/open space (existing water tower/future water treatment facility) Existing park/open space (owned by City of Brooklyn Park) Location Description: North end of West Unit. 	<p>There may be a future need to pull water from the Mississippi River to meet water supply needs and to alleviate reliance on depleting aquifers. If this becomes necessary, a water treatment facility may be located at the West Unit's northern end. This is the most desirable area, as it would be adjacent to the park's future administrative area and across the street from the existing electric substation.</p> <p>The master plan calls for vegetative screening and berming to buffer the parkland from this potential future land use.</p>

EXISTING RECREATION DEVELOPMENT INVENTORY

Both the East and West Units include concentrated areas of recreation development and offer primarily passive recreation (Table 11). Trails transcend both park units and ultimately connect the two units and the greater community via the Rush Creek and West Mississippi River Regional Trails.

Within the East Unit several facilities are at the end of their useful life and no longer fully support the community's needs, expectations and demands.

The West Unit has seen some improvements over the last few years that are intended to serve the greater community and attract new users. However, the overall recreation opportunities and condition of the infrastructure prohibit this area from fully capitalizing on its potential as one of the only nature-based parks within the Brooklyn Park system.

EDUCATION PROGRAM INVENTORY

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park education programs are growing and exceeding the educational spaces within the park. School groups doubled from 305 in 2014-15 to 684 in 2016-17 and public programs increased by 7 fold during this same timeframe from 19 to 132. Summer camp days also increased from 409 in 2014 to 539 in 2016. To support this increased demand and offerings of education programming and general park users, the visitor center hours tripled from 872 (2014-15) to 2,756 (2016-17).



Mississippi Gateway Regional Park offered 132 public programs and 684 school programs in 2016-17.

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Table 11: Existing Recreation Development Inventory

Source: Three Rivers Park District

EAST UNIT	
Visitor Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,250 square foot building • Non-ADA compliant bathrooms • Park information • Small public exhibit and live animal area • Minimal storage and staff offices (additional staff offices are provided in a trailer located adjacent to the visitor center) • Maintenance garage, work area and storage is part of/ adjacent to the Visitor Center • A large parking lot (scheduled for reconstruction in 2018) is located adjacent to the visitor center and supports the greater park.
Coon Rapids Dam & Walkway	<p>The dam serves several functions; predominately as a fish barrier prohibiting migration of invasive species upstream, and secondarily it creates a nine mile recreation pool behind it for motorized boating (water skiing, tubing, fishing, pontooning, etc).</p> <p>A walkway over the dam (part of Rush Creek Regional Trail) connects people walking, running and biking across the Mississippi River. The walkway provides scenic river views, highlighting the vast difference of the recreation pool upstream and rapids downstream. It also showcases the power of the river through the audible roar and the water spray passing over the dam.</p>
Picnic Area & Shelter	<p>Picnicking occurs, and is allowed, throughout the park, but designated and supported picnic areas occur between the visitor center and river, the river flats area and to the south of the visitor center. The river flats area is all general picnicking. This area is not supported by water, shelter or parking. The picnic area south of the visitor center is reserveable and is supported by a shelter, water and parking. A large lawn adjacent to the shelter also supports this area.</p>
Mississippi River Access	<p>A usable, but undesirable, non-motorized boat launch exists downstream of the dam which also serves as the main access route to the river. It is not ADA compliant, is subject to erosion (despite recent improvements), and does not provide the desired user experience. Users must also carry water craft from the upper parking area to the river.</p>
Regional Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rush Creek Regional Trail runs east-west through the park and over the Coon Rapids Dam walkway. • West Mississippi River Regional Trail (also part of US Bikeway 45 and Mississippi River Trail) runs north-south through the park.
Interior Park Trails	<p>Interior park trails are predominately non-paved and crisscross the majority of the park with the exception of the most northerly park area overlooking the recreation pool. This is a desired destination and park users have created their own unsanctioned trail network. Many of the trails are soft surface, prone to wet and muddy conditions and not ADA compliant. The interior park trails maybe used for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter but no maintenance/grooming is currently provided.</p>
Other Recreation Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing is the main park recreation activity. There are two fishing platforms built into the dam, but no other support facilities are located in the park. • Birding and osprey nest observation, in particular, are enjoyed by park users. A strategically placed picnic table supports this activity. • Several geocaches are located throughout the park. No support facilities are in place or required.
WEST UNIT	
Archery	<p>A multi-lane archery range is located north of the dog off-leash area. Targets, a small shelter (fits one picnic table) and gravel parking supports this facility.</p>
Dog Off-Leash Area	<p>A 2-3 acre turf, fenced dog off-leash area is located between the archery and picnic area.</p>
Picnic Area and Shelter	<p>Picnicking generally occurs near the main parking lot. There is one very small shelter that fits one picnic table. Permanent bathrooms and water are not provided.</p>
Regional Trails	<p>Rush Creek Regional Trail runs east-west through the northern portion of the park.</p>
Interior Park Trails	<p>Interior park trails are both non-paved and paved. Their configuration supports local access to the Rush Creek Regional Trail and hiking/walking/running within the park via a loop system with varying surfaces. Many of the trails are soft surface, prone to wet and muddy conditions and not ADA compliant.</p>

CULTURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

A broad review of the archaeological record tells of a human presence in the Mississippi River corridor dating back over 12,000 years. From the earliest Paleo-era hunters to the Dakota people who called this region home at the time of Euro-American contact, the river was a central feature of the landscape, providing both sustenance and transportation.

To date, no significant American Indian archaeological sites are identified within Mississippi Gateway Regional Park. However, only a small percentage of the land base is formally surveyed for cultural resources and the park's more natural areas maintain a high potential for containing unknown cultural materials.

The park has had a unique history since the turn of the 20th century (Figure 13). The East Unit was previously owned by Northern States Power. Coon Rapids Dam, one of the key features of the park, was constructed in 1913 with power generating in late 1914. The dam implementation effort was enormous and resulted in construction of a temporary city and associated housing to support the workers. Most of this was located on the Anoka County side of the river and has since been removed. In 1966, the power company elected to stop using the dam to generate hydroelectricity due to maintenance costs and limited profit and donated the land and dam to Three Rivers. Evidence of this former use is still evident today with the electrical transmission station, overhead electrical lines and utility easements that crisscross the park.

