

Ecological System Plan

BACKGROUND

Item 5H.
BCWMC 8-21-14

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) are preparing the first-ever Ecological System Plan. This plan will set a **vision for making parks and public lands friendlier to the environment**. It is a critical step forward in the management of natural resources and public lands in the city and watershed. It will help improve the urban environment in the face of threats such as **climate change, decreasing water quality, explosion of invasive species, increasing runoff, and fragmentation of habitat**. The ecological system plan will:

- Compile, create, and illustrate city-wide ecological data,
- Craft a vision for natural resources and public lands within the watershed and city,
- Outline guiding principles for management, and
- Challenge the community to rethink the city around them-from the local neighborhood park to the Grand Rounds to backyards-in terms of ecological function, benefit, and health.

The Ecological System Plan (ESP) will set a framework for managing public parcels as pieces of a **broader ecological system** within the city, watershed, and region. It will seek to first understand the ecology of the city and watershed, then plan for parks and public lands management and improvements that benefit both humans and nature. It will address specific threats such as climate change, decreasing water quality, explosion of invasive species, increasing runoff, and fragmentation of habitat. It will envision a more environmentally sound way of **managing the impacts of the city**, so that the city can be cleaner, greener, cooler, and more efficient.

The intent is that the Ecological System Plan will be followed by a series of detailed management plans designed to make specific site-based recommendations and determine a process for project prioritization. The Plan itself will make a deep investigation into the ecology of the city and watershed and will set a vision for ecologically-based management.

The project will unfold in four general phases:

Phase 1: Project Start-up. In June and July of 2014, MPRB staff primarily from the divisions of Planning and Environmental Stewardship will establish the various advisory groups, begin the public engagement process, and refine the project schedule.

Phase 2: Learn with Experts. In August and September of 2014, staff will work closely with research advisors, the project team, and hired consultants to research, map, and begin to communicate the fundamental ecological underpinnings of the city and watershed. This phase will focus on scientific fact as it relates to urban ecology.

Phase 3: Learn with the Community. From August through November of 2014 staff will go into the community to learn about urban ecology from those who experience it every day. Overlap with Phase 2 will allow the experts and the community to together assist staff with gaining a deep understanding of both empirical and community-driven realities. This phase will feature community events and will significantly engage the appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

Phase 4: Envision with the Community. From January through September of 2015, MPRB staff will work with all advisory groups, consultants, and plan partners to develop the plan vision and communicate that vision in a broad and engaging way. This phase will feature innovative community engagement tools, such as “plan in the parks,” partnerships with arts institutions and neighborhood groups, and digital media.



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