



PLEASE NOTE THE TIME CHANGE AND LOCATION

Planning Commission Agenda

Date: Thursday, May 28, 2026

Location: Lebanon Hills Maintenance Facility

740 Cliff Road, Eagan MN 55123

Time: 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

I. Call to Order

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Public Comments

Anyone wishing to address the Planning Commission on an item not on the agenda may address the Planning Commission at this time (comments are limited to 5 minutes).

IV. Approval of Agenda

V. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes of Meeting Held on March 26, 2026

VI. Presentations

- Natural System Plan Public Engagement Results and Implementation Chapter – Information

VII. Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

- Authorized the scheduling of a public hearing to receive public comments on proposed amendments to Dakota County Ordinance 113, Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems
- Authorized entering into a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Lakeville for the North Creek Greenway trail and trailhead at East Lake Park
- Provided direction on the county's transportation cost share policies with city partners
- Provided direction on the role of the county for the upcoming Public Art Blueprint plan
- Status of Lake Byllesby Regional Park Improvements
- Proposed amendments to County Park Ordinance

VIII. Topics for Next Meeting

- Natural System Plan – Release draft plan for public review

IX. Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates

X. Tour of Lebanon Hills New Greenhouse and Maintenance Building

XI. Adjourn

Next Planning Commission Meeting: Thursday, July 23, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.



Meeting Minutes: Dakota County Planning Commission Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-DRAFT

Date: 3/26/2026

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center

Attendance

Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttman
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Steve Shurts
- Andrea Vaubel
- Kelly Kausel
- Lori Hansen
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner
- Tom Lewanski, Natural Resources Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

Member(s) Absent:

- Paul Nasvik
- Abdinasir Ibrahim

Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair Guttman
- Commissioner Smith arrived at 7:10 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

- The Planning Commission opened the meeting by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments

- Comments/Notes: No audience member wished to address an item not on the agenda.

Approval of Agenda

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Hunting moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 10 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from January 22, 2026)

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the previous meeting’s minutes.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Vaubel moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, approving the previous meeting’s minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 10 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Draft Parks Natural Systems Plan – Implementation Chapter

Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner, and Tom Lewanski, Natural Resources Manager, discussed progress and updates on the Natural Systems Plan, an operational plan that governs the management of natural systems in the county. The plan includes objectives like prioritizing ecologically important areas, enhancing water quality, and managing natural systems. The county has restored 47% of its parkland and aims to achieve full restoration by 2046. Challenges include funding for long-term management and the system’s growth. The plan also addresses climate change impacts, such as assisted migration and wildlife movement. The Planning Commissioners emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement and potential collaboration with agricultural partners to protect farmland and natural resources.

Questions and comments by the planning commissioners, along with responses from staff (italics):

- How can we reach people that would like to volunteer but don’t have access to digital media? Could we use electronic signage for volunteer opportunities at Lebanon Hills? *Staff will contact Garrett Zaffke, Community Relations Volunteer Coordinator, and Visitor Services so they can evaluate signage and alternative signup methods.*
- Suggestion to draft and include a policy-level or strategy-level statement on noxious weed management for parks within the natural systems plan. *Staff will add language to the plan related to Parks and also to private easements.*

- Review and correct the alphabetical ordering/labeling (A, B, C, D, E) in the draft section to fix the duplicated letter and prevent confusion in future reviews. *Staff will correct.*
- The Planning Commission would like to receive more status updates on the implementation of the plans they have reviewed. The pie chart of management status is an example. They would like more follow-up and more opportunities to celebrate good work. *Staff will provide more updates.*
- Ensure that the draft plan prioritization criteria reflect climate change initiatives. *Staff agreed to add.*

Bison Update

Tom Lewanski provided an update on the bison at Spring Lake Park. Nine females are currently in paddocks two and three, with the best viewing location at the Fahey trailhead. Staff plan to move the bison in mid-April. A bull from Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge is expected to arrive in January after quarantine at the Minnesota Zoo. The fertile period for bison is June-July, with calves expected in spring 2028. Weekly checks are conducted on the bison to ensure their health and well-being.

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Comments/Notes: Mary Jackson, Sr Planner, provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

The County Board approved a contract with Lakeville for a new recycling zone, set to open in 2027. Discussions are ongoing about potentially accepting additional materials beyond those currently accepted at the Recycling Zone in Egan.

The County Board will receive a presentation on data centers on April 7th.

A contract to prepare the Greenway systems plan was approved, with several Greenway design projects underway.

The County Board approved designs for a shelter to serve the campground at Lake Byllesby and an overlook on the west side of the park.

Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

Comprehensive Plan Update and Public Meetings

- Mary Jackson noted that the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update will include a greenhouse gas inventory and strategies for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Upcoming public meetings include a noise wall discussion in Lakeville, an open house for CSAH 26 reconstruction, and an open house for the Mississippi River Greenway.

- The CSAH 42 modernization project will host an open house on April 16, and the groundbreaking for the new recycling zone is scheduled for April 22.

Topics for next meeting (Thursday, May 28, 2026)

Mary Jackson, Sr Planner, provided an overview of next month's meeting topics:

- Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan – Release draft plan for public review

It was noted that the agenda listed an incorrect date for the next meeting, which was verbally corrected to Thursday, May 28, 2026.

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

- Planning commissioner updates included a discussion on a Nelson mine project, which was canceled due to negative feedback.
- No further announcements or updates were provided by the planning commissioners.

Adjournment

Chair Guttman asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Commissioner Shurts moved, seconded by Commissioner Hansen, to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

**Next Meeting: Thursday, May 28, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County
Western Service Center, Apple Valley**

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator



Dakota County Planning Commission

Date: Thursday, May 28, 2026

Agenda Item: Dakota County Natural Systems Plan Update

Prepared By: Mary Jackson

Purpose

Provide an update on the Natural Systems Plan, including stakeholder engagement findings and additional content for the implementation chapter.

Background

Staff are combining the 2017 Parks Natural Resources Management System Plan ([NRMSP](#)) and the 2020 Land Conservation Plan ([LCP](#)) into the Natural Systems Plan, which will bridge the high-level guidance in the 2050 Parks Vision Plan and individual Natural Resource Management Plans (NRMPs) for parks and greenways.

