

Parks and Recreation Division Report

May 2024

PROGRAMMING

Summer 2024 Program Brochure

The Parks and Recreation Program Brochure for summer 2024 has been released and can be found on our website: duluthmn.gov/media/f351k321/parks-brochure-summer-2024-for-web.pdf. We are excited to bring a wide variety of programs across the park system for our community. This brochure contains program offerings for June-August.

Youth Programs

Archery League ran for four weeks in April, where ten archers continued to develop their skills through friendly competition at Washington Center.

Also in April, Parks and Recreation staff led activities during the school Spring Break week at three different KEY Zone sites, with activities including Glow-in-the-dark Dodgeball and nature-themed gym games.

55+ Programs

55+ Pickleball wrapped up its indoor season at Washington Center Gym. The group played every Monday and Friday morning throughout the winter months.



Staff attended the Arrowhead Senior Care Network at Duluth Heights Senior Living Facility. This quarterly meeting allows senior care organizations to connect on current events, trends in senior care, and resources available in Northeastern Minnesota.

Full Moon Hike

An excited group of 15 participants, ages 12 to 67, joined Parks and Recreation for the Pink Full Moon Hike at Hawks Ridge. Hikers ventured out on the multi-use Duluth Traverse trail heading east while the sun was setting, and ten minutes into the hike the moon began to rise over Lake Superior. It was a spectacular view and a beautiful night for a hike, and everyone had a great time.

PERMITS

| PERMIT TYPE | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Park & Building Rentals | 65 | 65 | 73 | 80 |
| Commercial Operator Permits | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| Busker Permits | 0 | 0 | 9 | 3 |
| Alcohol Consumption Permits | 2 | 5 | 5 | 15 |
| Total | 68 | 71 | 89 | 104 |

PROJECT UPDATES

Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI) Action Plan

A Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit professional consulting services to develop an Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI) Action Plan closed on March 22. Three proposals were received. The proposals were evaluated and scored by a review committee, including a representative from the Indoor Athletics Venues Task Force. All three firms were interviewed the week of April 22, and the review committee has sent a final round of follow-up questions. A recommendation is expected to be brought before City Council in May. The selected firm will be charged with conducting an athletics facilities' needs assessment, developing and facilitating comprehensive community engagement opportunities, and providing prioritized investment recommendations for key indoor and outdoor athletic facilities in Duluth.

Brighton Beach (Kitchi Gammi Park)

Construction of improvements at Brighton Beach, also known as Kitchi Gammi park, remains ongoing. Park amenities will be installed in the coming weeks. Contractors are on site to complete final shoreline restoration items including some landscaping work and trail repairs. Tree removals for the road corridor went well and construction of the road is still expected to be complete at the end of the year.

Duluth Golf Spring Meeting

The Spring Meeting for Duluth Golf was held on Wednesday, April 24 at 5 pm at Enger Park Clubhouse. The meeting welcomed about 12 attendees and covered 2024 operations updates and status updates on the irrigation project.

Enger Park Golf Course Irrigation

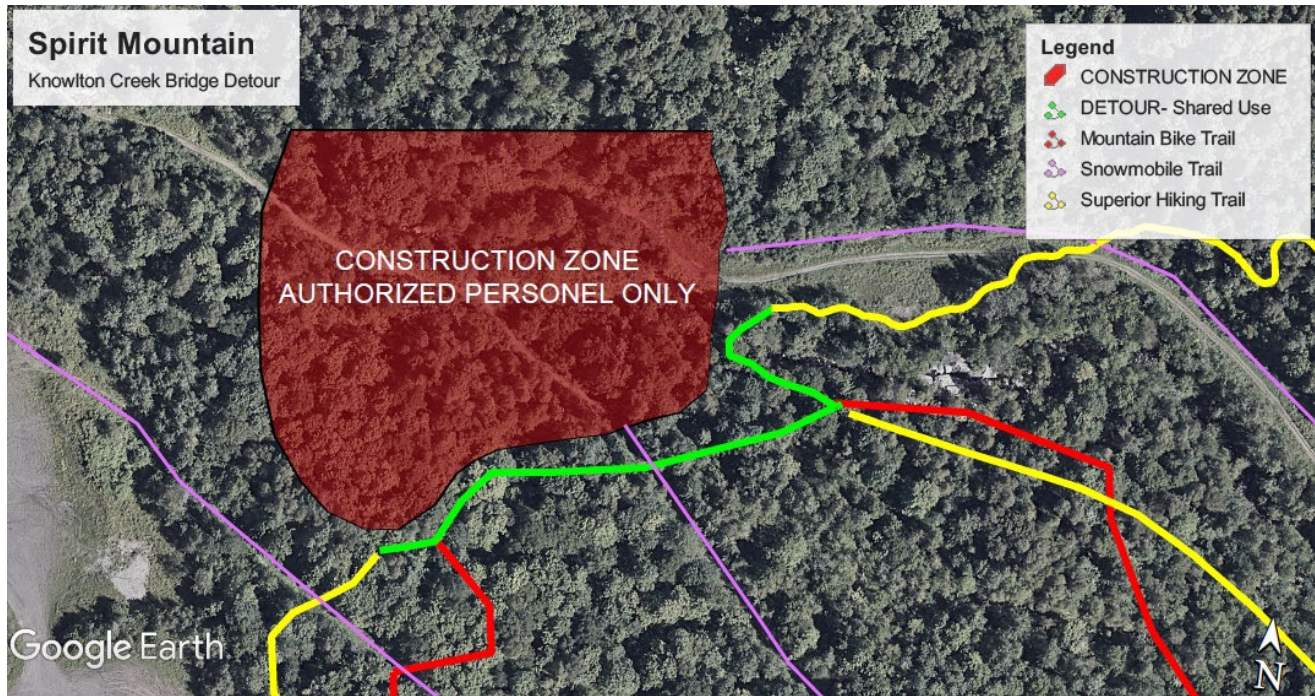
With last year's addition of AVRI Phase 1 project funds, the Enger Park Golf Course irrigation system replacement project was expanded from the original scope of 18 holes to all 27 holes. The contractor, Commercial Irrigation Inc., mobilized on site on April 22 and will continue to work on the course throughout the summer. While irrigation work is taking place, at least 18 holes of golf will remain open at all times.

