

Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota Application

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission)

Overview:

This application process gives all cities, townships, and counties in Greater Minnesota equal opportunity to request a that a park or trail be formally designated as being regionally significant in Greater Minnesota. In submitting the application, it is presumed that all applicants are familiar with the pertinent provisions of the following documents:

- *District Planning Committee Operating Guidelines* (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc)
- *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc)

Irrespective of the initiator, all applicants must follow the same application process, and all projects are evaluated using a consistent set of criteria that the Commission has established for each park or trail classification. Cities, townships and counties may join together in submitting projects for consideration, as is detailed in this application. Note that the application *must* come from the city, township or county (or combination thereof) that will be responsible for ownership, operation, maintenance, and programming of the facility.

Commission representatives are available to discuss your project or provide assistance in preparing your application. For assistance, please email to: gmrptcommission@gmail.com

Completed applications should be submitted electronically to: gmrptcommission@gmail.com. Subject line should include: *Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota*. Submittals should be in both Word and PDF format.

Steps in the Evaluation and Designation Process:

The *District Planning Committee Operating Guidelines* provides a complete overview of the steps in the evaluation process, which takes a project from initial screening through formal listing and ranking. Associated timelines and what is required from proposers for the Commission to complete each of these steps is as follows.

Step 1: Initial Screening/Baseline Evaluation for Regional Significance

Purpose: To determine if a given park or trail meets the basic requirements for being designated as regionally significant.

Required Submittals:

- Completion of this application;
- *Note: Proposers that have an adopted unit master plan and meet all other requirements (including initiator's commitment to fulfill obligations/role as the implementing agency) can go to step 2 and seek formal review*

Submittal Deadlines:

- June 30 each year

Step 2: Detailed Evaluation/Formal Recognition as Regional Park/Trail

Purpose: To formally evaluate a given park or trail that received at least a high or medium ranking under Step 1. In addition to this application form, proposers must include an approved/adopted unit master plan and a statement as to the initiator's commitment to fulfill obligations/role as the implementing agency(s). After evaluation, projects of merit will be formally included in the district master plan.

Required Submittals:

- Updated application (that includes responses from the Commission's initial review of the proposal)
- Fully completed and adopted unit master plan (meeting all of the requirements as defined in Section 4, page 57 of the Strategic Plan)
- Fully executed resolution using the Commission's Resolution Form that officially obligates the local unit(s) of government to any commitments made in support of the project

Submittal Deadlines:

- June 30 each year

Step 3: Formal Listing in Funding Program

Purpose: Under this step, the Commission works with the proposers with the highest ranked projects to include their initiatives in a formal *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Funding Program*. Initiators of approved park and trail projects that are ranked high are required to work with the Commission to define options on project funding, phasing, etc.

Required Submittals:

- Any additional materials and formalized agreements requested by the Commission to complement those provided by the local unit(s) of government under step 2, above

Submittal Deadlines:

- December 31 each year

Application Requirements:

The application includes the five sections. Applications deemed incomplete by the Commission will be returned. Resubmittal of applications must conform to established submittal and review timelines.

Application Summary Information

Park or Trail Name:

Robinson Park

Lead Applicant Contact Information (must be a city, township, or county in Greater Minnesota):

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Lead Applicant Name: | Sam Griffith |
| Lead contact person: | Sam Griffith |
| Title: | City Administrator |
| Mailing address: | City of Sandstone P.O. Box 641 119 Fourth Street Sandstone, MN 55072 |
| Phone: | 320-245-5241 |
| Email: | samg@sandstonemn.com |

Joint Applicants (listing of project partners, all must be a city, township, or county in Greater Minnesota):

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Joint Applicant #1 Name: | <u>This is not for a specific project at this time</u> but for designation as a Special Feature/Natural Resource Regional Park Designation. Attachment 1 includes letters from partners that have participated in a November project application. It is anticipated that the same participants would support additional projects on a case by case basis. |
| Joint Applicant #2 Name: | |
| Joint Applicant #3 Name: | |
| Joint Applicant #3 Name: | |

Is this a Step 1 or Step 2 Application?