The Commission discussed draft objectives and strategies in November 2025, and reviewed draft implementation content (restoration model, prioritization, workplans, and funding) in March 2026. Targeted stakeholder engagement was conducted in March and April with townships, cities, state agencies, local environmental groups, regional implementation partners, water resources management partners, County Parks staff, and residents. Staff will present engagement findings and additional implementation content on service classification and metrics. A draft plan is anticipated for July 2026.

Attachments

- Engagement Findings
- Service Levels and Potential Metrics

Questions

The following questions are intended to help assist in review of the packet materials.

1. What stood out from the engagement findings?
2. Do you have further recommendations for engagement?
3. Do you have thoughts and suggestions on metrics to include in the NSP?
4. Do you have comments on the Service Level model?

Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement

1. Stakeholder Meetings

Targeted stakeholder outreach was conducted in late winter and spring of 2026 among the following groups, to gain insight on shared issues and ways to improve partnerships.

Township Officers Meeting

March 14, 2026

Staff provided an overview of the Natural Systems Plan project for discussion.

State and Federal Agencies

March 18, 2026

Minnesota DNR

Summary:

Staff provided updates on DNR's recent management work and the County's plan update. Areas of interest related to potential partnerships include:

- A potential land protection partnership could include an expansion of Hampton Woods.
- Working together to help grow out their seed in the greenhouse for DNR projects.
- DNR is expanding fall burns. They've found that spring burns can increase takeover by warm season grasses. They are removing tree lines on Vermillion Highlands, restoring more grasslands and are doing a burn on the north side of the Vermillion River, 250 acres. Cemstone is working with DNR and paying for a 90-acre prairie restoration in a reclamation area. DNR is working with Pheasants Forever (PF) on Mud Creek, cutting trees and doing a burn. DNR is doing a burn and seeding on Clayton Savanna.
- Staff is interested in working more with Non-Game Wildlife on increasing habitat but is unaware of any wildlife reintroduction plans. DNR is installing bat houses on Vermillion Highlands. Contact is Melissa Bowman. They're working with Scott Hagen on areas south of Whitetail Woods on the Vermillion River and with PF on wetland scrape-outs to aid the Blandings Turtle, prefers wetter prairies. Sharp Tailed Grouse could be a candidate for reintroduction.
- Staff is interested in doing more wildlife surveys, especially on Vermillion Highlands. Could be a partnership opportunity. Jeff LeClaire is the State Herpetologist, has studied Hognose Snake dens on sand prairies. The Smooth Green Snake has been seen along the Vermillion River. Has also seen Cricket Frogs, Kendall. DNR is installing frog boxes at Gores Pool and have been mist netting bats at Vermillion Highlands.
- UMORE is being turned over to DNR in 2032. The U will retain some research plots on DNR land. DNR will acquire 1,000 acres to manage.

- DNR currently is not doing climate assisted migration work. They have collected acorns at Gores and germinated them in Missouri to ship saplings back to Gores Pool. They have two plots with the saplings and one plot is doing well. Contact would be Mike Wachholz at Lake City.
- Funding has been reduced, resulting in less equipment than other DNR departments that are funded by Outdoor Heritage. Vermillion Highlands is funded with the U of M. PF has been helpful for acquisitions and has worked with DNR in Scott and Carver counties. County staff are doing an Outdoor Heritage grant for acquisition and restoration and suggested DNR reach out if interested.
- DNR cannot purchase properties less than 150 acres unless they are adjacent to DNR lands. It can be a challenge for building connecting corridors. Local communities are interested in keeping lands on the tax rolls. Data centers and speculative land purchases for them have not been as much of an issue as have the lands restricted through solar agreements. This has been more of an issue in the southwestern part of the state.
- Staff noted that they have too much warm season grass that they harvest (Indian grass, Big Bluestem) and asked if the County or MN Zoo might be interested in it as supplemental hay for bison.

Citizen Groups

March 23, 2026

Hastings Environmental Protectors (HEP)

Wilderness in the City (WITC)

Summary:

- Both groups find project work in their areas and don't necessarily have long-range plans.
- Participants noted the benefit of a "middle" organization like Friends of the Mississippi River or Trout Unlimited working between the county and local environmental groups. These organizations can "plug in" local volunteers like HEP and WITC.
- Participants noted that the County Volunteer Coordinator does a great job of recruiting volunteers for stewardship events.
- County outreach to the groups on the types of work they support would be more effective than asking them to identify projects. The County could target more local objectives to bring in local volunteer groups.
- The draft plan could have less content on the two parent plans (LCP and NRMSP).
- Participants expressed support for the County's Habitat Stewards program.

County Parks Internal Work Groups

April 17, 2026

Natural Resources (NR)

Visitor Services (VS)

Outdoor Education (OE)

Facilities and Maintenance

Greenways

Summary:

- Staff discussed how water resources fit into the Plan. Some lakes with recreational uses are filling in and have too much aquatic vegetation to support recreation. Parks relies on assistance from Water Resources and SWCD for water quality initiatives. There can be differences in how lakes are managed for ecological quality and recreational suitability. Staff should track water quality initiatives for park and consider revisiting the 2017 lakes study at Lebanon Hills. Staff should also consider the National Park Service work on management for visitor use.
- Visitor Services staff would like deeper relationships with schools – could Dakota County Parks be a resource to schools by creating habitat areas near schools or libraries as outdoor classrooms?
- People are interested in the research side of natural resources and want to know what the NR team is finding –could share more. Parks could use more skills and capacity in communications.
- NR staff collect a lot of data and could share more with the Outdoor Education team. From the OE perspective, it would be useful to have analysis where education is planned, with more specifics than generic information.
- Staff discussed assisting private landowners with County-held easements with management beyond initial restoration. Could work with a group like Prairie Enthusiasts to help landowners build capacity within their group.
- Would like more integrated events and opportunities such as seed harvest events.
- Collaboration during restoration can advance other projects, such as trail maintenance. Staff should look for synergies.
- Staff discussed how the NR Unit can support Visitor Service goals: identify park campus areas or zones where NR and OE can co-develop projects to improve areas for outdoor education, such as prairie restoration projects. Staff would like to teach close to facilities and are interested in educational landscaping around facilities, such as the back yard at the Lebanon Visitor Center. Staff should consider integrating Indigenous perspectives and managing for groups to match their interests such as foraging, weddings other events. Consider more flowering forbs in the prairies around the Whitetail Woods camper cabins.