Hillside Sport Court Park Building Removal

The City issued a Request for Quotes (RFQ) to remove the dilapidated building at Hillside Sport Court Park. The RFQ addresses building demolition, proper abatement of known asbestos materials, backfilling, and removal of one light pole. Three quotes were received and are currently under review by staff.

Knowlton Creek Bridge Closure

The Knowlton Creek bridge, located at Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, will be closed until later this summer when the project is complete. The bridge serves the Superior Hiking Trail and a mountain bike trail ("The Puker"). A reroute is in place, as identified in the below map on the left.



Norton Park

Over 55 people gathered Tuesday, April 30 for a community input session to discuss future improvements at Norton Park! It was a great turnout with lively discussion about what folks want to see at the neighborhood park. Based on feedback from the event, staff will begin preparing cost estimates for various improvement options and seek further assessment of the existing building at the park. A survey for the community will be developed and made available in June. Survey results will then provide direction for design development. A subsequent community input session on the park designs will be held this fall. The iterative design process, as well as direction provided in the 2022 Essential Spaces: Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Plan and the 2016 St. Louis River Corridor Neighborhood Parks Plan, will culminate in construction of a community-informed park project in 2026. A copy of the presentation and a public comment form is available on the project webpage: duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-planning/st-louis-river-corridor/norton-park/



Lafayette Boardwalk Replacement

The City was awarded funding from Minnesota’s Lake Superior Coastal Program to replace the boardwalk at Lafayette Community Center. Two required permits are currently under review, with approval anticipated in May 2024. Upon approval of permits, Park Maintenance staff will complete the boardwalk replacement, likely in June 2024.

Munger Landing

We are planning a future opening event at Munger Landing in collaboration with project partners at the MN Pollution Control Agency, MN DNR, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The work was substantially complete this past winter and the final asphalt work will be completed in the first week of May. The event will announce and celebrate the reopening of the landing and the completion of the extensive restoration project. The event will also provide City staff with an opportunity to share the next steps for reinvestment at the landing to create a premier trailhead for Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail and the St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Controlled Burn – Wheeler Athletic Complex Pollinator Meadow

Contracted Prairie Restorations to conduct a controlled burn at the Wheeler Athletic Complex for a pollinator meadow that was installed during the improvement project that was completed in the summer of 2022.



Hartley Pond & Tischer Creek Feasibility Study

The Hartley Pond & Tischer Creek Feasibility Study is complete. The recommended alternative is to install a flow restrictive culvert, with or without a potential 3-acre pond remaining. An initial presentation on this Study was given to the Natural Resources Commission at the May 1 meeting. A presentation will be provided at the May 8 meeting for Parks & Recreation Commission. After these meetings, there will be a public meeting in late May, scheduled for May 23, at Hartley Nature Center before returning to both the Natural Resources and Parks & Recreation Commissions at their June meetings. If the City Council approves moving forward with the design of the recommended alternative, City staff will coordinate with the MN DNR to acquire funding for design of the project.

Invasive Species Control Project Areas

There will be an array of invasive species removal and control across Duluth this year using awarded grant funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and Sustain Our Great Lakes programs, as well as some City funds. There are also multiple agencies completing invasive control on public property at no cost to the City, including The Nature Conservancy, Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, and the Duluth Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA).

