

6.0 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space



*Photo: A Rice County Park sign.
Taken by County Staff.*

6.1 Introduction

Parks and open areas are essential spaces that are shared by everyone within a community, this statement also runs true for Rice County. There are currently 13 parks within the Rice County park system totaling over 1,100 acres. These parks don't only provide a way for residents to achieve a healthy lifestyle by being active, but also by utilizing the benefits of being out in nature. Many of the parks within Rice County offer amenities that visitors can use such as: picnic areas with a shelter, fishing dock, restrooms, hiking trails and playground equipment. Rice County has a handful of open space land as well. Some of those areas include: Rossez Wildlife Area, areas along the Cannon River, conservation lands, Farmed lands, and Forest land. The County also has Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and State Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA) that are open for public use. Visitors are

What types of Development/growth would you like to see in the County?

**1,300 Rice
County Residents
responded**

**77.91% (998 responses)
agreed that parks and
nature preserves were
important for development**

**Was voted the most
important category
out of the 13
options provided**

encouraged to observe and learn while protecting the natural features, plants, and animals.

Over the years, there have been Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plans set into place. In 1992, Rice County adopted the first Rice County Park System Plan, which contained policies for existing park infrastructure, and implementation strategies to support the goals of the parks. The framework of the 1992 parks plan not only helped with the direction the county needed to take with parks and open space, but as well as where to go for the future. In 2012, the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan was updated with even more expansive implementation strategies. The 2012 Parks Plan is located in Appendix G.



*Photo: Bicyclists on the Mills Town State Trail. Taken by
SouthernMinn.com*

6.2 Goals, Strategies and Action Items



Photo: Webster Township Park. Taken by County Staff

The following goals and strategies are general statements that focus on Rice County's Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces. The goals are broadly worded, while strategies are actions that can be taken to achieve the overarching goal. The action items are related to the goals

and strategies, but are more specific and detailed. It should be noted that goals, strategies, and action items are in no particular order of importance.

6.2.1 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Goal 1. Utilize All Available Resources to Further Enhance the Quality of the Rice County Park System.

Strategy 1. Update the 2012 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.

Action Item 1: Work with local municipalities, agencies, and residents to construct a new and revised Parks Plan that suits all party's needs.

Action Item 2: Set a timeline for the completion of each section of the Parks Plan.

Action Item 3: The County will use the Comprehensive Plan to guide the development of updating the Parks Plan.

Strategy 2. Create/update Master Plans for each County Park.

Action Item 1: Use GIS to construct descriptive maps for these master plans.

Strategy 3. Identify and implement funding resources for maintenance and improvement of the County park system.

Action Item 1: Work with inter-county municipalities to secure funding from sources such as grants.

Strategy 4. Promote active communication between the County, local municipalities, and residents.

Action Item 1: Increase the frequency of public meetings and surveys for residents to have the ability to voice their opinions/concerns in regards to County parks, trails, and open spaces.

“As cities continue to grow, I would like to see more green space around the cities themselves, in which community gardens, parks, and trails could all exist. Similar to green ring around London to stop the sprawl and encourage multifamily dwellings to conserve space, resources, and energy.”

“Maintenance and expansion of the City of Faribault trails are important. Connecting all the towns and cities of Rice County via bike trails and parks, including camping and privacy areas, would be a big boost to the desirability of Rice County as the next great place to live.”

“We need more bike/walking trails, particularly in rural areas. We desperately need to encourage recreation for health and tourism.”

Action Item 2: Improve and update the parks section of the County website.

Action Item 3: Collaborate with cities, townships, and school districts to promote community use of parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.

Goal 2. Protect, Enhance, and Maintain County Parks and Open Areas.

Strategy 1. Identify areas where future parks, recreation, and open areas could be placed.

Action Item 1: Utilize GIS to analyze features for potential uses and future County parks.

Action Item 2: Work on providing parks, facilities, and programs to underserved areas.



Photo: Cannon River Wilderness Area. Taken by County Staff

Strategy 2. Continue keeping county parks and trails clean and accessible for residents.

Action Item 1: Encourage the development of a volunteer program to help with maintaining and improving the overall quality of the County’s natural spaces.

Action Item 2: Implement excellent maintenance service in the park system.

Action Item 3: Develop a plan to eliminate physical barriers in all park areas to meet the recreational needs of all residents.

Action Item 4: Address ADA accessibility across the park and trail system and incorporate changes (where needed) when there are park improvement projects.

Strategy 3. Ensure safety throughout the park system.

Action Item 1: Make park and trail map guides easily available for Rice County residents and visitors.

Action Item 2: Increase and improve wayfinding’s throughout County parks.

Action Item 3: Continue working with the Rice County Sheriff’s Office to decrease negative activity going on in parks, open spaces, and trails.

Goal 3. Encourage a Healthy and Active Lifestyle by Promoting the Use of Parks and Trails.

Strategy 1. Collaborate with surrounding counties and municipalities to develop potential multi-county trails/parks.

Action Item 1: Continue advocating for the expansion of the Sakatah State Trail and the Mills Town Trail.

Action Item 2: Explore the option of implementing an Adopt-a-Trail program within the County Park System.



Photo: Picnic Shelter at King Mill Park. Taken by County Staff.

Strategy 2. Support the development of programs that encourage active living.

Action Item 1: Encourage community involvement with the park and trail system. Ex. Park clean-ups, fundraisers for park equipment.

Goal 4. Conserve and Protect Natural Resources that are Present in the County Park System.

Strategy 1. Park design shall protect and improve the functions of the natural

environment and strike a balance between public use and preservation.

Action Item 1: Encourage the establishment of a planting program in parks and open space areas where trees and vegetation are lacking.

Action Item 2: Support native landscaping and maintenance in County parks, if applicable, to maintain the natural environment.

Action Item 3: Advocate for the maintenance and development of natural corridors to foster ecosystems continuity and connections to parks and open spaces.

Strategy 2. Encourage the creation, adoption, and usage of Natural Resource Management plans to manage and preserve natural resources within Rice County parks.

Strategy 3. Provide recycling opportunities and facilities at public parks and points along the trail.



Photo: Various parks and wilderness areas in Rice County. Taken by County Staff.