- Staff discussed how Visitor Services can advance NR goals: OE working more with the NR unit to weave elements of NR work into programming. OE could promote restoration projects at schools, if NR is able to support these projects.
- OE also can help communicate NR projects to avoid problems with people not understanding the work. NR projects currently have webpages and on-site sandwich boards, and OE can help explain why the work is being done. Also need to provide info on timeframes – it can take a few years for an area to respond. Need a more strategic communication plan for natural resources.
- Need to look more closely at overlaps with NR and greenways and relationships with maintenance plans.
- Coordinate development and restoration efforts. NR and cultural resources plans could precede long-range development plans, to identify sensitive areas that should not be developed.

Implementation Partners

April 23, 2026

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR)

Great River Greening (GRG)

Mississippi River Park Connection (MRPC)

Summary:

- Groups were interested in more partnership opportunities.
- Look at potential roles for large industries located in the County. Some have supported the County's environmental projects. Consider easements on corporate landowners, especially adjacent to parks and greenways.
- Although federal funds are constrained right now, there are still some funds out there to consider.
- Demonstrate staffing needs in terms of proposed acres being managed.
- Consider a mechanism for landowners to work together to restore and maintain their own lands. It could be facilitated by staff or an outside entity.
- Groups are seeing more interest from cities in having their own natural resource management plans and in Climate Justice Action plans. Interest in conservation seems strong in urban areas.
- Are there overlaps or areas where the County should focus efforts? While everyone is glad to see funding put towards restoration, groups would like more communication from the County. The groups are interested in maintaining existing relationships with local communities and will be there to help them as long as they want.

- State WMAs and AMAs are generally less managed. Would the County support restoration on State lands? These projects would be eligible for state funding. Barriers to doing this could include staffing limitations for these areas and challenges in executing JPAs with the State.
- County staff should look at the Hennepin County Natural Resources Partnership Coalition for ideas. Led by Three Rivers, Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota, it is looking at parts of cities, corridors, and existing plan priorities to create a system plan. The group is developing templates and work specifications that are shareable and useable by others. The effort was funded by the LCCMR.
- Collecting useful data and tracking over time is important. Suggestions include maintaining a contractor cost spreadsheet and updating it quarterly. It can include multipliers for complexities. Look into outsourcing data analysis.
- Grant writing is another potential partnership opportunity.
- Outside funding may be available for some types of long-term adaptive management. Not clear if long-term management proposals are competitive enough with initial restoration projects.
- Non-profit partners have more flexibility to get work done and can expedite some processes, such as bidding. Partners can explore alternative paths that are not open to the County.
- Bundling projects was discussed to expedite work.

Water Resources Management Partners

April 28, 2026

Dakota County Environmental Resources Department (ERD)

Dakota County Groundwater Protection Unit (GWP)

Dakota County Water Resources (WR)

Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO)

Summary:

- Staff suggested the NSP remain at a high level on monitoring for water quality, with more detail provided in the NRMPs for individual park and greenway units. Parks staff currently work with SWCD and Water Resources on various monitoring efforts, such as Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine, Lebanon Hills, and Thompson County Park. Further discussion is desirable on which parameters should be monitored. Parks should continue monitoring for recreational safety, such as bacterial counts at swimming beaches.
- Need to identify actions in plans to be able to budget for activities. There needs to be a clear connection.
- Staff agreed that the County has a skills gap in aquatic ecology. Could be added to Water Resources or to Parks.

- Which is the best entity to manage other water facilities (stormwater, wetland banks) that the County owns outside of parks, greenways, and easements? An example is a high-quality wetland south of Farmington that the VRWJPO has managed for six years.
- Dakota County doesn't have an overall surface water plan tying together its programs and responsibilities. The SWCD and individual watersheds are required to prepare plans. A County surface water plan would need further scoping and clarity on funding resources available to do the work.
- In addition to ecological and recreational management of surface waters, the NSP should address groundwater recharge. The Conservation Focus Areas don't line up well with recharge areas and more attention should be paid to Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMA). Funding for projects may be available.
- Outreach will be important for protecting groundwater quality. SWCD does extensive landowner outreach related to conservation practices that protect water quality. SWCD is a first point of contact and can steer landowners to different programs as needed. The Land Conservation Program would like more extensive outreach next year.
- Ecological lake health and natural successional processes aren't always compatible with recreational interests, such as paddling, swimming, and fishing. There is concern that some lakes in Lebanon Hills will no longer support desired recreational activities over time, as they fill in and become shallower, more vegetated. How can these different interests be reconciled? Parks should revisit the comprehensive lake study done for Lebanon Hills in 2017. Further review of individual watershed management plans could provide good information. Some watersheds prepare Adaptive Lake Management Plans, which the State requires for any in-lake treatments. Environmental Resources and Water Resources could provide technical assistance/lead park waterbody studies, with Parks securing the necessary funding. The upcoming Parks Visitor Services Plan should also address recreational uses of the lakes in Parks.
- The group expressed a need for greater clarity on their different roles in water quality in parks.
- Meaningful metrics that can be shared with the public and elected officials were discussed. A good example resource would be the recent reports for the North Cannon Watershed, which are user-friendly. Metrics should be able to track trends – are things getting better or worse? The Lebanon Lakes study called for many projects that were implemented – how are they performing over time? The NSP should/could call for a comprehensive follow-up or an individual surface water study for each park and greenway. Staff have some data now, but it's not comprehensive. Studies should also inform management approaches.