XX Step 1 Application – seeking initial screening/baseline evaluation for regional significance
 ?Step 2 Application – seeking detailed evaluation/formal recognition as regional park/trail

Project Narrative:

Provide a brief overview of the project – including a general description, proposed acres of land or length of trail, type of facilities to be provided, and statement of regional significance. Also include any cost estimates available for acquisition, development, operations, maintenance, and programming. *Step 2 applicants must include an adopted unit master plan as part of the project narrative.*

This is not a request for project this is a request for a regional park designation. However, existing information may be sufficiently detailed at this time for a Step 2 Application.

Description of the park:

Robinson Park is, a 65 acre long and narrow park nestled between the Kettle River and the old sandstone quarry bluffs. It is connected to Banning State Park both at the southern end and at the northern by a primitive trail the runs the 3500+foot length of the park.

Within the Park are elements of The Kettle River Sandstone Company Historic District which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places #91000877. See attachment 2.

In addition to the historic district this park contains a number of different plant communities: floodplain, northern hardwood forest, fern/moss community, rock plant community, open grass area, wetland, shallow marsh and moss lichen community. See attached Robinson Park Master Plan Sandstone Minnesota, Attachment 3 for a complete description and map of those features.

The park provides an accessible recreation and education experience for a variety of users in a primitive setting natural setting with minimal development. Its compact nature makes most of the features easily visible to users of all ages make it a great place for children and older people who feel safer in this more confined environment.

It provides some unique recreation opportunities drawing people from outside the region with both the sheer bluff walls that provide unique opportunities for ice climbing in the winter, wall climbing and bouldering in the summer and white water rapids in the spring. It also provides scenic and easy access to a variety of mini environments in the summer. This is a park ideally suited to introduce children the variety in nature and keep older people connected to nature in an easily accessed environment. It is also used to introduce bouldering to students.

It also provides a critical link connecting the north and the south halves of Banning State Park on the west side of the Kettle River a state designated water trail. Through Robinson Park the Kettle River is designated a wild river.

See. http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/waters/watermgmt_section/wild_scenic/wsivers/kettle.html

General Location Information:

Describe the location of the property or trail corridor (city/township/county). Include a location map in PDF form as an attachment.

The park is located in the City of Sandstone, Pine County Minnesota. Attachment 4 shows the general location of the park and its adjacency to the Kettle River and Banning State Park.

Step 2: Determine park or trail classification, and complete the associated section describing alignment with first tier evaluation criteria

Section 3 of the *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc) provides a complete description of the classifications and evaluation criteria that are used to assess the regional significance of proposed parks, trails, and recreational facilities. *In filling out this application, the Commission presumes that applicants are familiar with these provisions and have filled out this application accordingly.*

An overview of the three available regional classifications is as follows:

Regional Trail Classification (Non-Motorized) – focus is on providing a high quality recreational trail experience that is readily accessible from an already populated or rapidly growing regional center or tourist destination. Trail must serve a regional population. Priority will be given to “destination trails,” which are typically located within a greenway, open space, park, parkway, or designated trail corridor separated from vehicular traffic. In addition, trails that enhance connectivity/continuity within and between regional centers and regional or state-level parks and trails will be of higher priority. Local trail connections to the regional trail will also be emphasized to expand its value to local communities.

Natural Resource-Based Regional Park Classification – emphasis is providing high quality outdoor recreational opportunities in a natural and scenic setting. Preserving a unique natural resource not otherwise available in the region is also an important consideration. Recreational features must be in keeping with the natural setting and includes, but not limited to, those as listed in the *Strategic Plan*.

The land area must be large enough to accommodate the proposed facilities/amenities without diminishing the natural character and sense of place of the park setting. Typically, this means a land area of 100 acres is needed. Optimally, parks should be over 200 acres to provide enough space for facilities.

