



Fishing near the base of Coon Rapids Dam.  
Image Credit: Three Rivers Park District

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## MISSISSIPPI GATEWAY REGIONAL PARK

This master plan represents the long-term vision, development, operation and maintenance of two parks near and adjacent to the Mississippi River in the City of Brooklyn Park, that naturally function as one larger natural resource-based park unit: Mississippi Gateway Regional Park.

Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, referred to as the East Unit, is owned and operated by Three Rivers Park District and Brooklyn Park Environmental Nature Area, referred to as the West Unit, is owned and operated by Brooklyn Park.

The master plan reflects the guidance of existing park users, the general public, underrepresented community sectors and public agencies with a vested interest in this parkland.

### VISION STATEMENT

The Mississippi River is the heart of this park. People connect to it in different ways and for different reasons. Some are in awe of its immense power, some are spiritually connected, some utilize the river for its resource value and some use the river as a means to escape, unplug and reconnect all at the same time. In recognition of the river's significance to us as individuals, a Nation and State, the master plan calls for it to be publicly accessible and protected for everyone to enjoy and experience.

Much of the river shoreline in suburban Hennepin County is privately held – making this publicly held parkland absolutely critical to providing access and opportunity to see, touch, hear and smell the river for all people. In light of this, the park's Vision Statement is as follows:

**A gateway for everyone to connect with the Mississippi River and its dynamic environment.**

The following Action Goals will help realize the Vision Statement's intent:

- Be welcoming and engaging to everyone.
- Celebrate the Mississippi River as the heart of the park.
- Introduce people to nature and outdoor recreation.
- Provide activity and purpose year-round.

### PARK DEVELOPMENT & PROGRAMMING CONCEPT

People have a strong desire to connect with the river, but many lack the awareness, skill, equipment, knowledge and sometimes confidence to fully connect with and appreciate the river and its dynamic environment.

To meet these needs, the park is envisioned as a stepping stone into nature. Portions of the park will be more developed and comfortable for people with limited experience or exposure to nature, and portions will be minimally developed to better serve people looking for a more 'off the beaten path' experience. The intent is that this park will connect people to nature in a manner that they are comfortable ultimately transforming novice park visitors into environmental stewards.

### Park-Wide Development Plan

Source: Three Rivers Park District



## Recreation Development

The main recreation development area of the East Unit will be a highly developed and vibrant space centered around the new Mississippi Gateway Center. This area will include picnicking, Nature's Highline and Tree House (an elevated tree canopy walk), nature-based play area, a mini-Mississippi River play and education feature and areas to gather and socialize adjacent to the new building.

The River Flats Area (located in the East Unit, along river's edge) will offer improved picnicking, a non-motorized boat launch, fishing improvements and ADA access directly to the Mississippi River shoreline. The main recreation of the West Unit will include reservation picnicking, nature-based dog off-leash area and archery.

Beyond these spaces, the park becomes less and less developed. Field learning stations and nature interpretation nodes located throughout the park will provide designated spaces to interpret and experience nature first hand. The field learning stations will be designed to accommodate group education with teaching shelters and storage space and the nature interpretation nodes will likely be lighter touches on the landscape that can accommodate instructor led, group education as well as individual, self-guided experiences.

A new education classroom is planned for the most southerly area of the park providing opportunities to learn about nature in nature. This space will also serve as a warming hut in the winter season.

A trail system comprised of both paved and non-paved trails, new bathroom facilities and enhanced wayfinding will allow improved access and service throughout the park. A new beginner cross-country ski loop, area for snow-shoeing and maintained paved trail loop will support winter park use.

## Education Programming

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park is planned to be one of the core education programming centers at Three Rivers. Programming will be offered multiple times a day including evenings and weekends to meet the community's needs. Instructor led programming will include teaching outdoor recreation such as cross-country skiing, fishing, kayaking, rafting and more as well as nature-based education focused on the Mississippi River and its dynamic ecosystem. Programming will also be offered off-site to better serve the needs of the greater community.

## Natural Resource Plan

As Three Rivers' main park on the Mississippi River, this park is planned to receive a higher level of natural resource restoration than typically provided in regional parks. When complete, the park will be comprised of floodplain forest, prairie, oak savannah and wetland. Natural resource management including invasive species removal and controlled burns will be ongoing.



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## VISITATION

Annual visitation is projected to reach 600,000 when fully developed. Park visitor make up is anticipated to be similar to the demographics of the area within a 15-minute drive time of the park, as well as Suburban Hennepin County.

## OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

The master plan calls for the park to be operated and maintained as one cohesive park unit and consistent with the greater Three Rivers Park System. The annual operation and maintenance cost when fully complete is \$1.8 Million.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Three Rivers and Brooklyn Park intend to work together to secure funding for this park through their respective capital improvement programs, grants, fundraising and partnerships.

Implementation will ultimately occur as funds are secured and at the discretion of Three Rivers Board of Commissioners and Brooklyn Park City Council. The total estimated cost for capital improvements including natural resource restoration and recreation development projects is \$25.5 Million.