City Parks Meetings

April 29 and 30, 2026

City Parks and Natural Resources staff from Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Empire, Farmington, Inver Grove Heights, Lakeville, Mendota Heights, Rosemount, South St. Paul, and West St. Paul

Summary:

- Cities with environmental staff report that they do a good job. The biggest constraint is adequate staffing to manage projects or take on more projects, not just funding. Adding staff is a challenge. Contracting work helps, but they contractors need oversight. It's often simpler to hire out the work but they have less control with contractors and costs can be higher due to prevailing wage requirements. It does avoid the need to acquire vehicles and office space for staff. There is capacity in the contractor pool if one can manage the costs of hiring them. Competition among qualified contractors is limited since their pool is somewhat limited in size.
- It can be difficult to demonstrate the value of stewardship to officials and the public, such as removing buckthorn. More education is needed once budgets improve. County residential surveys show that stewardship of protection of natural areas is a high priority for the public – do cities have similar surveys? Some do and it demonstrates support for their work. Projects sometimes have sticker shock, which can be difficult to overcome. Lakeville uses sandwich boards and videos to communicate natural resource projects with the public. They are more likely to received calls if they aren't proactive with outreach on projects. Suggestion: collaboratively develop shared resource material for public education on the need for natural systems stewardship.
- Past collaborations with the County were viewed very favorably, a good experience. Burnsville worked with the County prior to the City County Conservation Collaborative (4C) and it went well. Flexibility in the workplan was important. Suggestion: the County requested an NRMP in place before proceeding although the City has an adopted Natural Resources Plan. It was redundant and awkward to have two plans. County staff agreed that a simpler approach might suffice if grant requirements are met. Alternatively, Apple Valley found the NRMP for Alimagnet useful and are using it as a template for doing a city-wide plan.
- Participants were interested in when the next round of applications for the 4C program will be held. Staff anticipate sending a letter at the end of this year, an application round in July of 2027, and implementation in 2028. Staff are completing a funding request to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC.) Staff encouraged participants to provide letters of support for the program and funding requests. The County's upcoming Greenway operations plan will look broadly at funding, match amounts, and priorities.
- Current needs among the cities include approaches for tree removals and disposal of wood waste. Removal costs have increased, and disposal options are limited. Equipment and staff time are also constraints. Interest was expressed in using biochar kilns and the possibility of a larger biochar facility. Ash tree removals are a big push for Farmington. Contractors remove the trees, and the wood goes to sawmills or biofuel. The DNR website has a list of resources. Cities do get calls from concerned residents about dead trees near their property. Cities also get calls from residents who would like the wood for recreational fires, although the overall volume of wood is too large to make this a viable disposal option. Some cities are concerned about liability and legal issues in allowing residents to remove trees and usually leave the trees standing. County staff are watching progress on Washington County's funding request for a regional wood waste facility.

- Other issues include deer management. The County has conducted some support actions, such as survey flights. The more everyone addresses deer overpopulation, the better off everyone will be. Some cities do public hunts or hire sharpshooters or a combination of both. County staff have been working with Three Rivers on developing a metro-wide data set and management approaches.
- Related to water quality, Burnsville has partnered with DNR on reintroduction of submerged aquatic native plants and is working on ways to scale-up lake restoration, including elimination of aquatic invasives. They are allowing people to collect aquatic natives from lakes that aren't infested with invasives. The County's new greenhouse has a section for propagation of aquatic plants. Staff support the idea of partnering with cities on plant propagation once the County can produce more than is needed for the County system.
- Lakeville and Eagan environmental staff are doing great work on water quality. Some lakes have come off the State Impaired Waters list. To date, the CCCC has had a limited role in water quality issues due to staff capacity challenges. County staff asked if the cities have Adaptive Lake Management plans.
- Climate is a topic of interest and the cities are following it. Wildlife impacts were raised by County staff along with the need for movement corridors. This will likely become a regional issue. County staff asked about high-mortality areas on roads. Suggestion: cities and county work together, looking at highly visible areas of interest to both.

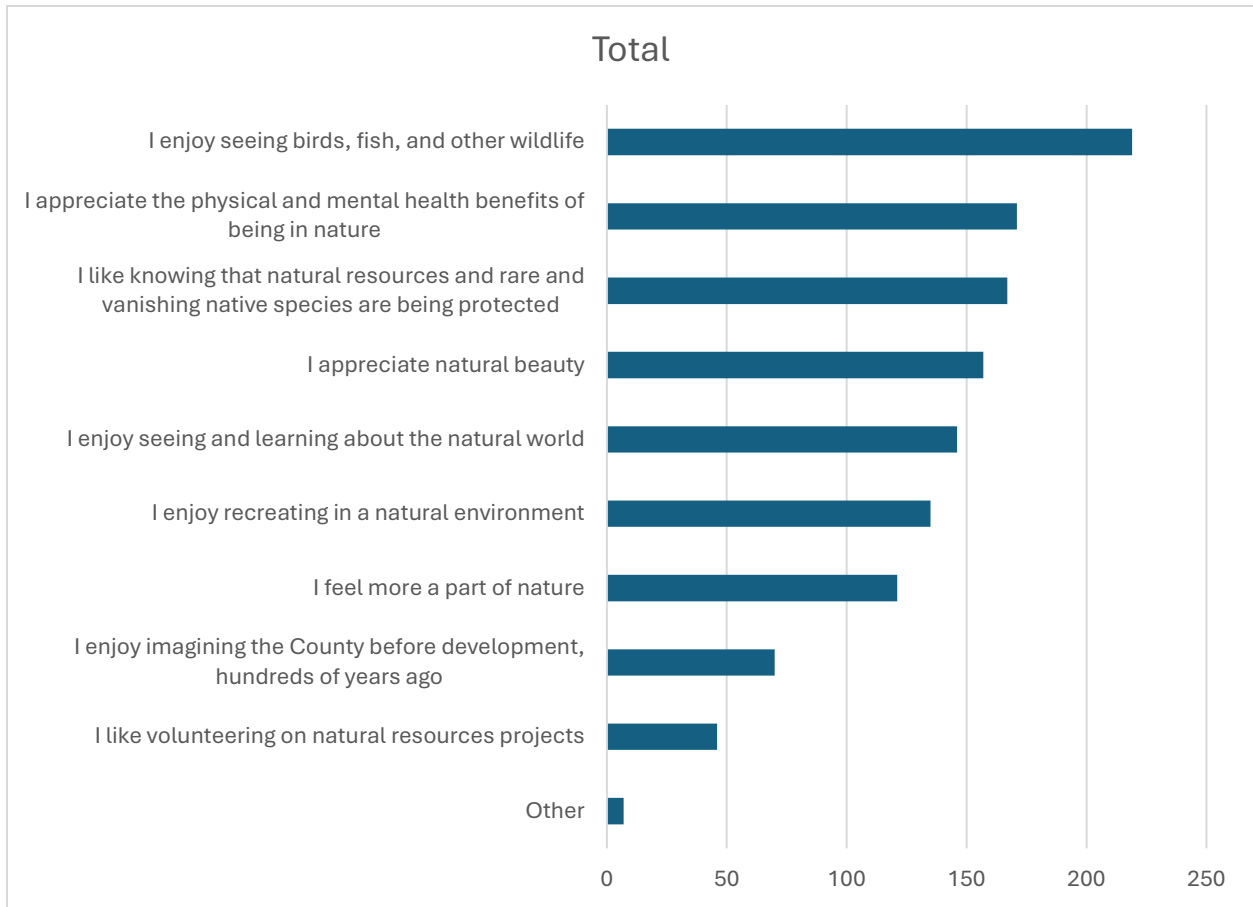
Additional groups will be engaged throughout implementation of the Natural Systems Plan and/or in conjunction with engagement conducted with other related planning projects.