Although providing a common set of offerings remains important, introducing new, unique, or innovative facilities/amenities is also emphasized to explore new ways to expand participation in outdoor recreation.

Special Recreational Feature Regional Park Classification – relates to new, unique, or innovative “special feature” outdoor recreational facilities of regional significance. A natural and scenic setting remains important to qualifying as a regional park, but serving a regional recreational need is more of a factor in determining merit. In general, the recreational features defined under *Natural Resource-Based Regional Park* classification remain valid. However, this classification purposefully offers more flexibility to explore unique ideas and find new ways to expand participation in outdoor recreation.

As part of the evaluation process, applicant must select one of the above classifications that best fits your project, and then complete the forthcoming sections pertaining to first and second tier evaluation criteria for that classification.

First tier criteria are unique to the selected classification and focus on establishing the overall merit of a project relative to key criteria and value indicators. A weighted scoring approach will be used by the Commission to determine overall scores and, ultimately, ranking of projects. *Contact the Commission if you have any questions regarding which category your project fits into.*

Special Recreational Feature Regional Park Classification – First Tier Criteria

Complete this section only if your project falls into this classification. Select only one classification!

The following lists and describes first tier criteria for this classification. *In the accompanying box, describe how your project aligns with the criteria.*

Criteria #1: Provides a Special High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience – places a priority on providing facilities/amenities that are relevant to existing/common user groups and also serve to broaden the appeal of outdoor recreation to new or expanded populations. Park serves as a destination unto itself, attracting regional users and (potentially) drawing tourists from outside the regional area. Premium is placed on quality of experience to encourage visitors to return time and again. Although facilities/amenities must be of regional significance, this classification purposefully emphasizes innovation and new ways of engaging residents and tourists to participate in outdoor activities.

Robinson Park provides some of the more unique recreational components in the State of Minnesota and is home to three festivals that either headquarter at the park or use Robinson Park as a critical part of the festivities.

Rock climbing: Robinson has long been a destination for climbers, and climbing classes. The Minnesota Climbers Association has taken a stewardship role in maintaining the park. They describe the park this way on their website:

“It was mostly known(sic) for its Ice and Mixed climbing, but there were also a handful of top-rope and lead rock routes.” It is also described as : **“There are now a few dozen bolted sport routes in Sandstone that include the classics of Nexus and Sigma. A [management plan and route application](#) were put in place.”** Source: <http://www.mnclimbers.org/access/>

A Save Sandstone event was held in 2013 and the success of this event is described like this on their face book web site. **“The Minnesota climbing community rallied during 2013 and raised over \$30,000 to contribute to saving the private bouldering land in Sandstone, MN. [Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota](#) purchased the land and is holding it to eventually sell to DNR, who will incorporate it into Banning State Park. The Saved Sandstone Festival will be a party to celebrate that accomplishment!”** Source: <https://www.facebook.com/events/539216802842938/> There is another event planned for this September. Because of the success of climbing in Robinson Park the

Banning State Park Plan was amended in July of 2014 to allow climbing and bouldering in the state park. Source: <http://www.mnclimbers.org/tag/banning-state-park/>

Ice climbing: Another side of rock climbing is ice climbing and for the last ten years the Park has been the site of the Sandstone Ice Fest. In addition to climbing and clinics it also includes the great chili cook off and plenty of winter camping. Information about the festival can be found here: <http://www.sandstoneicefest.com/>

The number of routes for ice climbing and rock climbing are identified here on the mountain climbing web site: <http://www.mountainproject.com/v/robinson-park/105812719>

White Water Canoeing and Rafting: While the Kettle River is a very placid canoe/kayak route most of the year however in the spring it turns into one of the four white water rapids in the state. Source: Minnesota DNR <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/watertrails/trips.html> Every year the park river permitting hosts the Kettle River Paddle Fest: <http://www.kettleriverpaddlefest.com/index.htm> featuring a number of activities.

There is also the interpretation of the historic site that includes both active volunteer led and passive interpretation on self guided tours.

