

## **Minutes**

### **LCMR Parks Study Group Tues., July 15, 2003 9:00 a.m. - Noon Room 5 - State Office Building**

#### Members Present:

Representatives: Dennis Ozment (Chair), Phyllis Kahn, Jim Knoblach, Kathy Tingelstad  
Senators: Linda Higgins, Carrie Ruud, Jim Vickerman

#### Members Absent: Sen. Dallas Sams

Staff Present: John Velin, Susan Thornton, Susan Von Mosch, Sandy Smith

Chair Ozment called the meeting to order and indicated that the study group can examine the issues it wants within time restrictions. Susan Von Mosch reviewed material comparing State Parks and Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails and regional parks outside Twin Cities metro area, including enabling legislation, who manages each system, and how operations and maintenance costs and capital improvements are financed.

Rep. Kahn stated that state trails should be added to the study group charge, especially if alternative funding, such as charging for parking at state trails, is going to be considered. Rep. Ozment said the Metro. Regional Park and Trails system is more integrated than State Parks and Trails making this a logical thing to do. The enabling legislation focuses on Minnesota's park systems. There is a push and pull between the Metro Regional Parks and State Parks on funding levels, but information on State Trails could be considered.

Rep. Tingelstad commented that comparing the total visits and operating budgets for state and metro. regional parks shows that the cost per visitor is \$4 for State Parks and \$2 for Metropolitan Regional Parks.

Bill Morrissey, Director, Parks and Recreation Division, DNR, gave an overview of the Minnesota State Park System.

Rep. Ozment asked that more complete fee information for State Parks be presented at a future meeting.

Rep. Knoblach asked about local versus regional visitors to State Parks. Of the estimated \$8.1 million visits, how many are local visitors from the city or county in which the park is located? For example, Flandrau State Park located in New Ulm has many visits from the city.

Rep. Tinglestad asked for more information on federal government requirements for maintenance of sites on the National Register of Historic Places.

Michael McDonough, Parks Planner with the Metropolitan Council presented an overview of the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trail System.

Rep. Kahn asked about the history of Minn. Stat. 473.351, which states that 40 percent of operations and maintenance costs will be paid by state, and about the 60/40 percent state / Metropolitan Council match for capital improvements.

Mr. McDonough and Del Miller, Three Rivers Park District, responded that the 40 percent for operations and maintenance was based on the proportion of non-local visitors and was put into law in 1985. It is not related to the 60 percent state share for capitol improvements. The 60/40 match for capitol was started in 1994 as recognition that the metropolitan area had an ability to match state funds.

Rep. Ozment asked for more information on staffing, FTEs, and volunteer hours for Metropolitan Regional Park System.

Rep. Tinglestad asked for more information on the economic development impacts referenced in the Metropolitan Regional Parks slide show.

Rep. Ozment asked that comparable activities be compared for State Park and Metropolitan Regional Park systems.

Rep. Tinglestad referred to the range of percentages of operation budgets generated from fees for different implementing agencies and asked if these could get more in line or more standardized.

Wayne Sames, DNR, presented information on the non-metropolitan regional parks. There is not one system for these parks. They are county- and city-managed parks, some of which meet the criteria for regional park grants used by the DNR. Mr. Sames presented background information on state funding for capital improvements in non-metro regional parks and trails. There is no history of providing state support for the operations and maintenance funding for these parks.

Jim Foote, Olmsted County, presented information on the regional parks in Olmsted County. He emphasized that the primary sources of operating revenues are camping fees, vehicle entry permits, boat and canoe rentals, and fire wood sales. The existing county parks were acquired and developed using a combination of federal and state grants and local tax levy.

Donald Al Lieffort, Douglas County, presented information on Kensington Runestone Park in Alexandria, emphasizing that park visitors are from around the state, other states, and other nations. As Douglas County was developing its campgrounds,

officials were surprised to find a statute (Minn. Stat. 398.33) limiting county camping fees to no more than the fees charged in state parks.

Rep. Knoblach asked for an estimate of what percentage of park users are local users. Mr. Sames responded there are wide variances and he will compile that information from grant applications files.

Rep. Kahn asked Mr. Foote who sets the standards for zoos. Mr. Foote replied that the Zollman Zoo in Oxbow Park is licensed and inspected annually by the U.S. Department of Interior, and the Minnesota Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Rep. Ozment invited representatives for the various park agencies to join the study group at the table to discuss where they go from here and how to fairly support the park systems.

Rep. Knoblach asked about the practicalities and challenges of charging fees. Sen. Ruud asked if fees for public campgrounds are competing with private, for-profit campgrounds.

Mr. Morrissey responded that there have been no complaints in 10 years from private campground operators, many of the private campgrounds are seasonal and will rent a site for the entire year; this is not allowed in State Park campgrounds. The services are different with private operators providing arcades and more amenities, where as the state does not have sewer or water hookups.

Greg Mack, Ramsey County Parks Director, said physical constraint issues affect the ability to charge fees. Ramsey County parks have multiple entrances to 1,400 acres of parkland in an urban setting. Only one park has a single entry. The parks are very accessible, but this makes the ability to collect fees difficult. There is some convenience parking. As an alternative, Ramsey County relies on revenues generated from enterprise activities (golf course and ice arena operations) to offset its regional park operations.

Rep. Knoblach asked if one common permit for the Metropolitan Regional Parks has been considered. Mr. McDonough responded that it has been discussed but moving to that would be a complex process.

The next meeting date for the Parks Study Group was set for Monday, July 28<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Rep. Ozment invited representatives from each of the park agencies to testify on the fees used in their jurisdictions, the philosophy of elected officials, how each agency got where they are today regarding user fees, and difficulties in collecting fees.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.