2. Residents

Public communications for the Natural Systems Plan included website updates with an invitation to send comments to staff at Planning@co.dakota.mn.us. No comments were received as of May 2026.

Public intercepts included interactive "dot boards" stationed at three Dakota County libraries and the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center. Participants indicated what they value about natural resources in parks and what they see as priorities for natural resource management work, using sticky dots to select their choices from a range of options. The boards were in place for three weeks in April 2026. A minimum of 266 people participated, based on the single option with the largest number of dots.

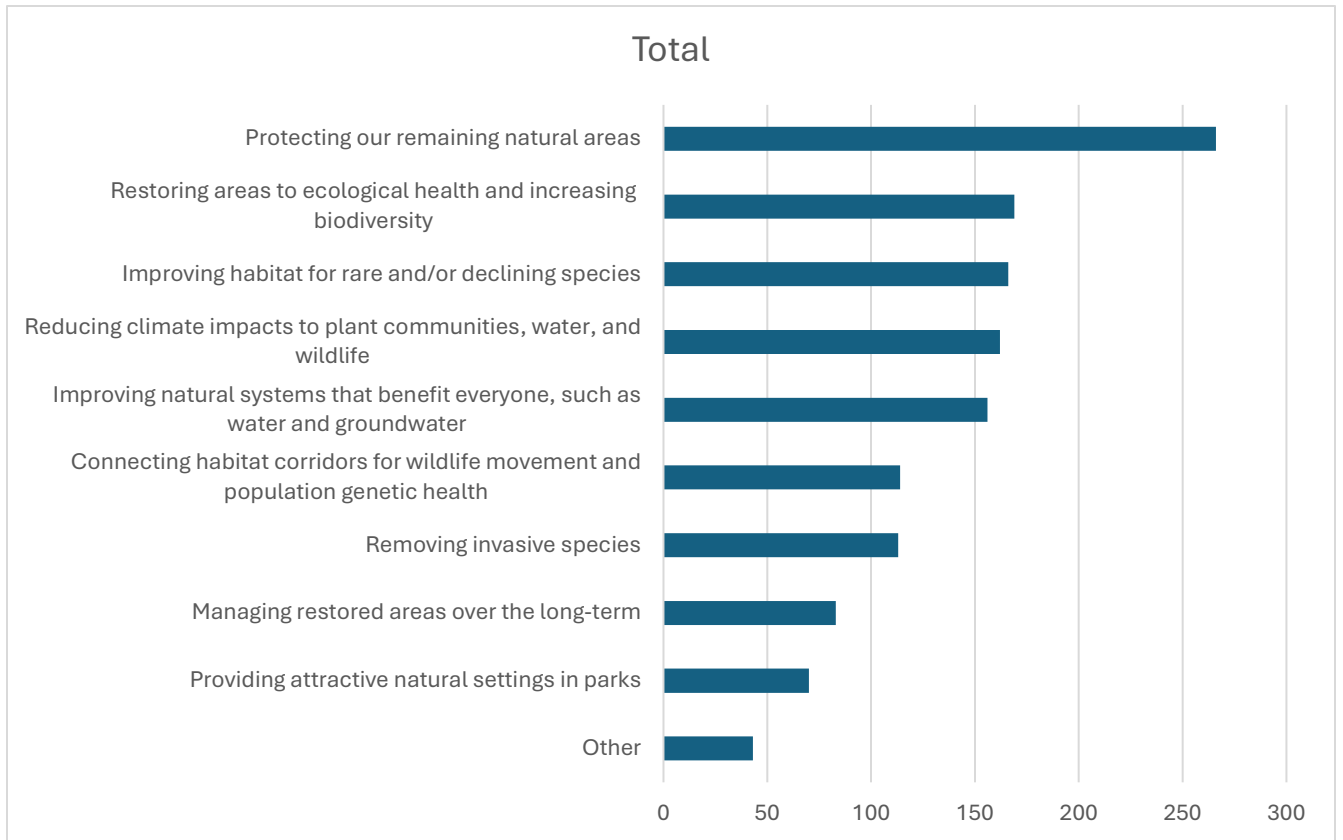
Question 1: What do you value about natural resources in Dakota County Parks?



Write-In Responses:

- none

Question 2: What are your priorities for natural resources work in Dakota County?