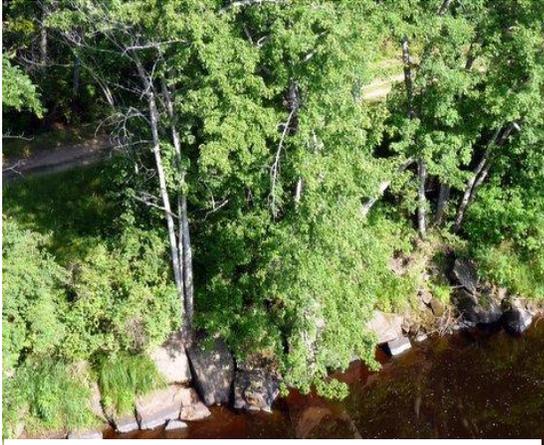
A map shown in attachment 5 shows the summer and winter origins of visitors to the park.

Criteria #2: Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place – although at a smaller scale than *Natural-Resource-Based Regional Parks*, priority is still placed on providing a natural and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place and uniqueness. Access to water (lakes, rivers, and streams) and/or historically/culturally-significant features is also emphasized. Lands must be suitable for and large enough to accommodate desired recreational uses without undue impacts to the land resource.

At 65 acres in size Robinson Park would appear small. However the park's footprint and topography creates many separate areas nature exploration. There are a sufficient number of areas separated by the parks physical features that allow users to have a quality experience in an uncrowded environment. The variety of the habitats as identified in the master plan, Attachment 3, keep visitors exploring different parts of the park. This not a hiking park unless you continue onto the Banning State Park using unofficial trails this is a walking park. In less than mile you can explore many scenic and historic features. It is perfect for what the state DNR has identified as an underserved population – the elderly and children in addition to the enthusiastic climbers and water trail users.

While the stated purpose of the park is to provide a natural resource setting for enhancement and interpretation of the historic setting and environmental education. Recreation has been mostly passive and past investments have been made to enhance or improve the historic or environmental setting while keeping development to the minimum for visitor comfort and community uses: dirt walking paths along the river and near the historic features, comfort facilities, a boat ramp for canoes, kayaks and rafts, small fishing clearings, a picnic shelter often used for family and class reunions, historic signage, and invasive weed control (and educational signage) and restoration of native plantings, and three primitive camp sites.

Below are some of the pictures of the natural and historic setting of the park.



View of Robinson Park from Highway 123 showing typical trail location and with respect to woods and Kettle River



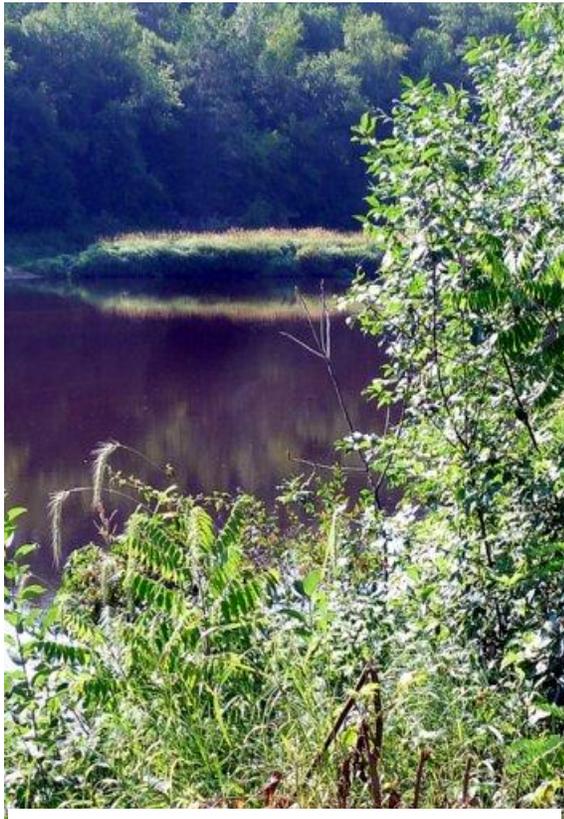
Entrance road into the park showing a combination of natural and manmade impacts.



