



**Addenda**

**Minnetonka Park Board**

**Meeting of December 1, 2021**

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**ITEM 7B – Natural Resources Master Plan Update**

- Attached is feedback received after the packet was distributed.

## Leslie Yetka

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**From:** Heather Holm [REDACTED] >  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 24, 2021 10:06 AM  
**To:** Leslie Yetka  
**Subject:** Re: Appendix A of NRMP  
**Attachments:** NRMPAppendixAFeedback.pdf

Hi Leslie,

Please find my personal comments attached for the NRMP. These comments do not reflect the opinions or positions of FoMP or the Friends of Cullen. They reflect my personal observations and experience living and volunteering in this community.

I have included some specific questions and feedback for the consultants so I hope it's not too late to share this feedback with them.

Have a nice Thanksgiving!  
Heather

On Tue, Nov 23, 2021 at 9:01 AM Leslie Yetka <[lyetka@minnetonkamn.gov](mailto:lyetka@minnetonkamn.gov)> wrote:

Hi Heather,

I am finalizing the report for the Park Board next week with a revised draft of the NRMP. I have only received comments regarding Purgatory Park and a few on Hilloway in Appendix A, which kind of surprised me acutally. I thought I'd check in to see if you or others in the FoMP intend on submitting more comments, especially related to individual parks? I will be too late to incorporate into the draft at this point before the Park Board meeting, but we can during the next round of updates before going to city council. I just wanted to check, as we welcome your feedback especially at the park level.

Thanks.

Leslie

Dear Barr Engineering and City Natural Resources Staff,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback for the NRMP and associated appendices. The following comments provide feedback general comments on the plan and priorities. The rest of the comments are feedback for Appendix A. Some of the comments are constructive and I don't want these comments to be misconstrued as negative. I included them to question the status quo and challenge you to consider how we can find ways to successfully restore our natural resources. The draft plan is comprehensive and provides an effective framework for moving forward. I am looking forward to our city (and its residents advocating for) funding the recommendations in the plan.

I have lived in Minnetonka for over eighteen years, and my husband and I chose to live here over all surrounding suburbs because of the quality of the natural areas and restored parks. While living here, however, I have witnessed the decline in the ecological quality of our parks as this plan indicates. I am concerned about the ongoing degradation of our parks and the ineffective strategies and methodologies employed, and lack of adequate funding to reverse this trend. Many residents are noticing the decline in ecological quality of our parks and open spaces, and in some situations, the decline is happening rapidly. This is resulting in an overall sense of urgency in our community. For these reasons, I would like the consultants to incorporate concrete and detailed methodologies in the plan, and the staff to develop strategies to ensure that development and use that undermine restoration efforts are not contributing to the decline. The existing NRMP (2000) is very good but most of the methodologies and recommendations were not executed for various known and unknown reasons. I am concerned that this plan will not be executed; it will merely be a document that collects dust on the shelf like the last plan, and our parks will continue on this downward trajectory.

Minnetonka residents love their parks and the natural beauty they provide. Some residents are unknowingly loving the parks to death by using them in a way that results in rapid degradation. We can have both beautiful restored natural areas and people using and enjoying these places. However, residents need to be provided clear guidance on how to use these places so it doesn't result in degradation. Degradation of natural resources is not an inevitable outcome in a suburban community. Please incorporate ways/cues that indicate that high quality natural areas are valuable and educate the residents on the multitude of benefits these places provide for all community members.

The challenges ahead are daunting, but if we use the most current scientific methodologies and best management practices, fund the restoration and maintenance of our parks, develop a robust volunteer engagement program, and clearly communicate to residents why high quality natural areas should be valued, we can stop the decline. I look forward to near and long term opportunities to collaborate and work on these challenges, so we can continue to enjoy and appreciate our city's valued natural resources. The high quality natural resources are what makes Minnetonka unique and an attractive place to live.

Thank you for your work preparing the NRMP!

### **General Comments for Consultants**

Many priorities noted in Appendix A encourage oak regeneration. I am wondering about the oak forest target plant community which retains more canopy cover in this target plant community and whether it will result in any oak regeneration? I would like to see bolder recommendations to transition the system out of its degraded, unstable state. If Minnetonka was largely oak barrens/openings/savannas, should we be managing these as oak forests? I

don't see how we will be able to solve the invasibility of these systems. Strategies to manage these 'forests' over the last fifteen years are not working and pressure from invasive plants remains high.

Oak forests consist of large historic specimens - consider rephrasing so it's a priority: Manage for the health of the large historic oak specimens and subsequent oak regeneration. Provide specific steps to reach this goal.

