

# Park Notes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks  
1621 Beechwood Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116 651-698-4543  
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## Letter from the president

Show your support for parks by attending a Legislative Day on Tuesday, March 18th beginning at 10:00 AM at the Kelly Inn near the Capitol, 161 St. Anthony Ave. DNR Commissioner Gene Merriam and others are scheduled to address the gathering. Following a lunch, many of those attending will use the occasion to call on their legislators. Since interest groups ranging from farmers to students to the disabled have held large rallies and events at the Capitol, if the parks people do not show up with equal enthusiasm, our message may be dismissed. Your attendance is important. For more information call 651-698-4543.

## Dike plan moves forward

*As Governor Pawlenty and the legislature address the state's financial problems we want you to be aware of the very real threats to parks and trails and their use throughout Minnesota.*

*We are blessed with a wonderful network of parks and trails throughout the state, and with dedicated managers and staff who maintain and operate them. Our parks and trails are invaluable assets. They bring significant economic benefits to our state, both greater Minnesota communities and the metropolitan area. They provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and its resulting health benefits for our growing population. They are laboratories for environmental education programs and they provide protection for wildlife, the dwindling inventory of undisturbed natural resources, and for human opportunities to enjoy them.*

*Consider how the proposals will affect you and your use and enjoyment of our parks and trails. We hope you will bring your views to the attention of Governor Pawlenty and the legislature. We know there will be reductions in service, but we trust they will be made fairly, and without damaging the overall viability of our parks and trails. We also hope there will be longer term solutions that will provide more stable funding for parks and trails.*

*Participate in the process: contact your legislators, write letters to the editor, recruit support from friends and organizations in which you are active, ask business, schools and civic organizations in your communities to become involved. Many legislators are holding community meetings or are mailing out questionnaires to get public input. This is an easy way to make your case.*

*Further background information can be obtained from the Friend's website [friendsoftheparks.org](http://friendsoftheparks.org) and by calling the Friends at 651-698-4543. If you are a member of a group which might like to become involved, please call us. We need all the help we can get.*

*Mike Prichard, President*

As other governmental bodies struggle with budget shortfalls and looming cuts to essential services, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) is forging ahead with a controversial plan to build a \$25,000,000 dike to protect the St. Paul Downtown Airport from flooding.

Flooding at the downtown airport is a periodic problem, hardly surprising since much of it lies in the Mississippi River flood way. Most of the recent development along the river has acknowledged the presence of the river and its habit of rising to high levels during heavy spring run-off with uses which are not severely affected by flood waters. A good example of this is the park development at Harriet Island. Although flooding is not good for the park, last year's high water did only minimal damage. The MAC is taking the old fashioned approach of trying to contain the

**The Friends will post the hearing date on its website and alert the public through St. Paul's e-democracy. If you do not currently subscribe to e-democracy, you may do so by e-mailing [mn-stpaul-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:mn-stpaul-subscribe@yahogroups.com)**

## **Tamarack Nature Center Expansion**

river, this time by pounding in over 4000 feet of steel pilings to construct a 9,600 foot dyke to keep the river water out. The dyke will rise 4 to 8 feet above ground level.

Objecting to the aesthetic and environmental impact of the project, the Friends joined with other environmental groups calling on the MAC to do a more extensive environmental study before the project gets underway. The request was denied.

The study already completed by the MAC highlights a weakness in Minnesota's environmental regulations. The MAC conducted its own environmental review, then judged it adequate. It is a case of the same people collecting the information, analyzing it and pronouncing it sufficient. This 'judge yourself' approach leaves the door wide open for the full impact of the project to be ignored. In this case the environmental study was made available for public review only one week before the Saint Paul City Council held its public hearing. This gave little time for the public to evaluate the report and provide input. "On the face of it, this approach appears arrogant," said Dayton's Bluff resident Jane Prince. "With little opportunity for public review and participation, suspicions are raised. You have to wonder why they feel compelled to resist public input."

The Friends primary concerns are:

- The MAC is not committed to make the project less environmentally harmful although they "will consider" or are "willing to discuss ways to help mitigate the project" thus keeping out genuine citizen involvement and keeping exclusive control over their project.
- The project's 4' to 8' dike will negatively affect the appearance of the river front from the river itself, from the bluffs and from across the river.
- The diking may slightly increase the level of flood waters elsewhere along the river resulting in additional impacts at Lower Landing Park, Harriet Island, Raspberry Island and other low-lying river properties.
- There is no plan and no commitment to provide public amenities such as a pedestrian trail or bikeway which could help soften the aesthetic impact of the dike.

The effort to force citizen input is not over. The MAC must secure a Special Conditional Use Permit from the City of St. Paul in order to proceed with the project. There will be a hearing before the City council to discuss the permit and the City could attach special conditions which the MAC must comply with in order to proceed with the project. The hearings could prove interesting as the dike is backed by corporate tenants of the airport and by St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly.

For more information about this project contact the Friends at 651-698-4543.

Little more than a generation ago, children played outdoors with carefree abandon after school and in the summer. Today, however, children are more likely to spend their time indoors, involved in structured activities, watching television, or using the computer. Studies show that children work and mature better mentally, physically, and emotionally when exposed to nature.