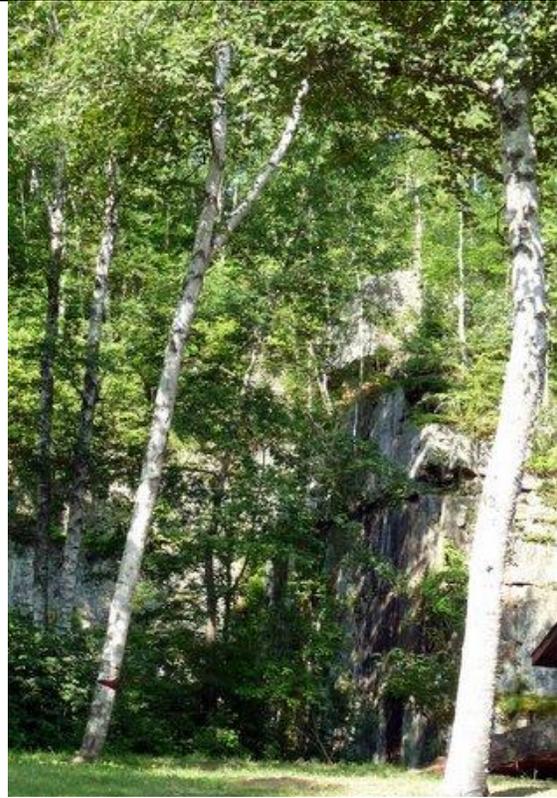
Kettle River view from one of the park



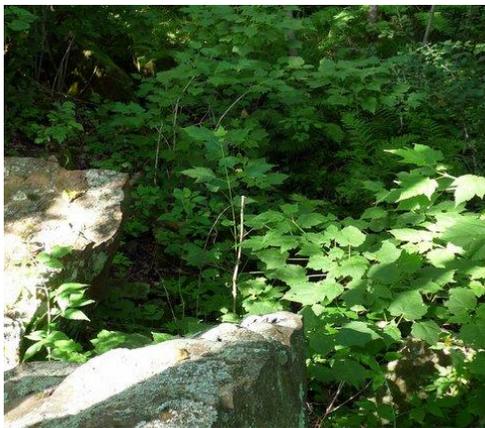
Inviting path to explore ravine area



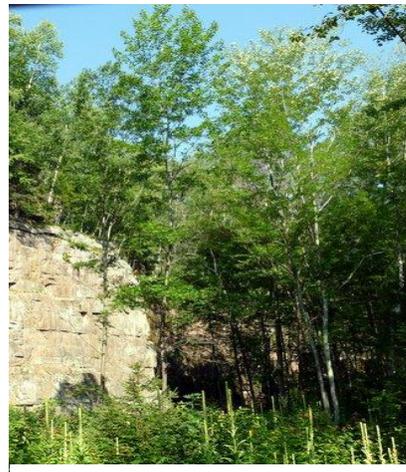
Quiet part of the Kettle River near the boat access ramp



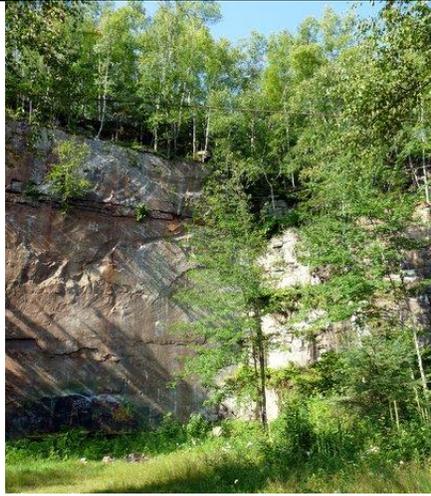
Beginning of cliff face use for one of the climbing routes