Write-In Responses:

- Educational opportunities
- Collaboration with U of Mn ecological research
- Earth Day every day
- Art
- Walking path in beauty of nature
- Encouraging every generation but especially the next to be mindful of their environmental impact
- Reminding us of our responsibility for the rest of nature/the universe
- Knowing that people are putting in an effort to know that plants and animals as well as the environment is safe
- Protect earth from capitalism
- Helping animals
- Implementing accessibility for disabled nature enjoyers
- Meta AI building \$800 million data center on 42 in Rosemount not good

Planning Commission Attachments, May 28, 2026

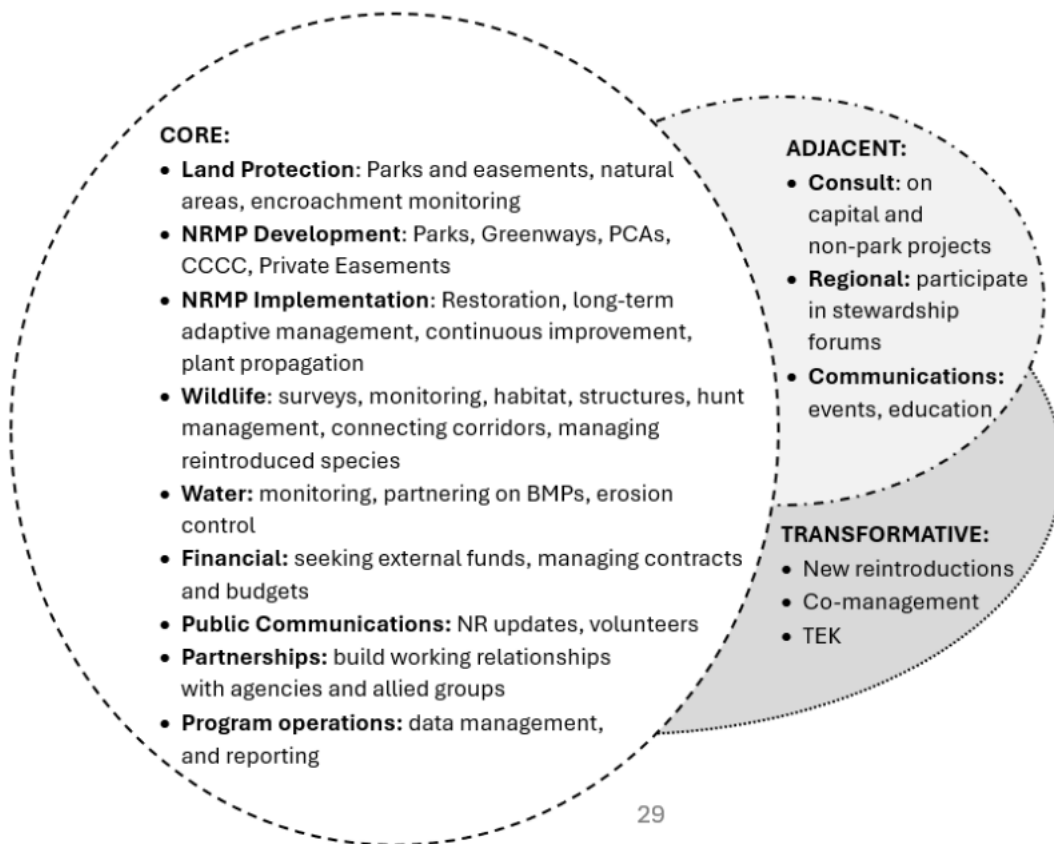
I. Levels of Service

Identification of core services and expanded services can help guide operational planning. This plan uses the following definitions to categorize services provided by the Parks Natural Resources unit. Typical time allocations are indicated for each service class.

Service	Percentage of Work
Core Services include essential work that is driven by a clear mission, is expected, and should continue.	70%
Adjacent Services typically involve expansion of existing skills to new types of work that is consistent with the mission. These services can become core if the effort is successful, and work must be continued to preserve investments made in launching the effort.	20%
Transformational Services are new services that can require the development and use of new skill sets. These are “breakthrough” efforts addressing newly identified needs or opportunities that expand capabilities within the mission. Transformational services can become core services if the effort is successful, and work must be continued to preserve investments made in launching the effort.	10%

Core Services

The following diagram shows the Natural Resources Unit’s services core, adjacent, and transformative services.



II. Metrics and Reporting

This plan recommends several sets of metrics to track plan implementation progress, facilitate operations, and prepare reportable information for officials and the public. Metrics should include both quantitative and qualitative measures. The Natural Resources Unit collects large quantities of data, which generally requires further analysis and synthesis to develop clear findings for system and/or unit level reporting. It can be challenging to design smooth pathways that can take large volumes of field and project management data and transform it into reportable information that tells a clear story to the public, officials, and funders.

A. Tracking Based on Audience Needs:

Data collection and synthesis into findings can meet several distinct needs for different audiences:

1. Reporting to elected officials and commissions

- a. Provide overall status of the unit's work (e.g., restoration, volunteers, etc.)
- b. Provide project-specific updates
- c. Support related annual budget and CIP requests, identify gaps

2. Reporting to the public

- a. Provide overall status of the unit's work (e.g., restoration, volunteers, etc.)
- b. Provide updates on specific projects
- c. Generate interest in and support for the work
- d. Encourage volunteer participation

3. Reporting to grant funders

- a. Provide overall status of the project
- b. Provide accountability on how grant funds are being spent

4. Providing data needed for the Natural Resources Unit's work

- a. Feedback loop to adaptive management
 - i. Collecting and interpreting monitoring and field data on restoration performance for specific projects
 - ii. Identifying common factors across projects that influence outcomes (soils, terrain, weather) and long-range data for identifying trends
- b. Guiding the Natural Resources Unit's work with operational data
 - i. Developing cost data for different types of restoration and management projects over time with multipliers for challenging conditions
 - ii. Identifying staff time required for different types of projects and/or acres of land being restored or managed
 - iii. Understanding program participation and efficacy (Land Conservation, Volunteers, City-County Conservation Collaborative)
 - iv. Tracking the status of many private landowner projects
 - v. Tracking implementation of five-year workplans, this plan, and individual NRMPs (annually)
 - vi. Others, as needed

B. Timing of measurements:

Measurements should be taken at agreed-upon intervals for internal tracking and/or reporting. Recommended metrics are based upon a) ongoing projects in the workplan and the system as a whole (monthly to quarterly) and b) progress against plan with the NSP objectives and strategies (annually).