Figure 13: Cultural Resource Timeline: Beyond 1890s

Source: Three Rivers Park District

-■ **1898** Coon Creek considered source for hydroelectric power
-■ **1911** US Congress approves dam construction
-■ **1913** Dam construction begins
-■ **1914** Dam construction completed
-■ **1917** Dam reconstruction due to ice damage
-■ **1966** Northern States Power closes the facility
-■ **1969** Dam and land are donated to Three Rivers
-■ **1975** Park development occurred including visitor center and maintenance building
-■ **1995** Old dam torn out due to severe ice and water damage
-■ **1997** New dam built on top of old dam's foundation
-■ **2010** Dam considered for use as invasive species barrier
-■ **2014** Dam reconstructed to serve as invasive species barrier



Coon Rapids Dam under reconstruction due to ice dam damage Sept. 17, 1917.
Source: Anoka County Historical Society



Coon Rapids Dam reconstruction November 5, 1917.
Source: Anoka County Historical Society



Coon Rapids Dam reconstruction nears completion.
Source: Anoka County Historical Society



Coon Rapids Dam walkway open to pedestrians - note cut logs being transported.
Source: Anoka County Historical Society



Coon Rapids Dam hydroelectric powerplant.
Source: Anoka County Historical Society

NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

As a natural resource-based regional park, the protection and enhancement of natural resources are as important as the recreation offerings. The natural resources provide the setting to support nature-based recreation including unique, high quality user experiences that help connect people to nature. A summary of the natural resources at Mississippi Gateway Regional Park are included in Table 12.

Table 12: Natural Resource Inventory

Source: Three Rivers Park District

GENERAL	
Glacial History	About 75,000 years ago, the Wisconsin Age glacial period began. This glacial period had a significant effect on the landscape and waterways of Minnesota. During this glacial period, and as recent as 14,000 years ago, the Des Moines Lobe of the Laurentide Ice Sheet covered a significant portion of Minnesota – including Hennepin County. When this lobe retreated it left behind rolling hills, nutrient rich soil and a vast system of lakes and rivers – including the Mississippi River.
Topography	Mississippi Gateway Regional Park’s topography is typical of the river corridor in this area. The historic riverbank is present throughout the park creating a natural wooded bluff line through the southern two-thirds of the East Unit - including slopes between 12-18% and some greater than 18%. The parkland above and below the bluff is relatively flat with very subtle slope pitching toward the river and southern park area (lowest area within the park). The northern third of the East Unit is flat with the bluff landform occurring right at the river’s edge and rising over the recreation pool. The West Unit is also relatively flat and slopes to a central wetland complex.

VEGETATION RESOURCES				
Minnesota Land Cover Classification System	The Minnesota Land Cover Classification System categories the landscape by land cover showing areas of development as well as natural areas by plant community type (Figure 14).			
	MLCCS	East Unit	West Unit	Total
	Artificial Surfaces	7.4	8.3	15.7
	Planted or Cultivated Vegetation	8.5	1.8	10.3
	Forests	62.3	16.9	79.2
	Woodland	31.6	20.2	51.8
	Shrubland	0	1.0	1.0
	Herbaceous	53.4	46.2	99.6
	Water	7.3	2.1	9.4
	Total Acres	170.5	96.5	267
Minnesota County Biological Survey	The Minnesota County Biological Survey maps the distribution and status of the state’s rare and native flora, fauna and plant communities. The Minnesota County Biological Survey identifies 52 acres of Silver Maple (Virginia Creeper) Floodplain Forest as well as areas of moderate biological significance within Mississippi Gateway Regional Park. These areas are located in the southern area of the East Unit (Figure 15).			
Cottonwood Reintroduction	Three Rivers is working with partners to reintroduce cottonwoods in the park as research indicates that they are not naturally reproducing at the historic rate and are an appropriate species for this site given its location within the Mississippi River floodplain.			
Invasive Species	The park is home to many common invasive species found within the Twin Cities including but not limited to: buckthorn, smooth brome grass, Canadian thistle, garlic mustard, reed canary grass and birds foot trefoil. Active management efforts are underway within the East Unit to reduce invasive species and progress has been made - however, the West Unit has not been actively managed and there are portions that are almost entirely invasive species. If they were removed, there would be little plant material, habitat and screening from neighbors left.			

OVERALL ECOLOGICAL VALUE HEALTH	
MnDNR Regional Significant Ecological Areas	The Regional Significant Ecological Area identifies areas within the Twin Cities with ecologically significant terrestrial and wetland areas. Areas within Mississippi Gateway Regional Park are classified as Moderate and High (Figure 16). Unfortunately, this data set does not identify why the areas are regionally significant. Based on the location of the identified areas, those classified as High appear to be within the Mississippi River floodplain, undeveloped areas and native plant communities and the areas classified as Moderate appear to be undeveloped upland.
Additional Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a MnDNR Ecological Corridor; • Within the Mississippi River Flyway; and • Within the MnDNR’s Mississippi River Critical Area.

WILDLIFE RESOURCES			
Rare, Endangered, and Threatened Wildlife*	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
	Blandings Turtle	Emydoidea blandingii	Threatened
	Long-bearded Hawkweed	Hieracium longipilum	Non-Threatened
	Black Sandshell	Ligumia recta	Species of Special Concern
	Round Pigtoe	Pleurobema sintoxia	Threatened
	Colonial Waterbird Nesting Site	N/A	--
	Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	Species of Special Concern
	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	Threatened
No rare, endangered and threatened wildlife are anticipated to be significantly impacted by the proposed park plan. As with all park projects, design and construction best management processes, such as avoiding construction during the nesting season, will be implemented to avoid or minimize any potential impacts.			

*Rare, Endangered, and Threatened Plant Communities lists rare Minnesota plant communities located within or immediately adjacent to Mississippi Gateway Regional Park that are documented in the Natural Heritage System.

WATER RESOURCES				
Mississippi River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located on west bank of Mississippi River at Coon Rapids Dam; • 2,080 feet of shoreline on the recreation pool (north of dam) and 6,500 feet of shoreline south of dam; and • The Mississippi River is an impaired water as listed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency due to mercury and PCB within fish tissue. 			
Wetland	Areas designated as wetlands are shown on Figure 17.			
	Wetland Type	East Unit	West Unit	Total
	Type 1: Seasonally Flooded Basins	66.3	23.3	89.6
	Type 3: Shallow Marshes	18.6	0.1	18.7
	Type 4: Deep Marshes	1.0	0.9	1.9
	Type 5: Open Water	0.4	1.1	1.5
	Type 6: Shrub Swamps	33.1	34.1	67.2
	Total Acres	119.4	59.5	178.9
Ponds/Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unnamed creek runs through both East and West Units and discharges into the Mississippi River at the southern portion of the East Unit. • There are several small ponds in the West and East Units that are all connected via the unnamed stream and adjacent wetlands with the exception of the pond in the very southern portion of the East Unit which is only connected via surface water during times of flooding. 			
Additional Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The park is located within the West Mississippi Watershed (Mississippi and Northwest/Riverside Subwatersheds). 			

