



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

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Dear Ms. Leatham:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Spring Lake Park Reserve master plan concepts.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a non-profit organization with a mission to engage community members and other stakeholders to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities Region. We represent thousands of people in the metropolitan area who care deeply about the river, including a growing membership of over 2,700 people and more than 3,200 volunteers and 2,000 advocates engaged each year.

Uniquely valuable park

Spring Lake Park is a particularly special riverfront site. Among the things that make it unique:

- It is the only Dakota County park located along the Mississippi River.
- It has a variety of native plant communities, most of which were classified by the DNR as high biodiversity significance.
- It has unique plant species found at few, if any, other sites in Dakota County.
- It is connected to hundreds of acres of largely undeveloped land, creating a rare corridor of natural land along the Mississippi River that is important pathway for wildlife movement.
- The river is a migration corridor for hundreds of migratory bird species. Sites along the river such as Spring Lake Park are vital resting and nesting sites for birds.

Because of these features and the fact that this is designated as a park **reserve**, FMR supports prioritizing the protection of the native plant communities and their inhabitants, and keeping this park as wild as possible.

Preferred concepts

Overall we prefer Concept 2, which includes bison and a somewhat lesser level of development. We support the addition of bison to the park; they are a very important, and generally absent, component of native prairies. A herd will draw new visitors to the park, and we encourage careful planning about how to accommodate increased traffic without causing ecological damage.

In concept 2, we are opposed to adding bike/cart campsites, and the associated trails, along the river at the west end. The area depicted is a largely intact oak forest on a slope next to the river

with highly erodible soils; it should not be developed. The campsites could also create more impediments for wildlife that are likely to use the area by the river as a transit corridor.

Trail network

We are concerned about the amount of new trails proposed in the concept plan. Trails create barriers for many species of wildlife and provide corridors for invasive species, potential erosion and other issues. We suggest fewer new trails in the middle section of the park than are shown in Concept 2 -- one loop would be adequate.

We also strongly oppose the expansion of trails and overlooks in fragile bluff areas. Such trails appear to be proposed, most notably at the east end of the park which shows a new trail right on the bluff's edge. The existing trail network in that area is more than adequate and does not merit expansion.

We suggest that any new trails should be soft-surface. Paved walkways and parking areas should be porous.

Buildings and structures

Given Spring Lake Park's uniquely pristine natural state, we feel that additional development should be kept to a minimum to retain the wild feel of the park. We would not support adding large interpretive centers or other large structures. Additional buildings should be scaled back and located in areas that are already disturbed.

Many of the visitor features, such as picnic shelters and trail rest areas, appear overbuilt in the examples shown. We encourage reducing new structures to only what is truly necessary, and emphasizing low rooflines, natural building materials and colors, etc.

The parking area and picnic shelter on Hilary Path seem like examples of unnecessary building. Is there evidence to support this area as a desired, popular destination within the park?

We suggest avoiding new turfgrass lawn area, but instead demonstrate to the public how to have pollinator-friendly plants and lawns.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on these concept plans. 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 Karen Schik at 651-222-2193 x15 or kschik@fmr.org.

In partnership,



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Colleen O'Connor Toberman
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