Children love to play in water and with creepy critters. They savor hideaways, cannot get enough dirt and sand, and relish climbing to great heights. They need movement. They want to pretend and to nurture other growing things. And, most of all, they learn from everything that is new and stimulating.

The 1990's saw a movement among children's environmental psychologists,

educators, horticulturists, and playground designers to create public children's "discovery" landscapes - places that accommodate children's natural inclinations to poke, prod, nurture, jump, hunt, whack, climb, and hide in a natural setting. Ramsey County believes it is important that we create these special places where children can experience nature in a way that is true to their own nature, and in their own community.

Providing out-of-the-ordinary paths, mazes, furniture, peepholes, creative play areas, and interactive exhibits draws a child's interest, and questions about how flowers, food, and animals grow can be answered with miniature plots and roosts for birds, bees, butterflies, frogs, and other wild creatures.

The mission of Tamarack Nature Center (TNC) is "to foster stewardship and an increased understanding of our natural environment by providing enjoyable outdoor education and outdoor recreation programs and experiences." TNC is located within the 320-acre park preserve of Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park in White Bear Township. Wood-chipped paths, paved trails, boardwalks, and cross-country ski and snowshoe trails provide year-round access to this diverse natural community. Environmental education and outdoor recreation programs and services at TNC are provided through four main delivery systems: school programs, public programs, self-directed exhibits and interpretive trails. *This article was submitted by Jody Yungers, Director of Parks Services and Operations, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department*

## Environment vs. \$\$\$

*T.K. Walling, Saint Paul's City Forester was informed that after 26 years of service, the city can no longer afford him. Walling was unquestionably the most knowledgeable "tree-guy" on the city staff and his loss will be felt for years to come. Walling has a Masters in Forestry and Economics. He started worked with the City of St. Paul in 1977 and took the position as arborist in August 1978. We often don't recognize the real value of something until we lose it. Parks, libraries... and T.K. fit in that category.*

The Friends' board called on St. Paul's elected officials to protect the city's natural environment as they struggle to make financial ends meet. In a letter to Mayor Randy Kelly and the members of the Council the Friends said, "Natural resources, parks and recreation facilities are key factors in making St. Paul a desirable place to live and work and affecting how it appeals to visitors. Thus, we recommend maintaining the urban forest, continuing environmental services and considering ways to improve cooperation and efficiencies in managing facilities."

Though it only has a small staff, St. Paul's Environmental Services plays a vital role in establishing and keeping a healthy natural environment. \$200,000 was invested over the last three years to improve the health of five and one half miles of the Mississippi River Bluff by clearing buckthorn and other exotics allowed for the re-growth of native plant species could well be at risk. As part of this State grant which funded this project, the Parks' Division committed to maintain the property after the restoration work was completed. This area and others restored to a more healthy environment need to be maintained, or the money invested by the city and state will be wasted.

Trees are part of our heritage and are crucial in maintaining an attractive, clean and pleasant place to live and work. The Friends have partnered with the City for almost ten years to provide over 1000 donations of trees to public spaces. We also provided for two interns last summer to inventory the trees to safeguarding this valuable resource. We will continue to fund a forestry intern this summer to continue this work.

St. Paul is facing severe financial problems. Decisions will be made shortly about where to place scarce financial resources. A priority for the Friends it to support the urban forest and continue to protect the natural environment.

## Grand Round Master Plan

The Grand Round Master Plan is headed to the St. Paul City Council this spring. The Plan provides a set of ideas and options for non-motorized recreation and transportation opportunities, preserves urban open spaces and provides a 30 mile recreational greenway for bicycling, walking, and in-line skating. The Grand Round will provide linkages between and among many natural, cultural and historic features that reflect many of the intrinsic qualities of Saint Paul. A significant portion of the route follows the Mississippi River. It also winds through several parks and gives riders a glorious view of the Cathedral and the State Capitol.

## Trees, trees, trees

The 2003 Tree Brochure is in the mail. As always you can purchase trees and shrubs for your own use or you can purchase trees to be planted in parks and public places in Anoka, Dakota, Ramsey Counties, Apple Valley, Blaine, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Cottage Grove, Eagan, Mendota Heights, St. Louis Park, South St. Paul, West St. Paul, Woodbury, Saint Paul and most other municipalities within Ramsey County.

We work hard to select trees and shrubs that are hardy, disease resistant, attractive, offer year-round interest and food or habitat for wildlife. All of our selections are hardy in zone 4 and many are hardy further north to zone 3. We try to offer something for everyone, small trees for small lots, vines for fences, large trees for large lots and parks. And, many of the items we offer are either hard to find or very expensive through normal outlets. If you like a tree, but your yard will absolutely not accommodate one more, contribute it to a park. It will be there for decades for you and your family to enjoy.

Trees: Discovery Elm; White Fringetree; River Birch; Pink Spires Crab; Sugar Maple; Northern Red Oak; Black Hills Spruce; Birds Nest Spruce; and Japanese Tree lilac. Shrubs: Dwarf Korean Lilac; Hummingbird Clethra; Diablo Ninebark. Vine: Aunt Dee Wisteria.

If you have not received a tree brochure or you need extra copies, call 651-698-4543. This year our web site features hot links to color photos and more complete descriptions of all of our items. [friendsoftheparks.org](http://friendsoftheparks.org)

**The Friends of Parks & Trails  
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