Provide specifics on management approaches for the priorities for all park evaluations. For example for Victoria Evergreen priorities: Protection of the oak trees and oak regeneration should be priority. What management approaches are required that result in oak regeneration? How will this work in the oak forest target plant community?

Provide more specifics somewhere in the plan (add additional approach/methodology information similar to page 33) regarding your recommendations to establish "intensive ground cover restoration". This needs to be spelled out. Perhaps an additional appendix with plant community-specific seed mix examples for each target plant community. I would also like to see a restoration management flow chart included in the plan. Executing methodologies out of order will not result in desired outcomes.

Provide specific management practices for each target plant community noted in the plan in addition to definitions. What plant species should be managed or not managed in each target plant community?

#### **General Comments for Staff**

Align restoration goals/target plant communities with all NR department actions. For example, please refrain from planting leftover tree sale trees in random places in the natural areas of our parks. In many instances, the tree species, siting (planted under oaks in savanna), genotype, and canopy density don't align with the target plant community goals. Focus on community forest recommendations for extra trees. Plant them in turf grass dominated/cultural areas in small parks.

#### **General Comments for Consultants and Staff**

Determining specific plants to manage in each target plant community (comment above) will help guide restoration practices. For example, placing plastic tubes on trees and shrubs that don't belong in that target plant community (encouraging growth of trees under oak drip lines) inhibits restoration outcomes if the target plant community is a savanna or if oak regeneration is a priority. Reallocate funds used to purchase plastic tubes to seed purchases. Plastic is polluting our environment and parks.

This plan would have much more robust and comprehensive if the park-specific volunteers were engaged early on in the process (as they requested). Any volunteer that spends fifteen years restoring a park has extremely valuable, on-the-ground experience and input. This was a missed opportunity. Some recommendations don't align with the challenges that certain sites pose (overuse, power lines, past land use) and volunteers could have provided feedback so the target plant community reflects tangible possibilities (and challenges). I suggest that staff prioritize engagement with volunteers, and work collaboratively with volunteers on the challenges we face so we can partner to improve the ecological quality of our parks. Volunteer retention is an ongoing problem because the organized events are often unstructured, do not provide clear goals and noticeable outcomes, use methodologies that are ineffective, and lack a sense of purpose. Volunteers need to feel that their personal time spent contributing to a cause is worthwhile and appreciated. I look forward to the development of a volunteer engagement program that will address some of the current challenges.

## **APPENDIX A Feedback**

Consider the inclusion of 5, 10, and 20-year goals for each park evaluated in Appendix A.

### **Jidana**

Note: Target Plant Community map is missing key for light green area.

South- and west- facing slopes and top of knolls (west and south of the camp area) - suggest change to savanna to encourage plan for aggressive removal of fire-intolerant trees to reduce overall invasibility of the site. Otherwise current management practices/approaches will result in continued buckthorn invasion/reinvasion.

### **Opportunities**

Add - Limit vehicle traffic in camp area to reduce soil compaction, particularly on or near bur oak root systems.

Cease mowing vegetation in camp area under bur oaks to help with soil erosion and ground cover restoration. Note: The Friends of Jidana have proposed establishing Penn sedge/forb and no-mow vegetation in the camp area, particularly under oak driplines.

Making that whole camp area 'cultural' does not provide a framework for any restoration within that section of the park.

Jidana Island south wetland apron has nice population of prairie cord grass.

### **Big Willow**

Target Plant Community map - 2000 NRMP notes oak savanna for area west of parking lot and south of creek. Suggest updating this whole area (excluding wetlands and creek border) to oak savanna to connect with Mills Landing and Minnetonka Mills open space/creek corridor west of Plymouth Road and north of Mtka Blvd. This could be a large, relatively contiguous savanna unit once remaining homestead (west of Big Willow) is acquired by city. The community desperately needs examples of pre-settlement plant communities, particularly savannas, to understand that afforestation and lack of regular fires has resulted in the degradation of our community savannas.

### **Meadow**

The Friends of Meadow Park have been restoring woodland fragments and the wetland edge near the playground. Suggest recoloring the map to reduce size of cultural area to provide guidance/target plant community recommendations for these areas.

### **Hilloway**

Check plant community type (bog) - update to fen or rich fen? (same comment for Orchard Park - fen).