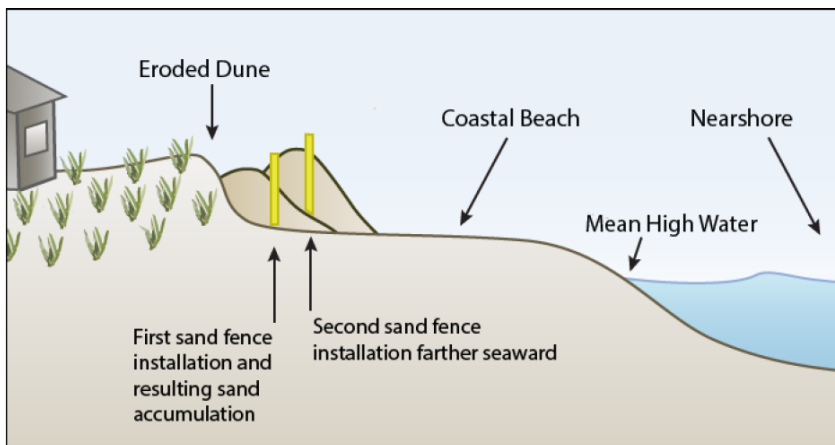
Project areas in 2024 will include the Kingsbury and Mission Creek forests, St. Louis River Natural Area, Hartley Natural Area, and the Lester Amity forest. The four terrestrial invasive species that the City focuses on are buckthorn, honeysuckle, knotweed, and wild parsnip. This year, contractors will also be treating baby's breath in the dunes on the Scientific and Natural Area end of MN Point. Although lovely, baby's breath crowds out native grasses that play an important role in the dune ecosystem.

Minnesota Point – Section 111 Study

The Natural Resources Coordinator continues to serve as the lead staff in the partnership with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to complete a Section 111 Study for MN Point. Recently, five staff from the USACE Detroit office, including the Chief of Engineering and Construction, came to Duluth for a half-day meeting with City Staff and representatives from the Park Point Community Club. The purpose of the meeting was to review the project's progress, convey concerns about potentially needed construction financing and strengthen the partnership between the individuals working on this important study. A public meeting will be held in May for the residents of MN Point and other interested community members to provide information to the public about the status of the Study.

Park Point Wind-Blown Sand

The City is working with the Park Point Community Club and property owners along the north end of Park Point to install fencing as a temporary solution to help mitigate the excessive wind-blown sand build-up. A community meeting was held on April 22 to discuss the fencing project with property owners. The City is also working with the MN DNR to renew the City's general permit, including securing a retroactive permit for property owners that had moved sand within the ordinary high-water zone during the lapsed permit. The fencing will aim to slow the transport and accumulation of sand and re-establish a dune system to protect the properties and City infrastructure in the area. Additionally, the City will work with a contractor to have native Minnesota beachgrass seed collected and propagated for transplanting in the spring of 2025.



PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES

Forestry

Pruning: This past winter was a great year for pruning. Overall, the goal is to prune city trees on a 5- to 6-year cycle, which balances the benefits for promoting healthy tree growth with the costs of staff time. Duluth has an average cycle length of 7.6 years, which includes the winter of 2022-2023 where snow removal operations dominated staff time and pruning was limited. If it were possible to maintain the rate of tree pruning accomplished over the past months in an extraordinary low-snow year, Duluth would have a 4.8-year pruning cycle! Municipalities across the country struggle to meet ideal pruning cycles, and it is common to hear of cycles ranging upwards of 10-years. As Duluth continues to plant trees after so many ash tree removals, the tree inventory will continue to increase and pruning cycles will lengthen without the addition of staff capacity.

Ash Tree Removals: Staff continue to remove dead and dying ash trees throughout Duluth, with the priority being removal of dead and hazardous trees. The trickling addition of previously unrecorded ash trees in Duluth's inventory creates a frustrating state of a moving finish line. Nonetheless, progress continues. Folks are encouraged to send information of known dead or dying ash trees using the Report a Tree form on the Duluth Parks and Recreation website: duluthmn.gov/parks/natural-resources/urban-forestry/report-a-tree/

Tree Planting: New trees are ordered each fall and those orders are arriving. In the below photos, you can see the process of unloading planted trees (in the white planter bags) and bare root trees, which are planted into a gravel bed to promote root development until transplanting into the ground can happen. Staff anticipate tree planting will begin in early May. Park Maintenance is in the process of building a greenhouse to support an internal tree nursery to help supplement trees for planting throughout Duluth. Municipalities all over the state and country are seeking to increase their tree canopy, and the demand for young trees is currently exceeding the market's capacity. This has resulted in historically under-filled orders in Duluth and elsewhere. Often the most in-demand tree species are out of stock. Staff try to plant a wide variety of species that are native and/or well-suited to the urban Duluth environment to grow an urban forest that is more resilient to pests and changing climate. An internal nursery will allow staff to grow harder to source species, too.



Chester Park – Thom Storm Chalet Access Improvement

Staff installed a new crushed gravel path to improve access around the Thom Storm Chalet in Chester Park. The areas see high traffic by Chester Bowl Improvement Club camp attendees and general Chester Park attendees. Turf was also reseeded in the area. Restoring the turf and completing the new path will help reduce erosion and improve connectivity.

