



City of Duluth - Parks and Recreation

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SUBJECT: MRPA Award of Excellence presented to Duluth Parks and Recreation for Youth on Trails mountain biking program

BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer

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[DULUTH, MN] Duluth Parks and Recreation staff was recognized at Monday night's City Council meeting with an Award of Excellence from the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) for their Youth on Trails mountain biking program.

According to MRPA Executive Director, Michelle Snider, "A major goal of the Awards of Excellence program is to increase public awareness and appreciation of the excellent parks, trails, and recreation services available in Minnesota."

"Connecting children to nature and the outdoors is at the core to our profession. The Youth on Trails program is impressive with its high level of collaboration at the City and with community partners and by the inclusive nature of this program to break down barriers to provide youth the accessibility to outdoor recreation in the sport of mountain biking," Snider said.

"In addition to the Award of Excellence distinction for the Youth on Trails program, presented at Monday's Council meeting, Youth on Trails was the top scoring program amongst all entries received by the MRPA Awards Committee," explained Snider. "This program will also receive a second award, the Tommy Johnson Award, or the "best of the best award," which will be presented at the January 2025 MRPA Annual Meeting."

This is the second MRPA Award of Excellence presented to Duluth Parks and Recreation.

The Youth on Trails mountain biking program was developed by Duluth Parks and Recreation thanks to a \$167,783 grant awarded by the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission, through the Connecting People to the Outdoors Small Grant fund, which is sourced from the Minnesota Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. This funding was used to develop a mobile fleet of mountain bikes, balance bikes, trikes, and safety equipment, and it supports a team of certified mountain bike instructors to lead programming across the city's park and trail system. The Youth on Trails program reduces financial, geographic, and social barriers to participation in mountain biking in Duluth that

traditionally prevent or reduce youth's participation in this growing lifetime activity.

In 2023, Youth on Trails offered 37 programs, working with more than 360 youth ages 6-14 throughout the year. In addition, partnerships with local youth agencies, nonprofit organizations, cycling shops, and Spirit Mountain were instrumental to the program's launch and success.

"Youth on Trails is a program that aims to welcome and introduce youth across town to the sport of mountain biking, especially those who would not otherwise be able to participate due to a variety of barriers. While the core vision focuses on mountain biking, it hasn't been uncommon for participants to learn to ride a bike for the first time with guidance from our instructors," explained City of Duluth Recreation Specialist Sam Werle. "The progression of skills from never riding a bike before to eventually riding our green-level trails is such an accomplishment for these kids; our staff has been so proud of the youth we serve, and more importantly they are proud of themselves. While many youth and families in our community have the means to enjoy our trail system on their own, there are still many who do not, and this program is geared towards them. We remove the equipment, transportation, financial, and wayfinding barriers, then provide education and safety support as participants learn at their own pace."

"The Duluth Traverse was designed to link Duluth neighborhoods to high-quality trail experiences," explained Duluth Parks and Recreation Manager Jessica Peterson. "I'm proud of our exceptional Parks and Recreation staff for developing this thoughtful program that is designed to increase access to and enjoyment of the Duluth Traverse, and I appreciate the continued efforts of dedicated nonprofits like COGGS that are committed to the stewardship and development of the trail system. As we work to get more kids on bikes--some for the first time ever--programming like this is an effective strategy for developing our next generation of outdoors enthusiasts, trail stewards, and diverse recreation leaders," Peterson explained. "It is an honor to accept this award on behalf of our Parks and Recreation staff."

To learn more about Youth on Trails and other Parks and Recreation programming, click here: <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/programs-events/youth-on-trails/>

The 2026 MRPA Annual Conference will be hosted in Duluth.

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Youth biking lesson



Recreation Specialist leads group on trail ride



Two youths having fun in program



Adaptive bike lesson



Youth on Trails event



Valley Youth Center rider group