



*Working to protect the Mississippi River  
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

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November 17, 2020

Scott Yonke and Ben Karp  
Ramsey County Parks and Recreation  
Maplewood, MN

Dear Scott and Ben:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer updated comments on the Battle Creek Regional Park master plan concepts. We appreciate that FMR has been invited to collaborate throughout this entire planning process and we look forward to continuing this relationship.

We've reviewed the proposed concepts and have some comments on the changes that have been made since our last review in July.

### **Trail System**

FMR supports the addition of trail segments that connect different parts of the park and provide better, safer connections between the park and surrounding neighborhoods.

We appreciate that the proposed network of new trails has been reduced in this most current iteration of the concepts. We especially appreciate the reduction of new trails proposed in the fragile Bluff Impact Zone near the southwestern corner of the park.

There are few proposed trails that we still find concerning. Trails can have significant ecological impacts. Every new trail serves to cut off and isolate wildlife populations, especially for very small species that won't cross trails. The same is true for some plant species. Increased trails also create more "edge areas" that are less amenable to plants and animals and create corridors that facilitate the spread of invasive species.

Given this, we evaluate proposed trails through the lens of, "Does this increase access to important areas of the park? Does that increased access outweigh the potential negative impacts of a new trail?" Some of the proposed new trails meet these goals. Others seem duplicative and unnecessary.

For instance, in the Fish Creek area, some of the proposed trails improve access to the scenic creek and provide better connections to the neighborhood. We support the addition of those trails. But some trails don't seem to go anywhere new. They create excessively short loops that don't really

appear to improve access, and in doing so cut through newly-restored areas that should be protected. Building trails on both sides of the creek also seems excessive; the creek is narrow and doesn't really need to have two trails so close to each other.

The Pig's Eye area is a better example of how trails can improve access to special areas of the park without overbuilt networks.

We also continue to question the concepts showing many new trails as being combined use for both hiking and biking. That seems misleading when much of the trail plan in the main park area was created through a project that studied only cycling trails and primarily engaged cyclists. In general, we hear from both hikers and cyclists that they prefer dedicated trails that are designed for specific modes and reduce potential conflicts and safety issues. If trails are easily shared, then the existing trail network at Battle Creek should be considered adequate.

### **Trailheads and Amenities**

We support modest improvements to trailhead areas, including acquisition of additional parkland in key places, that make the park more inviting and accessible. The focus on neighborhood access and safe street crossings is appreciated. We also support improved wayfinding throughout the park as it is frequently confusing to navigate. Any added trails will make wayfinding even more crucial.

We're also happy to see the addition of fishing piers, outdoor learning stations, and other amenities that welcome visitors to enjoy the park in new ways. We encourage you to avoid overbuilding new amenities or damaging the natural character in currently-undeveloped parts of the park.

We are curious about the proposed trailhead area near Lower Afton Road and Battle Creek Road. This seems like a good location to add some parking, a restroom, picnic tables, etc. We question whether adding a visitor center is really needed when the community center nearby is quite large. It seems like this existing large building could be enhanced to serve more park visitors. If the goal of a new visitor center would be primarily to serve skiers, Hyland Lake Park Reserve has a good example of how a modest warming house and staging area was added for ski meets without duplicating services provided by the larger visitor center nearby.

### **Ecological assessment needed**

In the county's entire planning process so far, little has been said to the public about environmental goals and impacts in the park. We expect that the full draft master plan will answer the public's questions about how the park will balance recreational and ecological goals, include an environmental impact analysis of the proposed recreational expansions, and incorporate plans for future ecological restoration throughout the park.

Before any new amenities or trails are built, we expect to see a review of how these projects will impact sensitive areas or rare species. The Pig's Eye area, for instance, has some wetlands that might need special assessment before a trail is built near/through them. The same goes for areas of the park where habitat restoration has been a priority; any new amenities should be careful to protect areas that have received significant restoration investment.

We also urge you to review a recently-published research study about the impacts of different recreational trail modes on wildlife. The study found that animals appeared to avoid trails used by mountain bikes and motorized vehicles more than trails used by hikers or horseback riders. This could suggest that expanding trail networks for noisier, faster modes such as mountain biking might have a greater negative impact on wildlife health and movement. (Full study: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/csp2.271>)

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on these park concepts. We look forward to participating in the rest of the planning process. If you'd like to discuss anything, please don't hesitate to contact us.

In partnership,



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