

Section 1

Introduction

A. Welcome and Purpose

Welcome to the Todd County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan! The **primary purpose** of this Plan is to create and establish a **general process** to guide the development of recreational opportunities, both public and private, in Todd County over the next ten to twenty years. This Plan has been developed to protect and enhance the **quality of life** of citizens, landowners, and business operators in Todd County by promoting safe and reasonable recreational opportunities.

This Plan is Todd County’s **first** planning process to focus on outdoor recreation and open space. Given this fact, the implementation of this Plan will require some new ways of doing business.

This Plan recommends not only potential recreation projects but also ways to enhance dialogue between the County with landowners, businesses, recreational organizations, local officials, agency representatives and others to determine the specific steps to implementing the goals and objectives outlined in the Plan.

In this perspective, this Plan is simply an initial outline or a **roadmap**. Each specific project pursued in the implementation phase will require active and ongoing public input and involvement to become a reality.



This Plan is the result of a **collaborative effort** between the Todd County Development Corporation (TCDC) on behalf of the Todd County Board of Commissioners with interested citizens and landowners, recreational organizations, cities and townships, and other groups in Todd County. Funding for this Plan primarily came from the Blandin Foundation through the Community Investment Partnership (CIP) program. The Eastman Kodak Company and the Initiative Foundation provided additional funds to support this Plan. In kind support came from citizens and local officials along with County staff who contributed hundreds of hours of time to help shape the planning process and the content of this policy document.

B. Scope and Plan Horizon

Geography and Land Ownership Patterns

Todd County covers 980 square miles or 626,680 acres. Over 15,000 acres of the land in the County, or approximately two percent is publicly owned. Federal, state, county, township, and city governments along with school districts own land in Todd County with the State of Minnesota being the largest public sector landowner. Major water features including lakes and rivers, which are also considered public, cover about 21,000 acres or just over three percent. The remaining 590,000 acres of land in the County is privately owned.

Voluntary Collaborative Process

Within Todd County there are 11 cities, 28 townships and 13 school districts. Each of these local units of government provides for and/or has authorities to support and enhance public outdoor recreation opportunities. The County along with the cities and townships all have authorities to help protect and enhance public and private open space.

While state laws provide a broad range of authorities to counties in the development of public recreation facilities and the protection of open space such as: 1) bonding for improvement projects, 2) land acquisition, 3) the use of general funds to pay for ongoing maintenance, 4) land use controls, and many more tools; Todd County intends to work in a collaborative manner with its citizens, landowners, recreation organizations, lake associations, cities, townships, and state agencies in the development of future recreation opportunities.

Plan Horizon and Implementation

The horizon for implementing this Plan is ten to twenty years. While the overall vision set forth in this Plan may take even longer to implement, the goals and objectives in this Plan are meant to be a flexible guide to promote and enhance public and private recreational opportunities throughout the County. It is simply a guide for implementation, a roadmap for the County and its partnering citizens, landowners, recreation organizations and local units of government to work together. Many more decisions by all partners will be needed. This Plan is **NOT** a scheme for a major expansion of public lands and facilities, but rather it is intended to be foundation for developing a locally guided system of partnerships working together to support the recreational and open space needs of residents and visitors of Todd County. It will require landowners and local leaders to work together in new and more effective ways.

What is Addressed in this Plan?

Traditionally, recreation plans developed for local units of government have focused on **public** recreation facilities such as parks. This Plan has extended that scope to include promoting and supporting recreation opportunities on **private** land, where each landowner decides how to use and manage **open space** on their private property for their recreational benefits and enjoyment.

Open Space

So what is open space? Open space is generally defined as areas of land and/or water that provide one or more of the three following functions:

1. Provides for recreation opportunities.
2. Protects natural resources.
3. Creates usable outdoor spaces within cities or developed areas, located in between buildings, structures and/or streets.