Figure 14: Minnesota Land Cover Classification System

Source: Three Rivers Park District, MnDNR

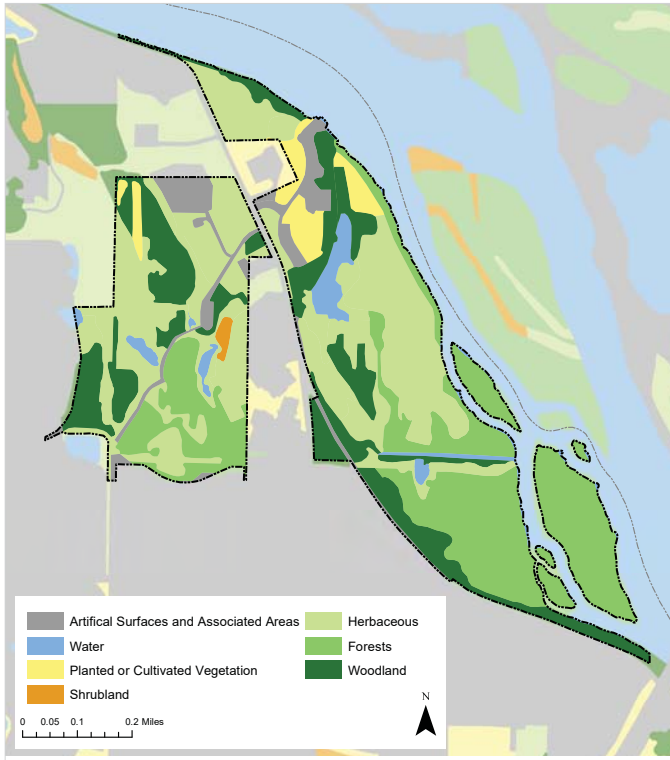


Figure 15: Minnesota County Biological Survey

Source: Three Rivers Park District, MnDNR

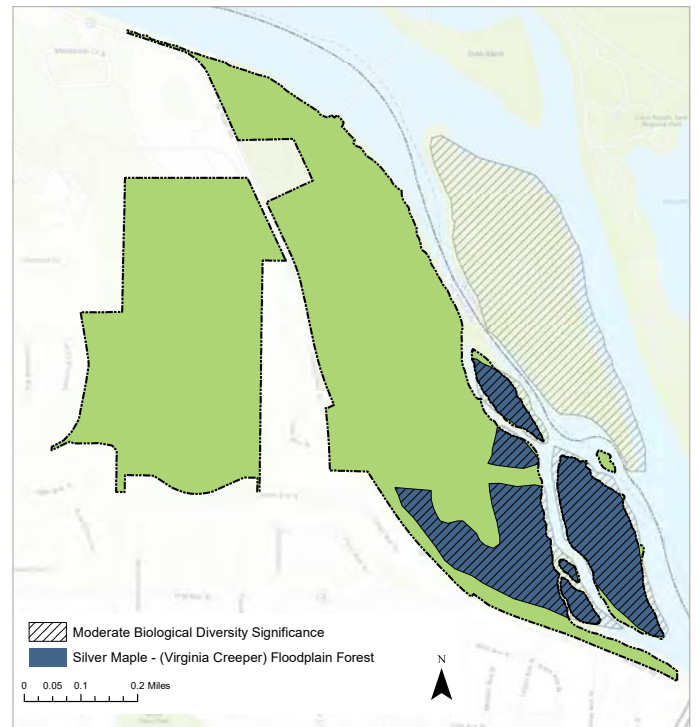


Figure 16: Regionally Significant Ecological Areas

Source: Three Rivers Park District, MnDNR

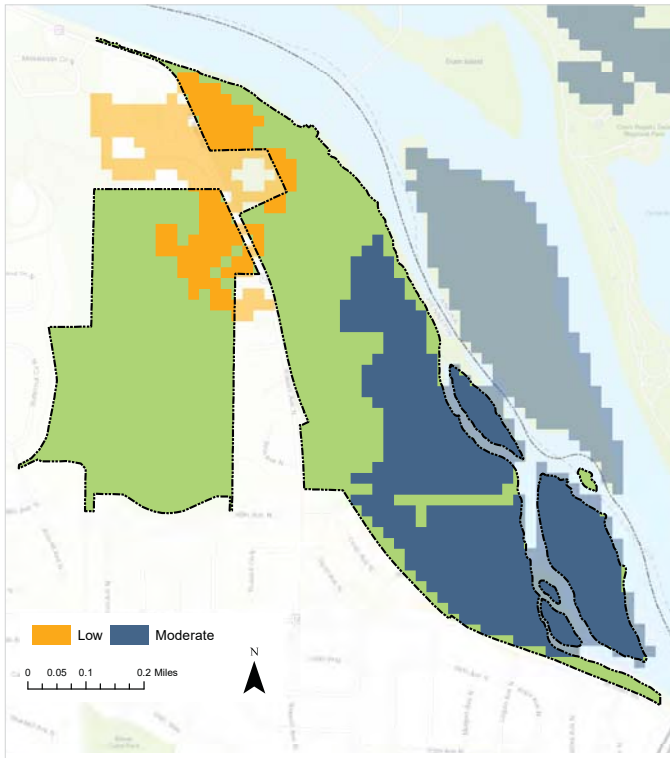
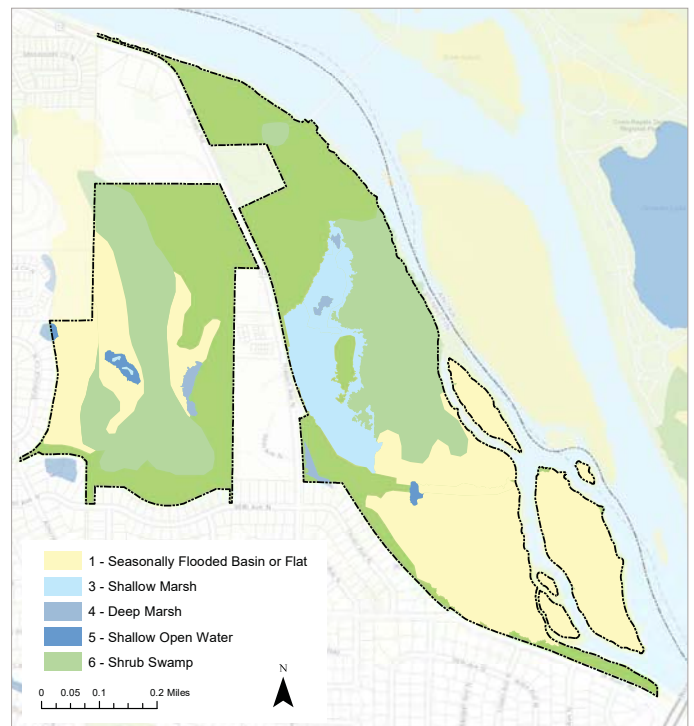


