

Parks and Recreation Division Report

September 2025

PROGRAMMING

Painting in the Parks

Summer programming in August ended with two fun and free painting classes along the St. Louis River, thanks to our partnership with Northern Exposure Art. Held at Chambers Grove and Morgan Park, these classes brought the community together to paint river scenes, enjoy the outdoors, and get creative. It was the perfect way to celebrate summer and be near the natural beauty of the river.



Lunch, Learn, and Share

August's topic of discussion was what Duluth Age-Friendly looks like in the community. Conversation focused on local infrastructure and inclusive ways to support folks of all ages. Helpful amenities that were discussed included having resources available in paper copy form, and prioritizing access to outdoor park spaces. Barriers mentioned were transportation services and getting around in downtown Duluth.



Senior Picnic

Everyone had a blast at the annual All City Senior Picnic at Morgan Park Community Center! Seniors enjoyed lunch together, connected with friends, and had the chance to win prizes generously provided by the Evergreen Senior Board. Local band Len & Lois performed a fantastic set of live music.

Youth Programs

August brought the end of a very busy summer for Parks & Recreation programs, activities, and events. Our summer session of Music Together and Youth Dance ended, marking another successful season of partnership with Music Together and 218 Dance Project, respectively. Other August activities for youth included Basic Mountain Bike Skills, Friday Fun (theme: Wizards & Warlocks), Youth on Trails Mountain Biking with Denfeld High School and Family Freedom Center, fishing field trips with Gary New Duluth Rec Boys & Girls Club and Denfeld High School, as well as a Teen Adventures program that introduced teens to Tenkara-style trout fishing along Mission Creek.



Athletics

It was a busy summer at Wade Stadium, Wade softball fields, and the Wheeler Athletic Complex. Users of those spaces include baseball, softball, pickleball, horseshoes, and bocce ball groups and individuals. Parks & Recreation's adult softball leagues just wrapped up their playoffs. Pictured below is the Tuesday Men's League champions!



Music in the Park

The second half of the Music in the Park series wrapped up on Tuesday, August 19. The nine-week series spent the first half in Chester Park and the second half in Lincoln Park. More than 4,000 attendees enjoyed a variety of music genres throughout the beautiful summer months.

Pop-Up Splash Pads

We hosted our third and final Pop-Up Splash Pad of the summer at Keene Creek Park on a perfectly warm summer day in August. Earlier in the summer we also hosted splash pads at Morgan Park and Grant Park. This partnership with the Duluth Fire Department served more than 850 people across the three events, bringing lots of smiles and laughs to each of these park spaces.



Intro to Fishing

The fifth and final Intro to Fishing program took place at Munder Landing on August 11. Thirteen participants ranging from 4-75 years old joined us. Three 4-year-old triplets learned how to cast and watch a bobber, and others were folks that had joined every Intro to Fishing program this summer! Topics discussed included how to tie your own knots and learning more about fishing on the river.



Intro to Sailing

This is a repeat partnership program with the Duluth Superior Sailing Association (DSSA). The first class in August had six adult participants with more folks signed up for two more programs happening in September. This program is set up as a two-night program, three hours each night. Most of the class time is spend on an 18' sailboat all over Duluth Harbor. DSSA does an amazing job of establishing a safe and friendly learning environment. By the end of the 3 programs, 16 adults will have been introduced to the wonderful sport of sailing.

Adventure Book Club

The August Adventure Book Club met at the pavilion at Brighton Beach on a wet, cool Friday morning to enjoy everyone's thoughts and perspectives on the book *Crow Talk*, by Eileen Garvin. After an hour-long discussion, the group headed out for a hike on the Lakewalk, heading west from Brighton Beach to the railroad bridge crossing the Lester River. This is a monthly partnership program with the Duluth Public Library during the summer and fall months.



OPERATIONS

PERMIT TYPE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Park & Building Rentals	58	67	93	73	102	198	150	218
Commercial Operator Permits	1	1	5	2	6	8	3	0
Alcohol Consumption Permits	8	5	0	8	12	16	21	16
Total	67	73	98	83	120	222	174	234

PROJECT UPDATES

Park Point Boardwalk

The second boardwalk replacement project has been completed! This boardwalk is on the eastern side of the Park Point Recreation Area. The work was supported with a \$108,000 grant through Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program, and the boardwalk surface has re-used ipe wood that was salvaged from the Lakewalk. This project was an exciting team effort, thanks to the hard work and beautiful craftsmanship of Park Maintenance and Property & Facilities Management staff!



Park Point Recreation Area Plan

The Park Point Recreation Area planning process is progressing nicely! Over 65 people attended the in-person community workshop on August 18 to review the three conceptual plan ideas and share feedback.



Additionally, 336 people responded to the on-line community survey to let us know what they like and what they wish were different about each conceptual plan option. We'll use this information to help us revise the concepts into one preferred approach, which will be brought before Parks & Recreation Commission later this year.

Concept 1 | Central Commons



Concept 2 | Harborside Connections



Concept 3 | Linear Flow



Irving Park – Stormwater Management

Staff from Parks & Recreation and Public Works joined the Irving Park Community Club meeting on Tuesday, August 26 to share an update on the new stormwater basin. Construction is progressing quickly and will be completed in September! This stormwater management basin is being constructed to improve the water quality of Keene Creek, a designated trout stream that runs through Irving Park.