Open space comes in different forms of ownership, function and management. Open space can be publicly or privately owned or varying combinations. For example, privately owned open space can be made available to the public through commercial enterprises such as resorts, golf courses, or hunting preserves. Private open space can also be managed for individuals on their own land or for a small group of people such as a homeowners association or a group of neighbors. The following lists some of the more common types of open space:

Types of **Private** Open Space

- Forestland.
- Cropland.
- Pastures.
- Wetlands.
- Residential yards (my backyard).
- Planned unit developments (PUDs) – common open space.
- Conservation easements.



Types of **Semi-Public** Open Space

- Golf courses.
- Ski resorts.
- Bird watching sanctuaries.
- Shooting ranges.
- Hunting preserves.
- Timber industry production lands.



Types of **Public** Open Space

- Public parks and school playgrounds.
- Public forestland.
- Public wildlife management lands – WMAs, WPAs.
- Public waters – lakes, rivers and streams.
- Public rights-of-way and utility sites.
- Community spaces – city and town halls, municipal lands.



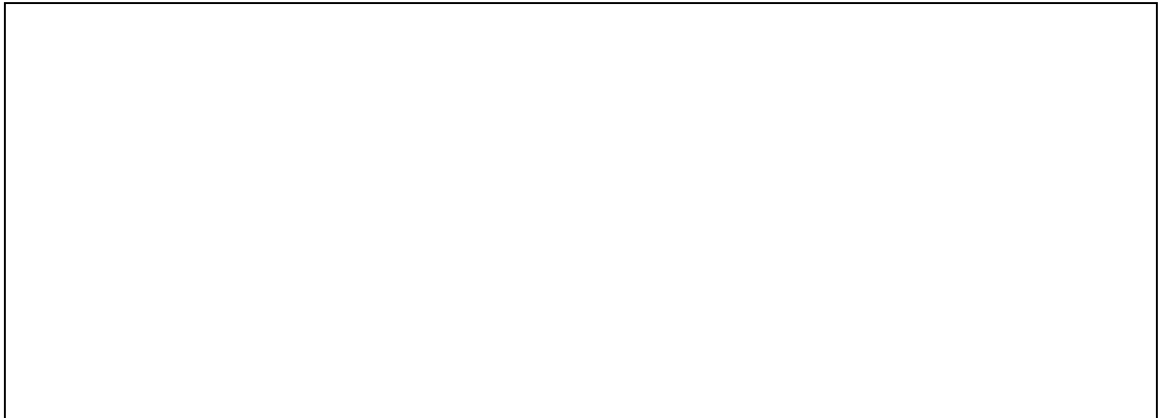
C. Why a Recreation Plan for Todd County?

“If I’d known I was going to live so long, I’d have taken better care of myself.”

Quality of Life and More

There are many reasons why counties and local communities prepare recreation plans. The main reason is to find ways to better serve their citizens. Recreation and open space are two major indicators of the quality of life in a given community. Other reasons include:

- Promoting the public health, safety and welfare.
- Increasing opportunities for physical exercise and outdoor experiences.
- Protecting important natural resources and cultural features.
- Encouraging sustainable economic opportunities through recreation and tourism.
- Reducing the number of conflicts between landowners and recreational activities.
- Supporting the wise use of limited public and private financial and human resources.



History of the County’s Recreational Planning Process

While this is the first formal recreation and open space plan for Todd County, a number of related efforts have previously been developed to help promote recreation opportunities. The following narrative summarizes the major efforts at the County level. It should be noted that some of the municipalities and recreational organizations in the County have developed recreation plans, which are not noted below.

Todd County Community-Based Comprehensive Plan (1997 – 2001)

In 1998, Todd County received a grant from the State of Minnesota Planning to prepare a comprehensive plan under the framework set forth in the Community-Based Planning Act. The Comprehensive Plan, based on extensive public input, established a policy foundation for sound land use planning and the protection of natural resources. Recreation was one of the topics or elements included in this policy document.

Community Investment Partnership (1998 – 2005)

In 1998, the Todd County Development Corporation (TCDC) applied to the Blandin Foundation to participate in the Community Investment Partnership (CIP) program. The CIP program builds the capacity of citizens through leadership training and provides funding for implementation projects. Through CIP, the County defined three priority focus areas. Two of the three focus areas were to support the development of recreational resources and promote economic opportunities. Through this program, the TCDC has brought almost \$500,000 into Todd County.

