

**MINUTES**  
**LCMR Parks Study Group**  
**Friday, December 5, 2003**  
**9:00 a.m. - Noon**  
**Location: Room 5, State Office Building**

Members Present:

Representatives: Dennis Ozment (Chair of Study Group), Phyllis Kahn  
Senators: Carrie Ruud, Dallas Sams, Jim Vickerman

Members Absent:

Rep. Jim Knoblach, Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, Sen. Linda Higgins

Chair Ozment called the meeting to order at 9:19 a.m.

Sen. Sams moved approval of the minutes of the Oct. 23, 2003 Parks Study Group meeting. Motion passed.

A letter from DNR Deputy Commissioner Mark Holsten was distributed. Peter Skwira, Acting Director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, reviewed the letter.

Rep. Kahn about the status of DNR's Division of Trails and Waterways. Mr. Skwira responded that Trails and Waterways will remain a division of the department and Laurie Martinson has been appointed division director.

Rep. Ozment stated that the Study Group is at the point of starting to put together its recommends and priorities. He asked LCMR staff to develop some draft findings to facilitate what members have learned. After reviewing the findings, the Study Group will discuss some draft recommendations. Following today's discussion, staff will have a draft report ready for review at the next meeting on Dec. 18<sup>th</sup>. Then, the Study Group will be ready to present the report to the full LCMR following adoption.

Rep. Ozment began reviewing the draft findings which generated questions and discussion among members. Related to Finding B., Rep. Kahn asked how much the City of Minneapolis pays for rental of the Fort Snelling playing fields and what proportion this amount is of total state park user fees generated. Ms. Von Mosch referred members to a summary table showing that in SFY 2003 user fees accounted for 21 percent of the state park operating budget. Mr. Skwira responded that state parks net about \$120,000 from Minneapolis' rental of this land; the revenues are deposited in the user fee account, not the working capital account. Rep. Kahn asked what percent of the 21% is that amount. Mr. Skwira responded that user fees are projected to generate about \$9 million in SFY 2004. [\$120,000 is 1.3 percent of state park user fees in SFY 2004.]

Related to Finding F., Sen. Sams asked who determines whether the three park systems expand their reliance on fees. Rep. Ozment responded that park agencies need to evaluate and consider their use of fees. Rep Kahn stated that anything with a waiting list and that is not a basic, fundamental park service should generate user fees. Market forces should be allowed to work. The Study Group could put specific ideas in the report and let park managers implement them voluntarily. During the next budget cycle conditions could be put on grants. Sen. Ruud stated that members saw some good examples of how more fees could be generated at lakeshore campsites in state parks. Rep. Ozment summarized saying that it sounds like members agree with Finding F. He asked what other things did members see and hear this past summer that members can agree on and include in the report?

Related to Finding H., Rep. Kahn said during the fall meeting in Benton County with rural regional park directors people were not interested in operations and maintenance funding but wanted capital funding. Members can look at this issue in the bonding bill this session. The costs of waiting to acquire land in developing areas will increase prices. Sen. Vickerman said the need for land acquisition is an issue that he cares about. He agreed with Rep. Kahn, something should be put in the bonding bill.

Rep. Ozment asked members if there were any additions to the findings.

Rep. Kahn wants to see a finding on trails and waterways into the report. The finding should emphasize the interconnectedness of trails and park. Rep. Ozment asked staff to include a statement in the findings regarding how closely the parks and trails work together. Sen. Vickerman stated that trails are just as important as the parks.

Rep. Kahn asked how are state trails coordinated with trails in state parks. Patricia Arndt, DNR Parks, responded that it depends on the situation. The Division of Parks is responsible for trails that are located entirely within state parks. If a state trails goes through a park, like the Gitchi Gami State Trail that goes through Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, then the divisions of Parks and Trails and Waterways develop a memorandum of agreement for the administration of that segment of the trail.

Rep. Ozment reviewed with members a draft outline of the report. He said members need to decide what should be highlighted as conclusions or recommendations. Some of the comments could be included as an appendix so that the information is not lost, but was not part of the body of the report. Draft conclusions / recommendations were distributed for discussion and additions are welcome.

Related to #1, Rep. Kahn stated that the state park reservation system pays an out-of-state firm. She would like a recommendation added asking DNR to figure

out how to provide this service, keep the money in the state, and do it in house. Some of the ideas from the campground reservation software used at Lake Carlos are good, but we don't want to move to a decentralized system.

Rep. Kahn stated that the #2 recommendation should be done immediately and implement it and to not wait for the recommendations to come back before the commission to evaluate and implement. That takes too long. She wants DNR's ideas to be brought forward as soon as possible. Ms. Von Mosch responded that the intent was to have DNR start the analysis now in preparation for the 2005 session.

Rep. Ozment asked if there were any other recommendations that should be included in the report. Sen. Vickerman said that park agency responses to the recommendations should come before the Study Group. After some discussion, it was agreed to add a recommendation that LCMR be advised to retain the Parks Study Group to evaluate responses to its recommendations.

Related to #3, Rep. Ozment said that some state park fees are statutory, but others are under departmental control and he wants to encourage park managers to start talking about user fees. In addition, in the metropolitan regional park system, some parks charge entrance fees and others do not. There is an inconsistency. The whole system should look at this issue.

Rep. Kahn asked if various metropolitan park implementing agencies are putting as much local money into managing regional parks but they are just deciding to use local property taxes instead of user fees. It is still local dollars but there is a difference in how dollars are raised.

Rep. Ozment said the point being made in Recommendation #3 is not deciding how to resolve the issue but asking park managers to develop suggestions for how to increase fees. Rep. Kahn thinks the report should include specific ideas for how park managers might do that, such as charging rental at the pavilion in Three Mile Creek Regional Park (Nicollet County). In addition, more outstate counties should be encouraged to follow the example of Benton, Sherburne and Stearns counties and cooperate on park development and management.

Rep. Ozment began reviewing the policy issues section of the draft report outline. He suggested going through the draft and members began discussing conflicting statements.

Section labeled Overall, page 2, Items a. and b: Members do not want to put state and metropolitan parks in competition with each other. Sen. Vickerman suggested moving these items to an appendix. Other members disagreed. Sen. Sams suggested alternative wording that "regional parks in Greater Minnesota where a large proportion of population does not have access to state parks should be considered the equivalent of state parks and be funded accordingly."

Rep. Ozment thinks the potential implications are far reaching and suggested moving to "unresolved conflicts." Members agreed.

Financing Issues and Options, page 3, Items f. and g.: Sen. Sams suggested keeping f. and move g. to "unresolved conflicts". Sen. Ruud agreed - the report should be positive, don't pit one type of park against another.

Financing Issues and Options, pages 3 and 4, Items j. and k.: Rep. Ozment suggested moving both to the "unresolved conflict" section. Members agreed.

Financing Issues and Options, page 4, Items l. and m.: Rep. Kahn suggested deleting l and editing m, as follows: "O and M for Greater Minnesota regional parks should be provided if such funding is going to continue to be provided to metro regional parks. There should be some proportionality in the level of funding. The definition of a regional park that has been used for the grant program generally seems to be a reasonable measure for what qualifies as a regional park." Rep. Ozment suggested moving the existing l and m into the appendix and keeping the edited m. in the report. Members agreed.

User Fees, pages 5 and 6, Items a./c, and e./f.: Rep. Kahn likes a. and c. more than e. and f.. Members decided to keep a. and c. in the report, move e. and f. into the appendix, but keep a statement encouraging reciprocity

Meeting adjourned at 11:17 a.m.