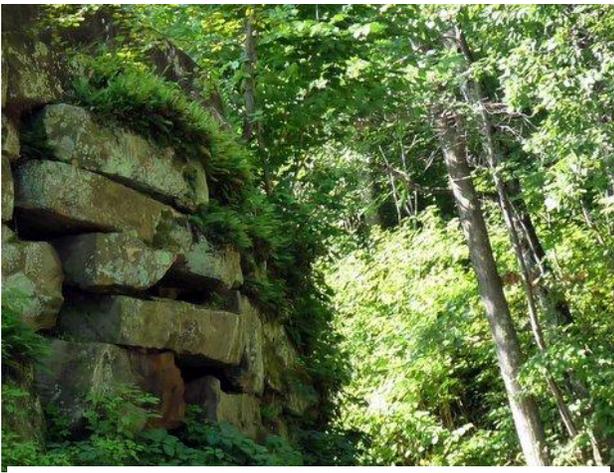
Wooded ravine between the access road and the south path shown in the first photos



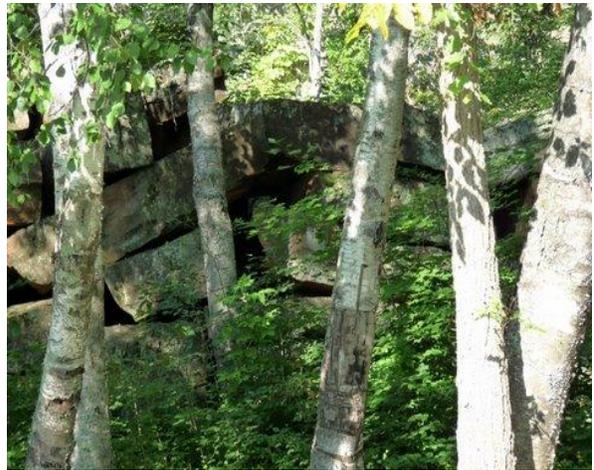
Beginning of major climb area



Climb routes in the central climb area.



Stacked stone platform near entrance also part of the historic features



Stacked stone walls along the west side of the entrance



Winter ice climbing on a typical weekend.

For more pictures see the see the ICEFEST web site at: <http://www.sandstoneicefest.com/>

And at:

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sandstone-Ice-Park/318485004840616?sk=photos_stream



Historical map of the Sandstone quarry



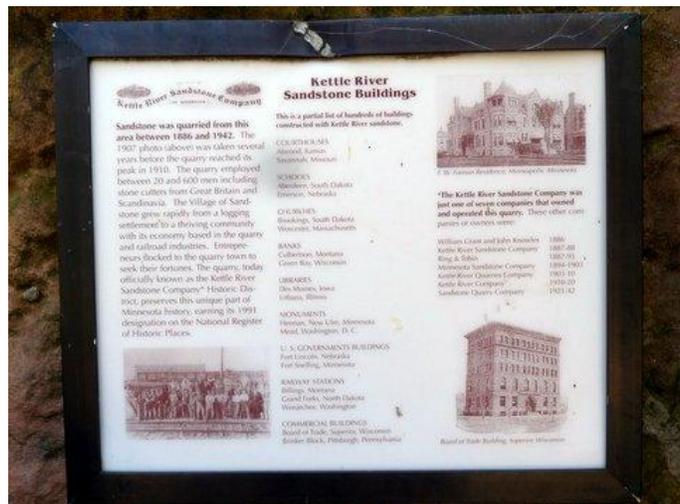
Photo of the interpretive display.



One of the historic structures still remaining in the park



Another of the features that are remaining from historic use as a quarry



The uses of the Sandstone from the quarry

Criteria #3: Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination – places priority on special recreational features being located in or close to a densely settled, rapidly growing, and/or an established regional center or well-established tourist destination. Connectivity to the park via local, regional, or state-level trails also factors into the rating under this criteria.

Robinson Park is located just approximately 1.8 miles north east of I 35 exit 191. Interstate 35 northbound out of the Twin Cities is one of the most well traveled tourist corridors in the state with Sandstone being approximately half way or approximately one hour away from both the Twin Cities Metropolitan area and Duluth.