Proposed State Park Project (2000)

In 2000, a group of citizens began exploring the potential for a state park to be located in Todd County. As the project began to evolve, citizens and landowners questioned the need for a state park. Some citizens questioned the process that was used; they expressed concerns that the process was not open to the public and limited their involvement. Others were concerned about impacts on their private property. In response, the project was terminated and the effort to create a new state park was abandoned.

Todd County Trail Plan (2001 – 2002)

After completion of the Comprehensive Plan and the priority setting process through the Blandin CIP process, the TCDC focused its efforts on developing a countywide trail plan. This was due to high interest by citizens participating in the Comprehensive Plan process in trails. The trails planning process evolved into the broader recreational plan described below.

Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan: Expanded Scope (2003 – 2005)

With additional input from the public gathered in the trail planning process – the need to connect important places together with the trails while at the same time protect private lands and open space resources – it was decided that the scope of the trail planning process needed to be expanded to include parks and open space since they typically link trails from one destination point to another.

Concurrent with the expanded scope of the content of the recreational planning process, the TCDC expanded the amount of public involvement. One example of this was the adding of five area meetings to the process. These meetings were held throughout the County in the summer of 2003 to encourage more opportunities for citizens to participate in the recreational planning process.

While this outdoor recreational and open space planning process is separate from the effort to create a state park and an expansion of the initial trail planning effort, there have been many important lessons learned. The importance of a fair and open process has been foundational to the development of this Plan.

D. Summary of the Planning and Implementation Process

Planning as a Management Tool

With a growing demand for the use of land and water resources and limited public funds to address conflicts that arise, how can we make better use of the resources we have? Can county governments working in partnership with landowners and local leaders really make a difference? How does all of this work?

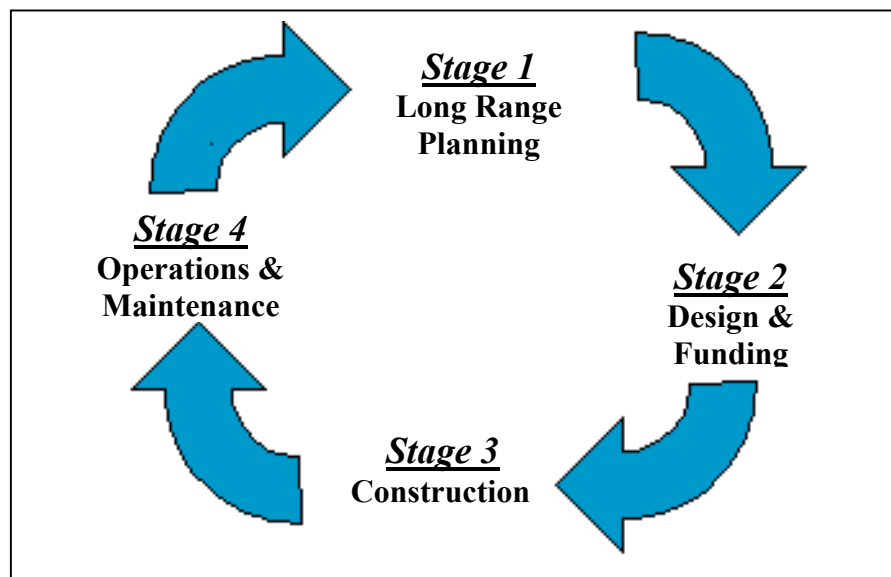
Planning is *the* management tool that helps citizens and landowners bring their collective efforts with county, township and city governments to guide the wise use land and natural resources. Planning is a continuous process that encourages collaborative thinking to logically approach resource management issues. The general process that was used to develop this Plan included:

- Gather of input from citizens, business and community leaders.
- Inventory and assess recreation and open space resources in the County.
- Build a strategic policy framework based on public input and recreation and open space resource assessment.
- Identify potential or initial steps to coordinating and implementing the goals and objectives.