C. Current Program and Service Inventory Metrics (PSI)

PSI metrics are a brief set of measurements reported annually to the Board and the public. They are designed to answer three questions related to programs and services provided by County departments and work units:

1. How much did we do?
2. How well did we do it?
3. Is anyone better off?

The Parks Natural Resources Unit currently reports on the following three PSI measures each year:

Restoration and Maintenance

How Much: Acres of completed restoration now being maintained
How Well: Percent of vegetation restoration in parks funded with external dollars
Better Off: Out of 100, resident rating of protecting and improving natural resources

Propagation

How Much: Number of plants installed in the past year
How Well: Number of species installed in the past year
Better Off: Dollar value of the plants produced

Volunteerism

How Much: Number of active volunteers
How Well: Number of people volunteering more than once in a year and over multiple years
Better Off: Dollar value of donated hours, saving County taxpayers

Additional metrics relate to other core services and could include:

- Wildlife health, especially for reintroduced species
- Water quality
- Partnerships
- Completion of projects based on priority ratings
- Effectiveness of outreach and education efforts

D. Tracking Tools

Tracking tools should be effective, consistent, and relatively easy to use in collecting and compiling data, particularly for recurring metrics that provide a long-range picture of trends over time. The Natural Resources Units uses a wide variety of data collection, analysis, and synthesis tools, from field notes and photographs to Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This plan recommends refining current methods and evaluating new tools for analysis and synthesis of data.



Natural Systems Plan Update

Mary Jackson
Office of Planning
Physical Development Division

- NSP Status
- Stakeholder Engagement Summary
- New Implementation Content

NSP Status



- Targeted engagement
March-April 2026
- Continued plan
development
- Draft plan summer
2026

Engagement



Group	Date
Township Officers	March 14
State and Federal Agencies	March 18
Environmental Groups	March 23
County Parks Internal Groups	April 17
Implementation Partners	April 23
Water Resources Partners	April 28
City Parks Staff	April 29 and 30
Residents and Visitors	April



DNR Staff Partnership Ideas:

- Potential expansion of Natural Areas
- Native seed propagation
- Wildlife surveys and monitoring
- Restoration grants



HASTINGS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTORS

Environmental Groups:

- “Middle Organizations” to plug in volunteers
- Look to County for local initiatives
- Support for Dakota Habitat Stewards



County Park Staff Ideas:

- Managing lakes: recreation and/or ecological benefit
- School habitat areas
- Easement management
- Education areas, park “campus” areas
- Education on restoration



Implementation Partner Ideas:

- Work with large businesses and industries
- Easement owner collaborative
- Hennepin County Natural Resources Coalition
- Data tracking



Water Resources Partner Ideas:

- Complicated, multiple partners
- Skills gap in aquatic ecology
- Lake ecological health and recreation suitability
- Need greater clarity in roles
- Need for follow-up lakes study and clear metrics



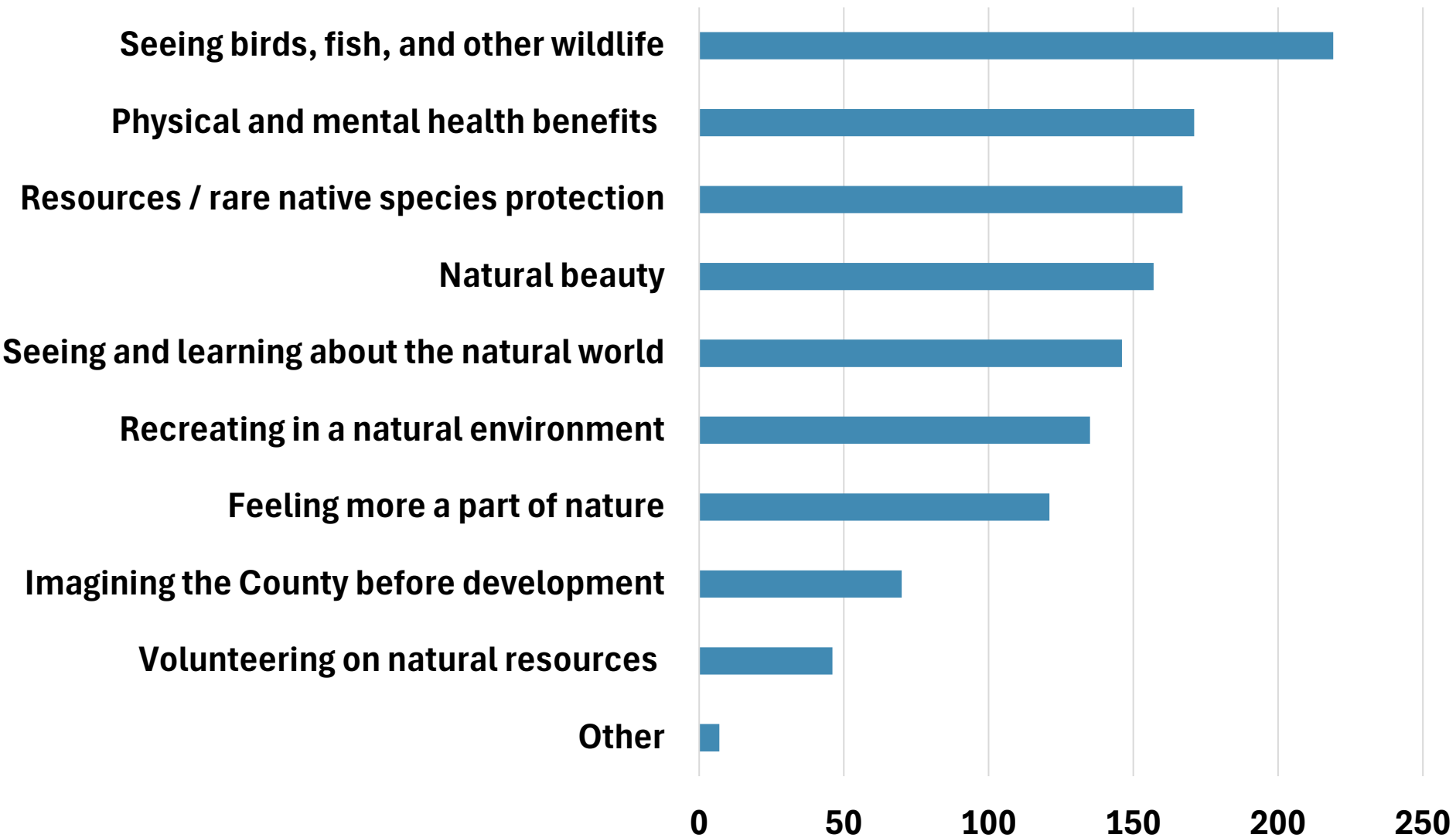
City Parks:

