



MEMO

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

TO: Rice County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Gabrielle Grinde and Bryan Harjes - HKGI

RE: Rice County Park and Trail System Plan

At the February 15th Board meeting, we will review the following information and ask for questions, comments, and feedback from Commissioners.

1. Progress Update

We are about one-third of the way through the project tasks. We are almost complete with the first phase of work, which included background information analysis. Ongoing tasks include public engagement and refinement of recommendations.

Completed	In progress	Upcoming tasks
Background analysis	Draft branding	Refine recommendations
Park visits and observations	Peer county comparison & NRPA metrics	Park plans and cost estimates
Trends and demographics analysis	Initial recommendations	Implementation and funding strategy
Mapping analysis	Public engagement	

2. Peer Counties Comparison

Research and analysis of several peer counties was conducted to get a sense of where Rice County parks stand in comparison to other similar and neighboring counties in the state. The following is a summary of key take aways from our research.

1. *How many counties did we research? What is the range of contexts among the counties (rural/urban/suburban) and population ranges?*
 - o We researched Rice County plus 6 other counties: Olmsted, Goodhue, Dakota, Sherburne, Blue Earth, and Otter Tail.
 - o The context ranged from fairly rural (Otter Tail, Goodhue, Sherburne, Rice County), to developing-rural/rural-suburban (Olmsted, Blue Earth), to suburban (Dakota).

- Population ranged from Dakota County with 439,882 at the highest to Goodhue with 47,582 at the lowest. Rice County, with 67,097, had the 5th largest population out of the 7 counties we researched. The average population across the 7 counties was 117,973.
2. *Of the 7 counties researched, Rice County has the highest number of county parks (13), and the 3rd highest total acreage of County Parks (1,109 ac.)*
- Dakota County has the highest total acreage (6,020 ac.)
 - Olmsted County has the second highest total acreage (2,086 ac.)
3. *Rice County is not the only county without formal programming offered among the 7 counties.*
- It appears that only Olmsted County and Dakota County are the only counties that have formal educational/recreational programming established
 - Sherburne County has a self-guided summer “Story Stroll” program and a partnership with the YMCA for its Unlock It! Adventure Series, a self-guided scavenger hunt. Desire for additional programming is mentioned in the Park System Master Plan.
 - Blue Earth County has a self-guided interpretive trail, and also has a Nature/Interpretive Center and also an outdoor classroom but unclear if any educational programming is offered
 - Otter Tail County has self-guided interpretive signage at the historic Phelps Mill building, but does not appear to offer any programming. Desire for additional programming is mentioned in the Phelps Mill Park Master Plan.
4. *How many residents per park are in each county?*
- Rice County: 5,161 (*This is much lower than most of the other counties*)
 - Olmsted County: 32,569
 - Goodhue County: 23,791
 - Dakota County: 62,840
 - Sherburne County: 24,296
 - Blue Earth County: 7,679
 - Otter Tail County: 20,027
5. *How many miles of county-owned/managed trails does Rice County have compared to peer counties?*
- Rice County: 12.5 miles of trails (9.8 mi hiking)
 - Olmsted County: 27 miles of trails (27 mi of hiking)
 - Goodhue County: 1.34 miles of trails/paths (0 mi of hiking trails)
 - *Dakota County: 136.9 miles of trails (44.9 mi of hiking trails, 41.2 mi of greenway trails)*
 - Sherburne County: 19.3 miles of trails (3.5 mi of hiking trails, 8.5 mi of greenway trails)
 - Blue Earth County: 25 miles of trails (8.4 mi of hiking trails, 16.6 mi of greenway trails)
 - Otter Tail County: 0 miles of trails (trail development included in park master plans)
6. *Are there facilities that are missing in Rice County that all or most of the other counties have?*

- Rice County does not own/manage any trail corridors/greenways or regional trails – 3 other counties manage a trail corridor network, and 2 other counties have direct connections to regional trails from county parks
- Rice County does not own/operate a visitor/nature center – 4 of the other counties have visitor/nature centers

7. *What does Rice County have that none of the other counties have?*

- Rice County may be the only county that manages primitive/hike or paddle-in camping sites
- Rice County has the second highest number of both motorized and non-motorized boat launches – 7 total – to provide access to its many lakes and major rivers (behind Blue Earth County)
- Rice County manages the most parks out of all the counties researched
- [The majority of the counties researched have at least 1 or 2 state parks, as well as significant trails (state/regional trails or greenways, water trails).]

8. *Rice County has a similarly low number of parks staff compared to peer counties. Based on the amount of park acreage and number of parks to maintain, Rice County has low staff levels.*

- Staffing numbers need to be confirmed, but from initial research, Rice County has a fewer number of FTE in its Parks Department than the other counties.
 - The majority of the counties researched had 1 or 2 FTE working in parks
 - The two counties that managed the most acres of parks (Olmsted and Dakota) both had many more FTE compared to the other counties; with 11 and 21, respectively
 - **Rice County: 0.2 FTE**
 - Olmsted County: 11 FTE
 - Goodhue County: 1 FTE
 - **Dakota County: 21 FTE**
 - Sherburne County: 1 FTE
 - Blue Earth County: 1 FTE
 - Otter Tail County: 2 FTE
- Staff per acre of parkland:
 - Rice County: 0.2 FTE per 1,109 acres
 - Olmsted County: 1 FTE per 190 acres
 - *Goodhue County: 1 FTE per 111 acres*
 - Dakota County: 1 FTE per 287 acres
 - Sherburne County: 1 FTE per 345 acres
 - Blue Earth County: 1 FTE per 364 acres
 - Otter Tail County: 1 FTE per 150 acres
- Staff per county population:
 - Rice County: 0.2 FTE per 67,097
 - *Olmsted County: 1 FTE per 14,804*
 - Goodhue County: 1 FTE per 47,582
 - Dakota County: 1 FTE per 20,947
 - Sherburne County: 1 FTE per 97,183
 - Blue Earth County: 1 FTE per 69,112
 - Otter Tail County: 2 FTE per 30,041