In the below photos from Wednesday, August 27, contractors are placing the filter stone and iron-enhance sand in the basin area. The dark black material is biochar that gets mixed with sand and installed as a filter layer in the basin. Iron-enhanced sand and biochar help to reduce nutrients and bacteria as stormwater passes through the basin before draining into Keene Creek - a designated trout stream!



Next steps included more layers of filter, grading, and installation of drainage structures. The photos below are from the first week of September (left) and Tuesday, September 9 (right). This basin will collect, slow, and filter stormwater from over 17.5 acres of the Irving Park neighborhood before it enters Keene Creek!



Work will wrap up in September, with final planting in the spring. The site will be seeded and planted with native plant species to support pollinator habitat. These plants will take a couple of years to establish, and Public Works has contracted site maintenance for the basin to manage invasives and help these plants get off to a great start. Funding for the project is through the Great Lakes Commission, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and City of Duluth Stormwater Utility.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Research in Duluth Parks

Each year, the City of Duluth receives requests to conduct research within Duluth's park system. The variety of local ecosystems across the parks provides ample opportunities for research teams to identify needed sites and collect data to support their research. Recent projects include research like soil and plant sampling, lichen surveys, and monitoring flying squirrel populations in Lester Park.

This fall, Dr. Annie Bracey and Steve Kolbe from the Avian Ecology Lab at the Natural Resources Research Institute will access ten sites along the St. Louis River to collect data on bird migration and invasive species. Their research will include temporary placement of passive insect traps, small mammal camera boxes, and radio receiving stations. They will also use mist nets to temporarily catch birds as a part of this research project. Together, these methods will help the team explore how environmental change effects wildlife, biodiversity, and ecosystem function! If you're interested in learning more about the Avian Ecology Lab's work, please join the Birding 101 Program on Wednesday, October 15 from 10 am – noon at Chambers Grove Park.

Tischer Trib 7 – Hartley Designated Natural Area

Several natural resource partners including the City, MNDNR, Hartley Nature Center, and the SWCD are working together to address several issues on Tischer Trib 7, which runs from Northfield Ave. through the enclosure at Hartley and enters the main stem of Tischer Creek downstream of the Dam. This is an exceptionally valuable tributary that contributes cold water to Tischer Creek, one of the City's designated trout streams. White Crack Willows, an invasive species, are blocking the stream channel with their roots and limbs, causing flooding and compromising aquatic habitat. In addition, sand from stormwater runoff coming out of Woodland neighborhoods is polluting the stream and covering up the clean gravel of the stream bed that trout depend upon. Finally, pedestrian bridges that are too low are blocking stream flow and contributing to flooding problems. The group has decided to have the SWCD apply to CPL this fall to remove some larger willows and replace them with native species and to use hand tools to remove some of the smaller deposits of sand upstream of the soapbox road. The CPL grant may also be able to help with the larger woody debris and sediment problems through the enclosure, though there is still hope that FEMA funding may be able to pay for that component. Meanwhile, City stormwater/engineering staff will apply to the US Army Corps of Engineers Section 569 program to purchase and install a sediment vault at Northfield Ave., which would trap sediment and debris from stormwater runoff before it enters the tributary. Updates to come on whether or not this project gets funded.

Fall Knotweed Removal

For the past 5 years, the City has hired a contractor to treat approximately 40 knotweed plants on City land. This work continues this year. Knotweed is a notoriously difficult invasive plant to destroy and must be treated with chemicals for several years in order to kill it. The City is making progress on many of the sites it is treating. For the past couple of years, St. Louis County has had funding to hire a contractor to treat knotweed on private parcels. This is a wonderful service available to private homeowners as knotweed is so aggressive that it can even damage home foundations.

PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES

Park Maintenance Projects

In addition to general park maintenance, staff have also completed a handful of additional projects to improve parks!

At Enger Park, staff renewed the mulch in the landscaping at the Enger Peace Bell (photo below, left). At the Rose Garden, staff installed a new path, which will make it much easier when using heavy equipment in the park because staff will not need to place plywood over the path for access anymore (photo below, right).



In August, staff replaced the playground fall zone at Duluth Heights Park (photo below, left)! The new engineered wood fiber replaced the sand surface to make the playground safer, easier to maintain, and more accessible. Wood fiber provides a softer, impact-absorbing surface to help reduce injuries from falls, and it meets ADA standards, allowing kids and caregivers using mobility devices to access and enjoy the playground. At Bayfront Festival Park, staff removed the berm around the Bayfront Family Center to create better sight lines and make the adjacent lawn areas more user-friendly (photo below, right).



Forestry

This summer, staff undertook an understory mulching project in three areas to suppress invasive tree growth and stimulate native tree regeneration. The selected areas include Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, Lester-Amity Park, and Park Point Recreation Area. At Hawk Ridge, the mulching treatment covered approximately 51% of the site and regeneration is about 1,000 stems per acre. Of the regeneration, only 200 of the stems were Scots Pine (an invasive), which is a lower regeneration rate than expected and demonstrates success! At Lester-Amity, about 1 acre of predominantly brush species with a significant component of invasive buckthorn was mulched. A portion of the site will be seeded, and the rest of the area will be treated again next year. This process can be repeated and expanded in subsequent years to encourage new native forest growth over time.



Other forestry activities include ash tree removals, buckthorn removal, and pruning. A recent ash and buckthorn removal was completed along 59th Avenue West above 8th Street. Removals have improved sightlines and now passersby can see the rock cliff-face along the road that was previously completely hidden by the dying and invasive trees. The photos below show another road corridor clearing location along East St. Marie Street.