Suggest updating maple-basswood target plant community to savanna, particularly on south-facing slope north of fen and top of hill. With buckthorn cleared in this section, it's largely open with scattered open grown cherry trees. Area marked as oak savanna on west side could be native grassland. I did not see a significant amount of non-native plant species in this section so I'm curious why it was mapped as a non-native grassland. There appears to be good native sedge diversity there.

Hire consultants to develop a pine plantation restoration succession plan. I am quite honestly perplexed at the recent planting of hemlock in this pine forest. This is a backward climate change assisted migration strategy. Consider use of small feller buncher for thinning to reduce damage to remaining pine stand. Suggest prioritizing the regeneration of deciduous trees,

particularly fire-tolerant oaks. Consider updating target plant community for mixed coniferous forest to reflect succession plan.

**Restoration Priorities**

Protect high quality fen from sedimentation from storm sewer. Develop plan to fix the erosion and deposition of sediment in the southwest corner of the fen. Explore opportunities in adjoining neighborhood to reduce flow.

**Lake Rose**

Target Plant Community - I would like to see oak savanna for the western and southern slopes and top of knoll. Volunteers have been seeding these sections with wild rye/sedges and savanna seed mixes. These areas need to be managed for continued woody encroachment/canopy closure. Under priorities, suggest that pioneer trees be removed; fire-sensitive tree species thinned on savanna slopes or managed with regular burns to allow sufficient light penetration for ground layer growth.

Black cherry monoculture on north slope is a management concern. Consider including succession management strategies for shaded north-facing slope.

**Tower Hill**

Consider removal of pines from slopes to prevent encroachment/seeding into the prairie. Remove trees on east slope would limit buckthorn growth/shading and decline of native grasses.

Suggest removing all woody plant growth (trees and shrubs) under open grown oak on west side of knoll. Siberian elms not entirely eliminated from this park and pose a threat to prairie. Develop plan to close off eroded fall line trail on east side and develop natural surface trail for park users that follows slope contours.

Add interpretive sign to inform public about value of prairies such as this one.

Work with police to address ongoing vandalism and unauthorized mowing of the prairie and develop restoration-related and community engagement strategies to curtail these activities.

Note: Colors used for target plant community map are different than other park maps.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Holm

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## Leslie Yetka

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**From:** Friends of Minnetonka Parks [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 1, 2021 11:57 AM  
**To:** Korey Beyersdorf; James Durbin; Chris Gabler; David Ingraham; Ben Jacobs; Katie Semersky; Christopher Walick; Mike Funk; Leslie Yetka; Kelly ODea  
**Subject:** FoMP Response to NRMP, Draft 2

All,

We approve of many of the initiatives proposed in the document, as stated in our previous communications. Two questions of substance remain for us. We would like to see the Park Board clarify their position on these questions.

**1. *What is the current state of our parks' health from an ecological point of view? Have we made progress or fallen back since the last NRMP?***

There is no overall, definitive statement on the ecological health of our parks as a whole in the report and there are statements that are confusing. Here are a few examples. The report says that many of the city's engagement participants think the parks are in good to very good shape. It also states that about the same percentage are concerned about the state of our natural resources. Many also believe that the city is performing well as a steward of the parks. However, the report also echoes a note from the previous NRMP that most residents are a bit naïve about the health of our natural resources and the report uses the phrase that is repeated frequently today that, "if it is green it must be good," as an example of resident misperceptions of the health of our nature spaces. The report suggests that, in reality, the truth might be much different to the trained eye. The expert consultant's *trained eye* report chronicles in chapter after chapter of the report the distress in our parks and natural resource areas and the resulting lack of high-quality spaces left. FoMP, which is comprised of individuals who have spent years in the parks as restoration volunteers, believes and has reported that we are at a tipping point regarding the health of our parks. What is the Park Board's definitive assessment?

**2. *Is the Park Board ready to recommend that the city take the leadership role needed to turn the situation around city-wide and not for just a few high priority areas?***

Are Park Board members champions of nature and the environment? Do they want the city to be average, above average or outstanding when compared to other cities? Taking a leadership role will require a significant infusion of resources into our nature areas and possibly the reorganization and redirection of some staff responsibilities and accountabilities. (Our understanding is that some of this shifting of responsibilities is already starting to happen.) It is worrisome that there are so many initiatives included in the report, yet staff states that most of it can be covered by current staff assignments and financial resources. It is worrisome because we have been told many times that "there is not enough in the budget" to conduct restoration activities that we request. Will the Park Board recommend that the city commit the resources needed to address the initiatives outlined in the NRMP and see that they are carried out successfully?

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this report. We look forward to collaborating with city policy makers and staff on these important issues and initiatives.

John Mirocha, President

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