Figure 17: Wetlands

Source: Three Rivers Park District, MnDNR



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The Mini-Mississippi River Play and Education Feature will be a main park destination feature and will help draw new and repeat park visitors.
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District



DESIGN GUIDANCE PARK DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park Master Plan includes development proposals at both the macro and micro scales, each overlapping to create a cohesive and congruent overall park development concept. At the macro scale, a park-wide development plan focuses on park components that expand or explain the recreation and natural resource plan for the entire park. Conversely, at the micro scale, individual development zones are described for specific and unique areas within the park.

In addition, while a master plan provides a very clear understanding of the long-term development concept of the park, it does not determine the final design of the park or spaces within the park. As the park moves from the master plan stage to the design phase best management practices to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential impacts will be employed. The delicate balance of introducing people and providing access to nature with protecting and preserving the park's natural resources will continue to play a lead role in design decisions and opportunities to reduce light pollution, minimize and treat runoff, encourage and support access via bus, bike and foot, incorporate native and pollinator species, practice responsible shoreline development and similar will continued to be evaluated.

DEVELOPMENT ZONES

The park development concept is structured to transition visitors from the built environment to nature. The farther one travels from the main recreation area, the less developed the park becomes and opportunities to interact with nature increase – and vice versa. The park includes four zones of park development; park-wide development, developed area, transition area and nature area.

PARK-WIDE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Park components found throughout the park are included within the park-wide development plan (Figure 18). These amenities complement and support specific park development zones.

Figure 18: Park-wide Development Plan

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Field Learning Stations

Field learning stations will support group education opportunities. A minimum of three park field learning stations are planned and will provide a basic education shelter and/or gathering space and storage for groups of 20-30 people. Depending on the education program of each space, they may also include other permanent or temporary components to assist with education efforts. While they will primarily serve school groups, program participants, and organized groups (such as Boy and Girl Scouts), they will also providing places for the general public to stop, rest, picnic, bird and/or interpret nature within the park. These spaces may evolve to also include small indoor learning labs to best meet the group education goals.

Nature Interpretation Nodes

Nine nature interpretation nodes are proposed throughout the park to purposefully introduce and connect people with nature. These spots are intended to showcase the most special places in the park: the recreation pool north of the dam, the dam, the river's edge, the prairie, the wetland complexes, floodplain forest, the islands, the rookery overlook, and the south pond (Figure 19). These places will provide opportunities for observing, interpreting nature and educating park users. These areas are intended to be resource based. As such, design and development of the spaces should complement and not detract from or otherwise negatively impact the natural resources. These nodes are points of discovery – as they entice visitors to explore further into nature and perhaps out of one's comfort zone. They are intended to be playful, reflective, educational and/or points to gather. They may incorporate a permanent improvement or it may be more temporal and change seasonally or annually – creating new reason for visitors to return to Mississippi Gateway Regional Park. Several of these spaces are already used but this is an opportunity to improve and enhance these spaces to better serve park visitors.

Additional nature interpretation nodes may occur as-needed to fulfill the park education and outdoor recreation programming goals. Some nodes will be multi-purpose and may overlap with field learning stations.

Fishing Facilities

Expanded and improved Mississippi River fishing facilities are proposed along much of the river's shoreline. Improvements and amenities are planned to include a non-motorized boat launch, ADA accessible route to the river's edge, places to sit and interact with or observe the river and fishing improvements such as fishing platforms (some ADA compliant), a fish cleaning station and places to prepare a shore lunch – including picnic spots with grills along the shoreline.

Trail System

The trail system complements the underlying park development hierarchy with the most developed and maintained trails within or adjacent to the developed area and gradually transitioning to non-paved, more rustic trails in the southerly and most remote portion of the park.

The proposed trail mileages by surface/type are below:

- Paved Trails (3.65 miles total) (Figure 20);
- Natural Surface Trails (3.15 miles total) (Figure 21);
- Cross Country Ski Trails (2.0, 2.6, & 3.0 km loops) (Figure 22);
- West Mississippi River Regional Trail (1.35 miles); and Rush Creek Regional Trail (0.5 miles).

The trail system provides access throughout the park in a manner that improves and provides ADA access and is comfortable to visitors with strollers as well as visitors that are unsure or may have some fear of nature or being secluded. In addition, the proposed trail system is designed to improve year-round access and recreation. The paved segments may be plowed, creating a series of loop opportunities and other non-paved segments may be groomed and made available for beginner cross-country skiing. To improve access and safety of connecting the west and east sides of the park via the Rush Creek Regional Trail, a grade-separated crossing of West River Road is proposed.

Figure 19: Nature Interpretation Nodes Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 20: Paved Trails

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 21: Natural Surface Trails

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 22: Cross-Country Ski Trails

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Additional trail design considerations and improvements are listed as follows:

- Improve/reroute non-paved trails where seasonally wet;
- Design and maintain trails in the developed and transition areas to be ADA compliant with hard, packed, stable surfaces;
- Utilize sustainable/natural trail design & maintenance best practices;
- Design trails to be sensitive to their surroundings and not adversely compromise the goal of connecting people to nature;
- Incorporate places to sit – with more places to sit in the more populated/developed areas of the park and along ADA routes;
- Provide wayfinding and interpretive signage; and
- Incorporate destinations (i.e. nature nodes) along trails.

In addition, special attention will be made to the natural resources immediately adjacent to the more developed trails. This is intended to increase plant community diversity, incorporate pollinators and utilize native plant species so persons not able to utilize the more rustic trails still have an opportunity to see and enjoy a wide range experiences such as birding

Parking & Park Roads

The parking lot and park roads are reconfigured to bring parking closer to the park entry points and away from the park’s main features - the Mississippi River and its associated plant and wildlife communities. In addition, this area will be designed to attract and support park visitors accessing the park via bus, bike or foot. A new park road with short term and ADA parking is proposed to improve access to the River Flats Area which includes general picnicking, fishing and non-motorized boat access. Visitors will no longer need to haul fishing gear, coolers, chairs, kayaks/ canoes and other paddling gear down and back up the bluff.