9. *What is the typical park department structure? Is Rice County the only county that has “Parks and Facilities” together in one department?*

- Several other counties’ parks departments were nested in other departments:
 - Goodhue Parks is part of its Public Works department
 - Blue Earth Parks and Sherburne are part of their Public Works departments
- Dakota, Olmsted, and Otter Tail have stand-alone Parks departments

3. Parks and Facilities Inventory and Mapping

Tables and maps will be presented identifying:

- existing and planned parks and trails in the County
- access to parks and trails
- state parks and open spaces in the County

4. Review Branding / Logo options

See attached page of potential park branding and logo options. Potential new logos may be used to brand park and trail print media, online information, and signage at parks.

5. Initial Observations & Recommendations Framework

Rice County has many acres of parkland and parks located throughout the county. However, a lack of awareness of what is offered and lack of programming of the park sites contributes to under utilization of parks. We will review and discuss our initial observations and framework for recommendations.

Rice County parks and rec system	
Strengths	Cannon River access, natural parks, parks are not crowded
Weaknesses	Lack of updated facilities and amenities, ADA accessibility, marketing and outreach, lack of awareness of parks
Opportunities	Build and create trail connections to Sakatah State Trail, Mill Towns State trail, Cannon Valley Trail; add park programming; update and improve basic amenities; update branding/signage/marketing
Threats	Invasive species, climate change, Canon River levels fluctuating, population growth slow down
Recommendations Framework	
<i>Category</i>	
Natural Resources	Work with local school groups on invasives management; target key locations (Cannon River Wilderness Area); set priorities
Parks and Facilities	Update existing shelters, restrooms, ADA Accessibility; Coordination with DNR on identifying facilities; Individual park master plan concepts
Trails	Identify all existing, planned, and proposed trails. Work with DNR, County Highway departments, cities and townships, to implement new trails. Set priorities for connections and funding.
Cultural Resources & Programming	Birding programs; partner with DNR; consider partnerships with River Bend Nature Center

	Consider adding programming opportunities; consider adding programming staff
Acquisition for future parks and trails	Consider opportunities with willing sellers; Potential County-wide trail network / greenway system; Potential park expansion
Operations and Maintenance	Work on Maintenance and Replacement Schedule to identify a base line level of funding needed to take care of existing facilities
Funding	State and federal grants, dedicated parks funding, CIP
Staffing	Consider hiring a Parks maintenance supervisor, programming staff / Volunteer coordinator
Other?	

6. Public Engagement

An interactive map is posted online for general public input:

<https://hkgi.mysocialpinpoint.com/rice-county-park-system-plan/map#/>

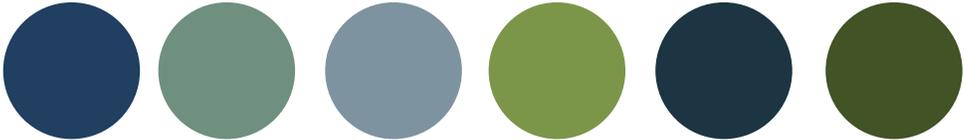
This map will be open through the end of February, and potentially longer, to solicit input from the broader public about issues and opportunities for Rice County parks and trails. Outreach is targeted to stakeholders and the general public. Please help us spread the word to your networks!

7. Next Steps

- Continue to promote online engagement through the end of February
- Refine recommendations and park concept plans

Rice County Branding

Rice County Brand Colors



Existing Logo



Icon Style



Branding Logo Options

Color Palette



RICE COUNTY

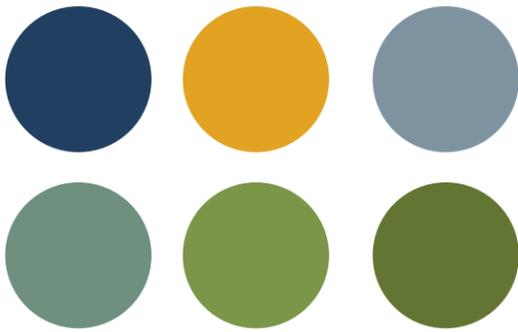


Parks



RICE COUNTY
Parks

Color Palette



RICE COUNTY
PARKS

RICE COUNTY
PARKS



RICE COUNTY
PARKS



RICE COUNTY
PARKS



RICE COUNTY
PARKS

RICE COUNTY, MN



PARKS

RICE COUNTY, MN

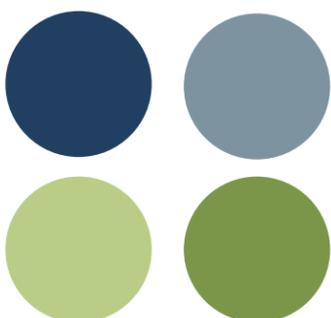


PARKS



RICE COUNTY
PARKS

Color Palette



RICE COUNTY, MN



Parks

RICE COUNTY, MN



Parks