- Support the 4C program
- Communicating value to the public and officials
- Similar budget and staffing issues
- Wood waste concerns
- Deer management
- Interest in native seed propagation

Engagement Highlights



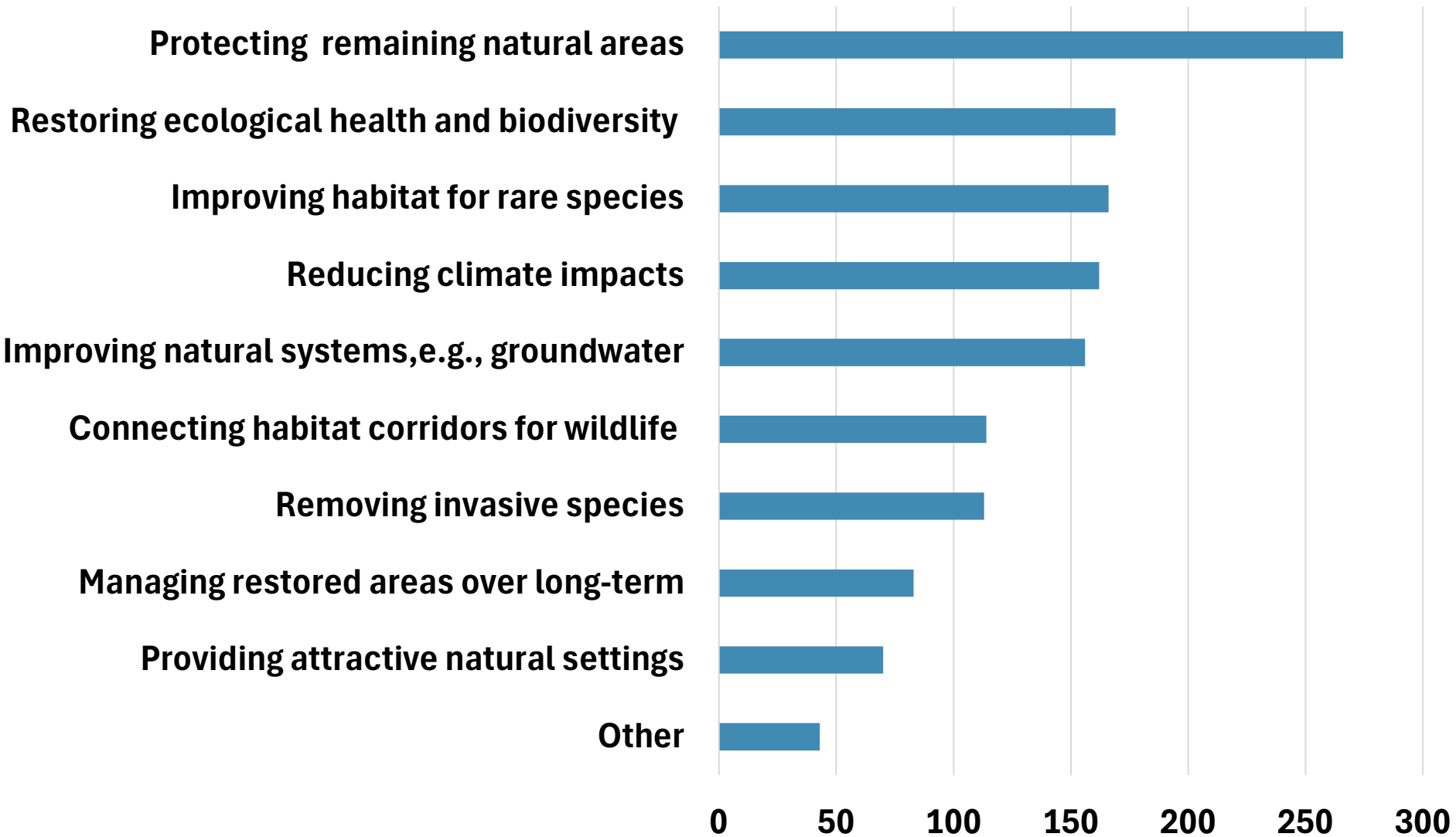
What They Value About Parks Natural Resources



Engagement Highlights



Priorities for Natural Resources Work





Additional Groups to Engage in Plan Implementation:

- Indigenous communities
- State and federal agencies
- Community partners
- Schools
- Contractors

1. Reporting to elected officials and commissions

- System status, project updates, support budget and CIP requests

2. Reporting to the public

- System status, project updates
- Generate interest, inform, encourage volunteer participation

3. Grant funders

- Project status, funding accountability

4. Feedback loop to adaptive management

- Project performance, common factors across projects

5. Operational data

- Costs, staff time required
- Program participation and efficacy
- Implementation of five-year workplan, this plan, individual NRMPs

Implementation-Service Level

CORE:

- **Land Protection:** Parks and easements, natural areas, encroachment monitoring
- **NRMP Development:** Parks, Greenways, PCAs, CCCC, Private Easements
- **NRMP Implementation:** Restoration, long-term adaptive management, continuous improvement, plant propagation
- **Wildlife:** surveys, monitoring, habitat, structures, hunt management, connecting corridors, managing reintroduced species
- **Water:** monitoring, partnering on BMPs, erosion control
- **Financial:** seeking external funds, managing contracts and budgets
- **Public Communications:** NR updates, volunteers
- **Partnerships:** build working relationships with agencies and allied groups
- **Program operations:** data management, and reporting

ADJACENT:

- **Consult:** on capital and non-park projects
- **Regional:** participate in stewardship forums
- **Communications:** events, education

TRANSFORMATIVE:

- New reintroductions
- Co-management
- TEK

Questions?