The development concept also includes an area for overflow or future permanent parking if need warrants. Bus parking and drop off will be accommodated in the Main Recreation Area parking area and an additional bus drop off servicing the South Pond Outdoor Learning Area is envisioned along West River Road in the southern portion of the park. Best management practices to address stormwater runoff will also consider ways to improve birding and support pollinators in the developed park areas.

DEVELOPED AREA

The main recreation area (50 acres) includes clusters of built destination-like park features and is the most developed of the four zones. Pockets of nature will be interwoven within the development area to enhance and provide a natural setting for the recreation components. This area is located in the park’s centralized heart and is a logical location for a main recreation area as it has already been impacted by past development, is accessible by West River Road and possesses significant scenic vistas. Further, this area is served by mass transit (currently Route 766) during weekdays. With this plan’s goal to better serve under represented community groups, expansion of bus service to weekends and evenings and improved bus stop facilities and connections to the park are desired.

The developed area is physically divided by West River Road. Proposed park elements located east of West River Road (East Unit) celebrate the proximity and adjacency of the Mississippi River and its associated landscape features. Conversely, the proposed park elements located west of West River Road (West Unit) is a combination of specialized user groups; large group reservation picnicking, dog off-leash area and archery which are less reliant on a natural setting to be successful.

With these different features and purposes in mind, the Developed Area is divided into three areas Upper Recreation Area (East Unit), River Flats Area (East Unit) and West Side Recreation Area (West Unit). The main components of each area are depicted below (Figure 23) and then further described in the following narrative.

Figure 23: Developed Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Upper Recreation Area (East Unit)		River Flats Area (East Unit)	
1	Mississippi Gateway Center	7	Non-motorized Boat Launch, ADA Access & Outdoor Teaching Space
2	Coon Rapids Dam	8	General picnicking
3	Mini-Mississippi River Play & Education Feature	Recreation Area (West Unit)	
4	Nature’s Highline Trail & Tree House	9	Archery Range
5	Nature-based Play Area	10	Dog Off-leash Area
6	General Picnicking	11	Large Group Reservation Picnicking
		12	Maintenance & Off-site Learning Hub

Upper Recreation Area

The Upper Recreation Area is generally bound by West River Road to the west, the bluffs the south and east and the electric substation and Coon Rapids Dam to the north (Figure 24). This area will be the most populated and programmed area within the park and incorporate many features that are desired by the local community but have regional interest and draw. The area is served by a new park entry road, parking lot(s) and Rush Creek Regional Trail expansion. Development within this area will incorporate and highlight the wooded bluff, scenic views across the park and to the river and vegetative screening along the road and electric substation.

1 | Mississippi Gateway Center

The Mississippi Gateway Center is proposed to provide a vibrant, welcoming place for people to learn about the park and it's most important asset – the Mississippi River. The Mississippi Gateway Center will merge the functions of a visitor and nature center together and provide impressive views of the Coon Rapids Dam and the river. It is envisioned to include classrooms and an interactive exhibit space to learn about the river and serve as the home to the park's education and recreation programming.

School and group education is planned to occur multiple times a day (Monday through Friday) during the school year and as needed on the weekends. This schedule may change to multi-day group programming, like summer camps, during the summer season. Public programs will occur throughout the day including evenings and weekends to support community demand. This building will be sized to accommodate up to 125 program participants.

The building is envisioned to be built into the bluff with a large deck overlooking the river and patio providing entry and event space (Figures 25 - 27). The building and surrounding patio and deck space will be community focused and will host large events throughout year. Events may be park specific or may serve a broader community need or function, like a farmer's market, to better engage the community within the park. The spaces will be designed to accommodate food trucks, small event tents and a higher level of activity than currently found in the park.

Main components of the building include:

- ADA/family and multi-stall restrooms;
- Small privacy room;
- Park information/reception/gathering area;
- Main gathering space;
- Programmable plaza/entry space;
- Large deck overlooking park/river;
- Nature interpretation and programming space;
- Exhibit space with live animals and animal care area;
- One dirty/working classroom for recreation education
- Two nature based education classrooms
- Equipment rental (potentially kayaks/canoes, snow shoes, cross country skis, bikes and similar); and
- Staff offices, break room, and storage.

Figure 24: Upper Recreation Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 25: Mississippi Gateway Center Deck Perspective

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 26: Mini-Mississippi River Play & Education Feature

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 27: Mississippi Gateway Center Cross-Section