- It is connected to Banning State Park by the Kettle River State Water Trail and an unofficial hiking trail that runs along the river.
- It is within 6 miles of the Audubon Center of the North Woods <http://audubon-center.org/>
- It is within 13 miles of Grand Casino Hinckley – which includes in their 271 full RV sites and 50 chalets rated one of the two best RV parks in Minnesota and the only RV park in Minnesota to get rated as a best family park in 2014 Good Sam Travel Guide. <http://blog.goodsamcamping.com/2014/07/top-family-rv-parks/>
- It is within a thirty minute drive of St. Croix State Park and State Forest and the Willard Munger trail for those more interested in traditional large park activities.
- The Sandstone Junction Trail which connects Banning State Park and the City of Sandstone to the Willard Munger Trail

Using standard statistical methodology on data collected during the summer of 2013 using the data collection developed by the Metropolitan Council but not their analysis methodology it is estimated that Robinson Park has an annual visitation of 47,500. Summary information on Summer and Winter visitors is shown in Attachment 5. Based on that estimates from the survey it has more visitors than 17 state parks.

Criteria #4: Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region – places a priority on areas in which a high quality outdoor recreational opportunity of a similar nature is not otherwise available within the region and/or within a reasonable distance. Fills a discernible and critical gap in an area with a recreation opportunity shortage. Complements (and does not duplicate) recreational opportunities otherwise available in the region.

Robinson Park fills two significant gaps in the parks experience in Minnesota. It offers a more manageable park for both young people and older adults with limited mobility; one can drive the road paths past several historic and interesting physical features. It also offers a venue that is unique enough that nonprofit organizations are willing to invest volunteer time and money in the park on a relatively long term ongoing basis.

Because the City has been flexible in making arrangements with the climbing community and its key

location near the freeway has resulted in the park has become popular destination for climbers and climbing classes. Winter climbing with farmed ice has further enhanced it as a destination. The organizations representing climbing have raised money and donated time to maintain not only their facility within the park but the whole park. In 2013 they raised money and partnered with the Minnesota Parks and Trails Council to purchase land adjacent to Robinson Park and add to Banning State Park. After the land was acquired the climbing groups successfully lobbied to amend the Banning master plan to allow changes in use to allow climbing. The flexibility shown by the City at Robinson Park has stimulated additional investment and development of other public resources in the area.

Also as stated in Criteria 1 there are limited opportunities for white water experiences in Minnesota. The Kettle River is one of the 4 white water resources in the state and Robinson Park provides a key access and exit point for the experience.

In the winter of 2014 Checkpoint Minnesota selected Sandstone as one of the ten locations for the state scavenger hunt.

Step 3: Complete the following describing alignment with second tier evaluation criteria

Second tier criteria relate to commitment of partners, local support, local funding potential, etc. that the Commission takes into consideration in determining the feasibility or viability of a project. This information is especially important to the Commission in determining funding priorities. *Importantly, second tier criteria factor into deciding the funding viability of a project, but first tier criteria are the primary means by which its merit as a viable regional park or trail is determined.* The following information is required for all proposed projects, irrespective of which classification it falls under.

Criteria #1: Feasibility of assembling the land – describe the following:

- Extent to which land is publicly owned (acres and/or percentage of property)
- Extent to which land is privately owned, (acres and/or percentage of property), and describe the extent to which land owners are willing sellers

All land is public owned within the park and it is surrounded by Banning State Park on three sides. The west side of the park is a vertical cliff with some wooded area on the west side of the cliff abuts the developed part of town.

Criteria #2: Regional-level support – describe which groups would benefit, how each supports the project, and the grassroots efforts that may be helpful moving the project forward and ensuring its success. Include a description of the process/outreach program used to involve the public in the planning process.

There is no specific project planned however past projects such as the removal of invasive species and replanting native plants (the 2013 project) have always garnered support, an example of the traditional type of support past projects have had is shown in Attachment 1.