Overall Planning and Implementation Process

A thorough planning process combined with coordinated implementation efforts can help private landowners, local leaders and public agencies work together to more effectively protect and enhance the resources in their communities. Through the development of this Plan, the Todd County Board of Commissioners and its citizens have committed to improving outdoor recreational and open space resources in the County through a four-stage planning and implementation process. **Figure 1** illustrates the overall recreation planning and implementation process established by the County.

Figure 1
Recreation
Planning and
Implementation
Process



Public Input and Participation

From the outset of this overall recreation planning initiative as guided by the TCDC, creating a fair and open process along with providing as many opportunities for public input and involvement as possible have been two primary goals.

Several methods of gathering public input have been used in this process including:

- Informational Meetings and Presentations
- Area Meetings
- County Fair Booth
- Press Conferences/Luncheons
- Landowner Workshops
- Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Project Management Team (PMT)

The CAC, or citizens advisory committee, provided ongoing public involvement for this planning process. Day-to-day coordination and administrative details were managed by the TCDC in conjunction with the Project Management Team (PMT), a group of County staff members, citizens and the County's planning consultant.

For a more detailed description of the public input gathered in this process, please see Volume 1, Section 4, Citizen Participation and Input.

It should also be noted that the development of this process was intentionally not rushed through. This was done to help avoid pushing interested groups into making decisions without good information being made available.

This planning process was designed in a methodical yet flexible way so as to allow time for building partnerships and trust. It is hoped that by working collaboratively through a fair and open process, the citizens and leaders of Todd County will together be able to promote far more citizen involvement combined with local leadership in implementing this Plan.

E. Mission of the Citizens’ Advisory Committee

The Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC) determined early in the recreational planning process that it needed to clarify its role. The CAC created the following mission statement to reflect its overall purpose:

CAC Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Todd County Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to develop a recreational plan that recommends ways to increase opportunities for public recreation in the County while at the same time protecting and enhancing private property rights and open space resources. To accomplish this mission, the members of the CAC recommends that the County:

- *Work with landowners to find meaningful ways to help protect natural resources and open spaces in order to maintain the strength of the private sector in the County.*
- *Encourage and support the maintenance, improvement, and expansion of its existing parks, open space and trails.*
- *Expand or create new parks and trails in conjunction with landowners on a voluntary basis only, consistent with its policy not to use eminent domain for recreational projects.*

F. Organization of the Plan: Three Basic Questions, Three Parts

Understanding the **organization** of a plan is essential to its effective and meaningful use. Plans are to be used by local leaders and citizens as management tools or reference documents to help them better guide and manage their communities. Plans are suppose to help us make better decisions, and to do so, they need to be **used**.

Getting a planning document off the shelf so it can actually be used starts more readily when each reader understands how the document is organized. Most plans address very complex topics and contain large quantities of information. They typically are confusing and cumbersome to refer to. In contrast, well-organized plans help users more quickly find the information and ideas they need to coordinate and implement projects and programs.

The organization of the Todd County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan is based on the strategic planning process model. Strategic planning asks three fundamental questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? And, how do we get there?

This Plan has been organized into a three-part format. Please note that this format is consistent with the framework established in the County’s Community Based Comprehensive Plan. The three parts of this Plan include:

- Volume 1 – Plan Background: “Where are we?”
- Volume 2 – Strategic Policy Framework: “Where do we want to go?”
- Volume 3 – Plan Implementation: “How will we get there?”

Volume 1 provides the reader with background information relating to recreation and open space resources in the County. It includes an inventory and assessment of existing recreation facilities in the County in Section 2, an analysis of recreation trends in Section 3, an overview of public input in Section 4 and major conclusions in Section 5. The information in Volume 1 provides the foundation for the vision and directions established in Volume 2.

Volume 2 outlines the County’s strategic vision in a written framework. Volume 2 provides a detailed framework of goals, objectives, and action items that define how the County will work with its recreation partners over the next five, ten or more years.

Volume 3 of the Plan establishes how the County will implement the strategic policy framework developed in Volume 2. Specific recommendations for administering programs and implementing the County’s goals are provided in Volume 3.

The **Appendix** provides background information for the Plan. Additional information used in the planning process can also be found on the County’s website at www.co.todd.mn.us.

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