Source: Three Rivers Park District

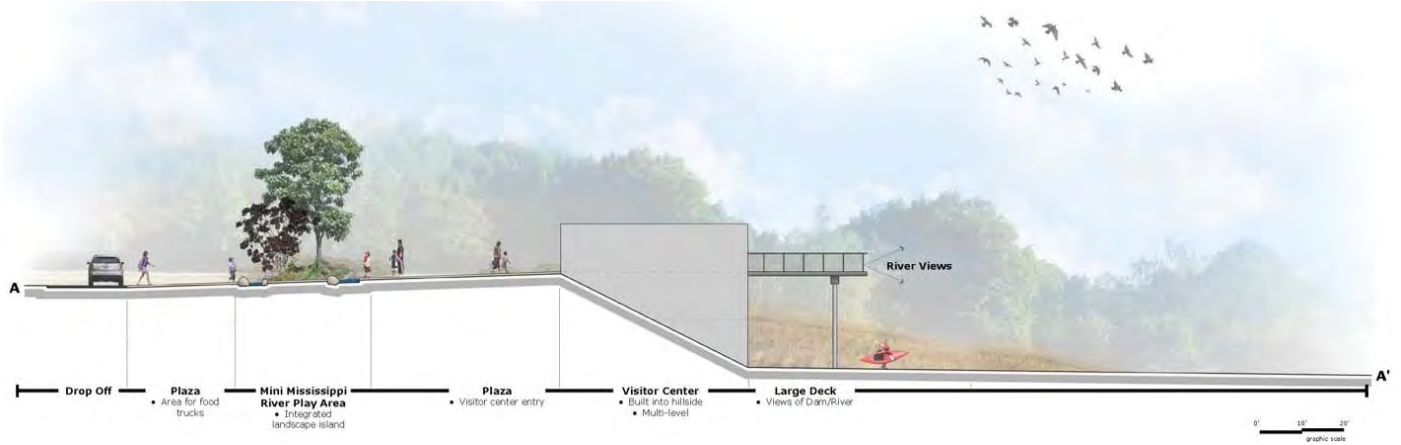
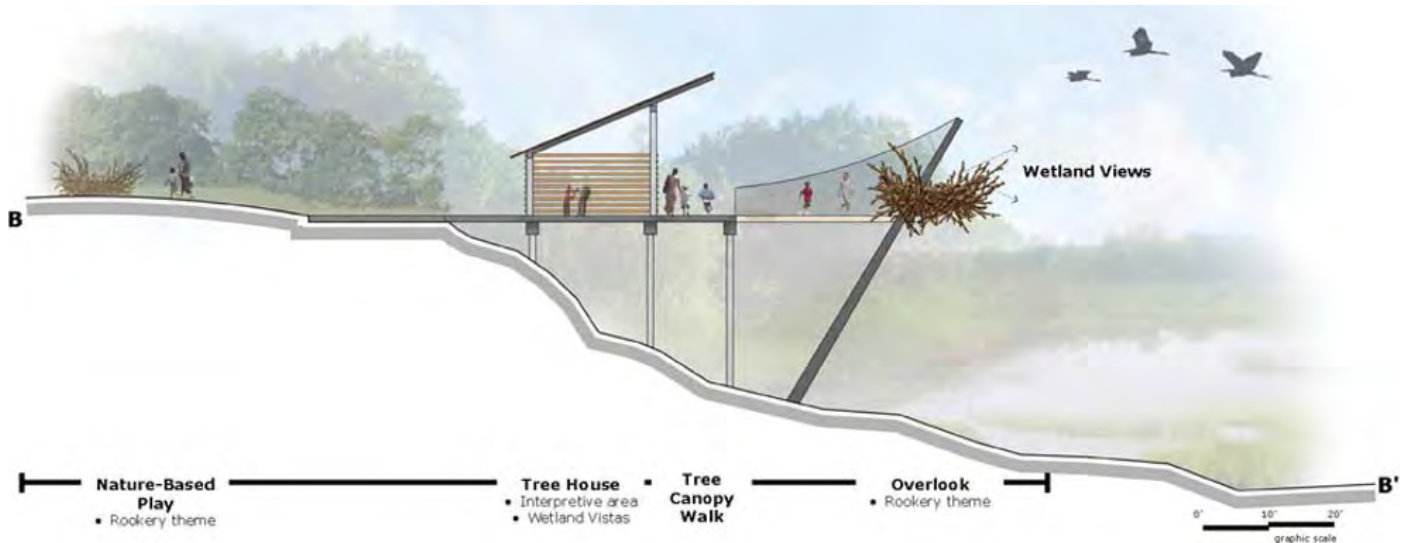


Figure 28: Nature's Highline Trail & Tree House Cross Section

Source: Three Rivers Park District



2 | Coon Rapids Dam

The Coon Rapids Dam will continue to be a focal point of Mississippi Gateway Regional Park - offering visitors the opportunity to visually access the Mississippi River and physically access Anoka County's complementary regional park via the dam walkway. In addition, the dam will continue to serve as a barrier to invasive migratory fish species that threaten the river's health.

3 | Mini-Mississippi River Play & Education Feature

The Mini-Mississippi River Play and Education Feature will be a main park destination feature and will help draw new and repeat park visitors. The play river is planned to start at (or near) the Mississippi Gateway Center and run through the northern large lawn and picnic area. It will provide an opportunity for visitors to learn about the river, watersheds, water quality, lock and dams and more through play. It is envisioned to be interactive allowing visitors to manipulate water flow and river channels (Figure 26, previous page).

The feature's goal is to mimic and highlight the Mississippi River through the Twin Cities area - highlighting both the wild, scenic and passive qualities of the river as well as the developed, industrial and working qualities.

4 | Nature's Highline Trail & Tree House

Nature's Highline Trail and Tree House will allow exploration from a new perspective, via an elevated walkway providing a greater sense of adventure and discovery than an at-grade trail. The elevated 25 feet high walkway begins off the Mississippi Gateway Center's deck and extends southwest along the steep, wooded bluff line reaching out above a wetland located at the toe of the bluff and providing views across the park and to the Mississippi River.

This facility will allow people to experience the park in a new way - similar to a raptor or bird soaring through the air or perched on the branch of a large oak tree. The walkway will increase visitors' awareness of the greater park. It is intended to be multi-level, with pockets of nature-based play, located below and adjacent to the walkway, directly integrated into the walkway using rope climbers and log chutes (slides) to create a seamless playful experience for users - regardless of age.

A tree house is proposed at the canopy walk's southern terminus and envisioned to incorporate an observation deck disguised as the nest of a large osprey, heron or other river bird species (Figure 28).

Figure 29: Nature's Highline Trail

Source: Three Rivers Park District



The elevated boardwalk construction will require many design features beyond a typical boardwalk. The boardwalk will be constructed within a dense and mature tree cover that will require jogs to avoid removal of significant trees and provide the desired overlook opportunities (Figure 29). The boardwalk will be constructed on a steep slope with erodible soils and a potential high water table due to the adjacent wetland and; therefore, will require helical pier foundations to limit soil disturbance while providing excellent bearing capacity. The boardwalk will be engineered with long beam spans to reduce the number of piers required. Due to Minnesota climate, additional engineering may be necessary to ensure that the structure will withstand the snow and wind loads.

The walkway will be 10 feet in width - or more in some locations - to accommodate educational programming as well as visitors stopping and enjoying the views while allowing other visitors to pass.

5 | Nature-Based Play Area

A play area was one of the top improvements requested by the community during the master planning process and there was significant interest and support to provide something unique with a destination quality that community members could not find at their local neighborhood park – like a nature-based play area. As envisioned, the nature-based play area will run along the entire bluff area from the Mississippi Gateway Center southwest along Nature's Highline Trail.

There will be at least three play nodes developed along this area, with the most developed node being located adjacent to the building. This play node will incorporate more standard nature-themed play components to help transition children and families without experience playing in nature. The middle play node will be more rustic with all-natural materials and located at the base of the bluff along the wetland edge. This could include large tree climbers, forts, net climbers and be physically connected to Nature's Highline Trail. The third play node will be near and incorporate the tree house structure at the southern end of Nature's Highline Trail. This area will be semi-developed with some play occurring in (or along) the lawn and developed area and some play tucked into the woods and bluff area.

An ADA trail will run through the nature-based play area, connecting all three play nodes and bringing people from the top of the bluff to the bottom and back. The entire bluff

area will be open to exploration and play, providing many opportunities for kids to find insects, build forts, experience imagination play and get dirty!

The nature-based play area is envisioned to be constructed with either natural materials and/or materials that appear to be natural - instead of typical dimensional lumber which increases the cost and time to construct. These design considerations will create custom play structures and areas that will connect the natural environment with man-made built structure.

6 | General Picnicking

There are three first come, first serve picnic shelters planned along Nature's Highline Trail. Each will be designed to accommodate 25-50 people within, and adjacent to, each shelter. No fee/no permit is required. These will be located directly adjacent to a new lawn space large enough to accommodate lawn games and pick-up soccer. They will include grills and picnic tables. Water will be available at the Mississippi Gateway Center and new bathrooms south of the picnic area near Nature's Highline Trail and Tree House. Electricity is not planned at this time, but could be added at a future date if warranted by demand.

Picnicking will also be allowed throughout the entire area to accommodate all different preferences - from quiet picnic spaces under the shade of an oak tree to the plaza directly adjacent to the Mississippi Gateway Center. Grills and picnic tables will be located throughout this space.

River Flats Area

The River Flats Area is located between the Mississippi Gateway Center and the Mississippi River (Figures 30 & 31). It is served by a new park road, temporary and ADA accessible parking and several paved trails. Key natural features that encompass the area include the Mississippi River and wooded 'bluff' slope. These natural areas are planned for natural resource restoration and management in a manner to balance resource protection and recreation development goals.

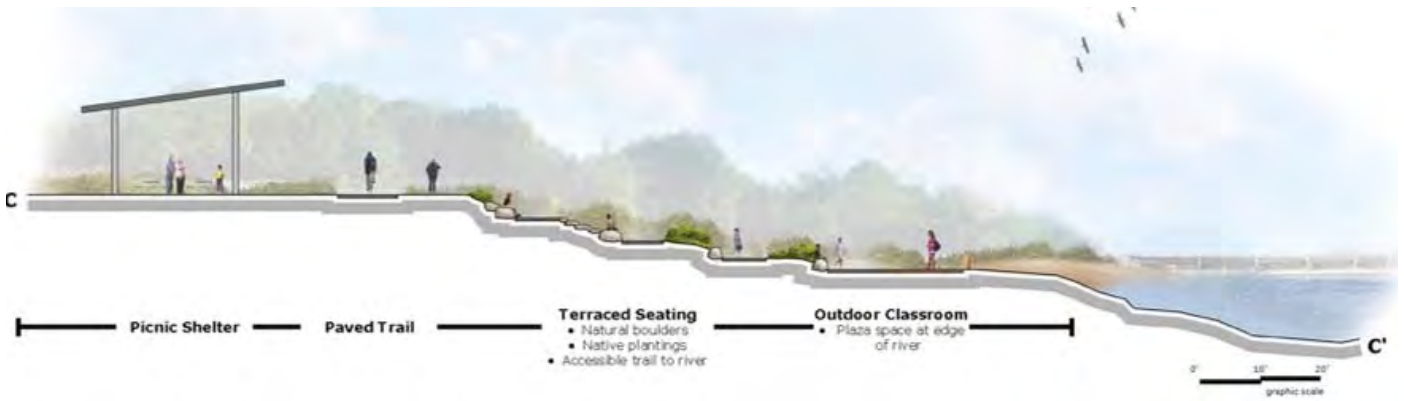
Figure 30: River Flats Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 31: River Flats Area Cross-Section

Source: Three Rivers Park District



7 | Non-Motorized Boat Launch & ADA Access

The non-motorized boat launch is intended to support canoeing, kayaking and rafting. The launch will include a paved pad leading up to the river's edge to support easy boat unloading, but is not intended to support boats on trailers requiring a wet launch.

A new ADA Mississippi River approach will provide direct access for all park visitors. The access will be built into a slope, requiring a switchback design and several small boulder retaining walls that will also serve as places to sit and observe the river. At the base of the route, a large flat space will be designed to accommodate river education programs essentially functioning as an outdoor classroom.

8 | General Picnic Area

The River Flats Area includes three first-come, first-serve picnic shelters adjacent to the Mississippi River. These will be similar to the non-reserveable picnic shelters of the main recreation area. Each will be designed to accommodate 25-50 people within and adjacent to each shelter. No fee/no permit will be required. They will include grills and picnic tables.

A centralized water fountain and vault latrine bathroom will support this area. Electricity is not planned at this time, but could be added at a future date if warranted by demand. Small, intimate shoreline picnicking spots will also be located along the river with grills to support shoreline cooking by general park users and anglers.

West Side Recreation Area

The West Side Recreation Area is generally bound by West River Road to the east, wetland areas to the south and west and Brooklyn Park's compost and potential future water treatment facility to the north (Figure 32). This area incorporates several basic, specialized recreation components that are independent of each other and other park offerings but have efficiencies when located in close proximity to each other. Participants typically only partake in one of these activities per visit, and they all require the same centralized support amenities, such as parking and bathrooms. Locating them together reduces the amount of required parking and bathrooms within the park. Vegetative screening around and throughout this area is envisioned to reduced potential impacts on adjacent properties and to increase opportunities for high quality user experiences of the recreation features.

9 | Archery Range

The archery range is envisioned to be reconfigured to safely separate it from other park uses and improved with new targets, shooting platforms, shade structures, bow racks and quivers, defined shooting lanes and lines, distance markers, ADA modifications and safe, shaded places to sit and observe.

10 | Dog Off-Leash Area

The dog-off leash area is proposed to be up to 10 acres and located in a natural setting. Trails, shaded structures, drinking water and fencing are

Figure 32: West Side Recreation Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



envisioned. Additional planting within and around the dog off-leash area are planned to screen and buffer any potential impacts from the adjacent properties.

11 | Large Group Reservation Picnicking

The large group reservation picnicking area will include two reservation sites that can accommodate up to 150 people each. Each reservation area will have a shelter with electricity, grills, seating, drinking water and a kitchenette with a sink for doing dishes and a refrigerator. Fire pits and other amenities may also be added. A modest adjacent playground to support the reservation areas is planned, as well a centralized bathroom facility which will also support the trails, dog off-leash area and archery.

12 | Maintenance & Off-Site Learning Hub

A new maintenance facility to support the entire park is planned. This facility will also be home to a new off-site learning hub which is intended to bring the “park to the people.” This facility will serve community groups and schools that may not be able to easily access the site, are not aware of the park or have limited access to Three Rivers within their community. The off-site learning hub model will host its own programming efforts and utilize existing community events to best serve participants and its goals. Program staff will utilize a mobile model and take their educational program on the road.

The maintenance and off-site learning hub area will include temperature controlled and cold storage, open sided storage, garage work space, staff offices/break area/bathrooms and vehicle/equipment parking. Screening and fencing around the immediate area is planned to minimize any potential impact on the greater park and provide a secure area for maintenance related functions.