The upcoming Saved Sandstone event was initiated and sponsored by the climbing groups is an example of the support the Park receives.

Criteria #3: Commitment from project partners at agency level – describe the extent to which the lead agency and its partner agency(s) can fulfill the role of working with the Commission to move the project forward (i.e., commitment of staff time, willingness to commit via formal agreement/letter of interest, etc.) and fulfill its obligations in terms of operations, maintenance, and programming.

Attachment 6 is the commitment letter submitted for the invasive species removal grant. Any project proposed in the future would be expected to have a similar commitment letter adapted to a similar project from each of the partner agencies and organizations.

Criteria #4: Local funding match – describe the level to which project partners will provide matching funds to support acquisition and/or development, and the level of funding for ongoing operations, maintenance, and programming.

No specific project is proposed at this time but in the past the City has had provided partial funding and worked with public and private partners to accomplish work. A council resolution that supports the designation and commitment to be a local sponsor is attached.

Other?

Sandstone is a small community with a fiduciary duty to a special Minnesota resource that has a lot of meaning not only locally but also at the regional but also at a state wide level. It takes this duty very seriously and will fulfill its obligation to both the historic and environmental character of the resource. The goal is to enhance both the historic and environmental diversity of the Park so that it may be interpreted and enjoyed for generations to come.

Step 4: Complete general information section and provide required attachments

The following pertains to providing additional general information about the project that will aid the Commission in its evaluation. Applicant should complete the forthcoming section to the extent possible.

Basic information:

1. Has the property information and site inventory been completed and inputted into the Commission's GoMN system? (This is required of all submittals.) There are no identified paths at this time to submit this information.
Yes No
2. Is there an existing unit master plan for the park, trail, or recreational facilities that meets the unit master plan requirements defined in Section 4 of the *Strategic Plan*? Yes No If yes, attach a PDF of the plan. **Attachment 2**

3. Does the proposed use of the property for a park or trail conform to current zoning and all other local codes and ordinances? Yes No If no, please explain:

4. Are there any land use restrictions, land contamination issues, or issues affecting land development and future uses/site safety? Yes No If yes, please explain:

5. Are there any known archeological artifacts, human remains, burials or cemeteries located on the property? Yes No If yes, please explain:

6. Are there any other issues or concerns that may materially and adversely affect the property? Yes No If yes, please explain:

Attachments:

Provide a listing of attachments that further describe or illustrate the park or trail. This includes aerial imagery, graphic plans, and written descriptions. (Note: formal recognition of a park or trail by the Commission as being part of the regional system only occurs after all of the defined steps and conditions are fully met.)

The attachments list is the first page after the completed application.

Step 5: Submit the completed application to The Commission

Completed applications should be submitted electronically to: *gmrptcommission@gmail.com*. Subject line should include: *Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota*. Submittals should be in both Word and PDF format.

Resolution Supporting Application Required!

The application must be accompanied by either a copy of a resolution, council minutes or some other official documentation that demonstrates that the local unit of government and any listed project partners support the proposed project and the consequent application. *For Step 1* applicants, the resolution does not need to have a specific form or specific language, as long as it is consistent with the statements in the application, and any related support material. *For Step 2* applicants, all resolutions must use the Commission’s *Resolution Form* that officially obligates the local unit(s) of government to any commitments made.

Since no specific resolution is available A City Council resolution supporting the designation as a regional park and a willingness to commit to project support once there is a project. Attachment 6

Letters of Support!

Letters of support are also encouraged. There should be an effort to solicit letters from specific groups that will derive a direct benefit from the project. The applicant is also welcome to provide letters of

support from all other sources as well.

Since there are no specific projects are this time Attachment 1 show the document the support that can be generated for specific projects.

Signatures:

Lead applicant must sign the application (must be an authorized representative from a city, township, or county in Greater Minnesota). In doing so, the applicant states that all of the information provided in this application is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge.

Name:

Title:

Unit of Government:

Signature:

Date: