Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails Legislative Policy Forum October 2026

Elizabeth Wefel

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Agenda for today

- Dynamics of the upcoming election and session
- GMPT's Legislative- Survey and Development
- Proposed Agenda And Priorities
- What's next?

DYNAMICS OF UPCOMING ELECTION

- All 201 Legislative Seats up for reelection
  - Close margins in both bodies make it too close to call
  - Challenge for Greater Minnesota – what does the majority look like?
- Governor's Race
  - Only certainty – we will have a female governor
  - Unclear how either candidate will handle parks and trails issue
    - If DFL wins, Lieutenant Governor will be the former mayor of a GMPT member
- Results available November 3 or shortly thereafter
  - Committee chairs and leadership details likely available late November/early December

DYNAMICS OF UPCOMING SESSION

- Budget Year
  - State budget still wobbly and will impact discussions
  - State budget must pass by June 30 or we head into shutdown
  - Neither gubernatorial candidate seems interest in raising taxes which means less funds available.
- Legacy Bill
  - Should pass at same time as budget bill, but is not required to pass
- Bonding
  - Not a bonding year.
  - Lack of debt capacity makes a bonding bill unlikely until 2027
- Legislative session starts January 12

GMPT's Legislative Policies and Agenda

- Legislative policies guide our work at the Capitol
  - Our policies focus on ensuring that we have our fair share of funding for regional and local parks and trails, that we are supporting the Commission and they support our members, and that the Legislature does not place undo burdens on our ability to build parks and trails
  - Examples of problematic legislation include efforts to block funding for any park or trail that has used eminent domain, restricting the price at which land can be built, blocking any use of eminent domain
- Legislative agenda guides the specific issues that we will be working on.
  - We will introduce bills on some, but not all of these issues

Legislative Survey – What do you think & What does it mean for our work?

- Open to all members. 14 responses from across the state.
- Key themes:
  - Protecting Greater Minnesota's share of the Legacy Funds is a top priority
    - 20% should be a floor not a celing
  - Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Eligibility
    - New top tier issue focused on ensuring Greater Minnesota's eligibility for funds
  - Other priorities:
    - Asset preservation and maintenance
    - Funding for projects of all sizes
    - Ebikes are a growing issue

Legislative Survey – What do you think & What does it mean for our work?

- Other suggestions:
  - Streamlining Grant Administration
  - Environmental and Outdoor Education Funding
  - Keeping Wilderness Inquiry Funding out of Parks and Trails Funds
- Impact to our policies:
  - Revise policy 1 to make more open ended regarding Legacy Formula
  - Two new policies
  - One new agenda item

Policy Priorities – Amended language

Insert language regarding reauthorization

1. A strong and vibrant regional parks and trails system plays a vital role in the continued health and economic growth of Greater Minnesota. Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) supports a Legacy Amendment parks and trails funding formula that allocates at minimum 20% of the total funds to regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota, reauthorization of the Legacy Amendment, and ~~supports~~ adding alternative funding streams when possible to support this system.

Clean up language and add maintenance

2. Local parks and trails are crucial resources that enhance the vitality of communities throughout the state, but communities often lack the money to invest in the construction and maintenance of these resources. ~~The Local Trails Connection Program, Outdoor Recreation Grant Program and Natural and Scenic Area Program provide communities with financial assistance, but these programs have been historically underfunded.~~ The GMPT supports increasing the funding for these programs, from both state and federal sources, and any other programs that support construction and maintenance of local and regional parks in Minnesota.

Policy Priorities – Amended language

Combine policies regarding Commission and update language

- The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission has engaged in a rigorous process to ~~evaluate and~~ designate regional parks and trails and to ~~make~~ recommend~~ations for~~ how the Legacy funds for Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails should be appropriated. The GMPT supports awarding the grants in accordance with these recommendations ~~and~~.
- ~~The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission plays a vital role in implementing a statewide system of regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota. The GMPT supports~~ finding a stable funding source for the Commission that does not reduce the Legacy funds available for Greater Minnesota parks and trails projects.
- ~~The GMPT urges the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission to take steps to promote applications for designation of regional parks and trails and grant proposals to achieve an equitable statewide distribution. Such distribution may take more than one legislative cycle to occur.~~

Policy Priority - New Items

- NEW - CPL
- The Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) was created to restore, protect, and enhance natural resources throughout Minnesota. GMPT opposes efforts to exclude Greater Minnesota from accessing the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program and other programs supported by the OHF.
- NEW – E-bikes
- Although legal use of e-bikes can make recreation more accessible for Minnesotans, the increase in the unauthorized use of e-bikes on local and regional trails is creating health and safety challenges throughout the state. GMPT supports efforts to promote the safer use of e-bikes, including increased enforcement and strengthening of existing laws.

Legislative Agenda for 2026



The GMPT supports legislation that allocates 20% of the Parks and Trails fund to the parks and trails of Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission to be allocated in accordance with the Commission's Recommendations and that ties the reimbursement of state grant administration fees to the work actually performed by the state agency providing those services.



The GMPT supports legislation that would extend the expiration date of legacy parks and trails grant completion deadlines.



The GMPT supports the passage of a Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources bill that includes funding for the Local Trail Connections, Outdoor Recreation, and Natural and Scenic Area grant programs and for selected local and regional park and trail projects.



The GMPT supports passage of an Outdoor Heritage Bill that ensures all of Greater Minnesota is eligible for Conservation Partners Legacy grants.

NEXT STEPS

- Approve agenda and priorities at Annual Meeting
- Start building (or refreshing) a relationship with your legislator
  - Many of you may have a new Senator, Representative or Both
- Engage your city or county elected officials on your issues
- Read our monthly newsletter and updates
- Fill us in on what's happening in your community

Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

QUESTIONS?