TRANSITION AREA

The second tier of development, the transition area (140 acres), is very accessible – both visually and physically to the main recreation area. This area brings people into nature in a very comfortable manner (Figure 33) and showcases an oak savanna, prairie and wetland, lowland forest and Mississippi River shoreline. The recreation development within this area includes trails, field learning stations and nature interpretation nodes. All of these elements focus on providing access and connection to nature by highlighting the natural processes occurring within the park. Many of the development and natural resource plans for this area will keep the opportunity for birding (an existing favorite current visitor activity) front and center as implementation plans are finalized.

13 | Oak Savanna Restoration (East Unit)

This area is located in the most northern area of the East Unit between the Mississippi River recreation pool, West River Road and the electric transmission station. This area is relatively open with beautiful mature oak trees overlooking the recreation pool. This area previously served as an emergency and maintenance route to the Coon Rapids Dam. While this is not anticipated to be needed in the near future, consideration will be required as part of development and restoration efforts.

The vision of this area is to restore and manage it as an fire dependent oak savanna with native, deep-rooting plants and forbs. There will be a new paved trail, parallel to the river's edge, with overlooks and a nature interpretation node. A non-paved trail will be located through the oak savanna forming a loop with the paved trail. The oak savanna will be about three to five acres when fully restored, providing some opportunities to observe grassland dependent species that do not require large habitat blocks such as brown thrashers, wood peckers and sparrows. The deep rooted vegetation will also help reduce storm water runoff across the site and the Mississippi River, and improve water quality of runoff which does make it to the river.

Figure 33: Transition Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



14 | Prairie Restoration & Wetland Complex (East Unit)

This area is between West River Road and the Mississippi River, south of the bluff area and north of the floodplain forest. The prairie is old field brome grass, and restoration and management efforts to create a prairie with a higher percentage of forbs (flowering plant material) is planned. No wetland restoration is planned at this time, but management efforts to preserve wetland function and its use as an educational asset of the park will occur.

This prairie/wetland complex will be limited to trail development and nature interpretation nodes, field learning stations and similar. Nature's Highline Trail and Tree House will overlook this area and views across and all the way to the Mississippi River are envisioned.

The prairie and wetland complex is envisioned to be about 40-45 acres. When restoration efforts are complete and management efforts underway, this area will become home to a wide diversity of pollinator species including bumble bees, monarchs, swallowtail and more. In addition, the diversity and frequency of sightings of grasslands birds is expected to increase and nesting habitat for turtles will be improved. These areas will become a richer plant community and better support natural resource education efforts.

15 | Mississippi River Shoreline (East Unit)

The Mississippi River shoreline will be improved to stabilize shoreline erosion and provide access for fishing and scenic viewing.

16 | Lowland Forest & Wetland Complex (West Unit)

The lowland forest and wetland complex of the West Unit are envisioned to be improved for ecological function as well as providing a more desirable user experience. These areas also serve as a buffer to the adjacent residential areas. As such vegetation screening will occur as needed.

The lowland forest and wetland complex may be about 20 acres once design plans and management efforts for this area are finalized.

Figure 34: Nature Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



While currently home to many edge species, it is expected that fly catchers, sora rail, red wing black birds and similar wetland edge and small forest species may make this area home in the future.

NATURE AREA

The third area is generally undeveloped (60 acres) with light touches on the landscape to provide access and highlight the natural world in a very subtle way. The main natural resources within this area include wetland, floodplain forest and Mississippi River shoreline (Figure 34).

17 | South Pond Learning Lab (East Unit)

The South Pond Learning Lab is located at the small pond in the south area of the East Unit and the only developed areas within the Nature Area (Figures 35 & 36). This site offers many different areas for natural resource interpretation and education due to its proximity to the Mississippi River, creek, pond, prairie and floodplain forest.

This area is already used for group education, and improvements are desired. Currently there are no bathrooms, no shelter and no storage making the site challenging to routinely and efficiently program – especially for young children. As such there are lots of logistics that go into programming at this site: getting all the equipment on site, temporary bathrooms and lack of ADA access to and around the site. For example, a plank of wood is used for water quality sampling and catching critters with nets. While fun for most students it does prevent some students from fully participating and often results in accidental falls into the muddy shoreline. In addition, there is no protection if poor weather moves in during class time.

This area will remain a key programming site in the park and planned improvements include development of an elevated four-season classroom building (avoid potential floodplain impacts) - this would also serve as a winter warming hut, a vault latrine bathroom, ADA

Figure 35: South Pond Outdoor Learning Lab

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Figure 36: South Pond Area

Source: Three Rivers Park District



Natural resource restoration and management is the focus of the park's Mississippi River floodplain forest.

ramp/dock to the pond's edge and to support and improve nature education. Several such education hubs are proposed in this area. Education hub improvements may include components like small teaching circles or amphitheaters.

This spot really becomes a signature piece of the park and an education program site like no other within the park and greater Three Rivers system. Because of its 'remoteness,' it becomes a private sanctuary for the groups. Careful and thoughtful design of new improvements will be necessary to not over develop this unique place and work with the natural elements that make the place special and allow site users to easily connect with the nature. It should be designed to allow groups of 100 to 125 school children divided into 4-5 small groups.

The site will also support introductory level snow shoeing and cross country skiing in the park and can be used to support new programming offerings – such as introductory camping, nature retreat gatherings and rental and joint programming by scouting groups and similar.

18 | Floodplain Forest Restoration (East Unit)

The main focus of the floodplain forest located in the southern region of the East Unit is natural resource restoration and management. The existing non-paved trails will remain and improvements to avoid wet area and ensure a stable trail footing are anticipated. Additional trail development and a new pedestrian bridge over the creek near the Mississippi River is planned to create desired trail loops for year-round use.

The flood plain forest is about 20 acres and the most remote area of the park. This area includes a heron rookery (use varies depending on the season) and supports many migratory, water edge dependent bird species. Blue and green herons, prothonotary warblers and wood ducks all may call this area home.

This area also has many cottonwood trees which are not repopulating at historic rates resulting in a decline in the population. Studying this phenomena and assisting with revegetation will be a focus of this area as cottonwoods are a key floodplain species.

19 | Wetland Complex (West Unit)

The main focus of the wetland area located along the western boundary of the West Unit is natural resource management (predominately water quality and habitat improvement) with some trail development around the wetland area to provide access to and views across the wetland.

The wetland complex is about 20 acres and will support and be home to many of the same species found in the adjacent lowland forest and wetland complex.