



# NOKOMIS-HIAWA REGIONAL PARK master plan

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**MPRB would like to thank these people / organizations for their involvement in this plan:**

**The City of Minneapolis**

**Hennepin County**

**Minnehaha Creek Watershed District**

**Neighborhood Organizations including:**

The Standish-Ericsson Neighborhood Association | The Nokomis East Neighborhood Association  
 Hale Page Diamond Lake Community Association | Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group

**Members of the Community Advisory Committee:**

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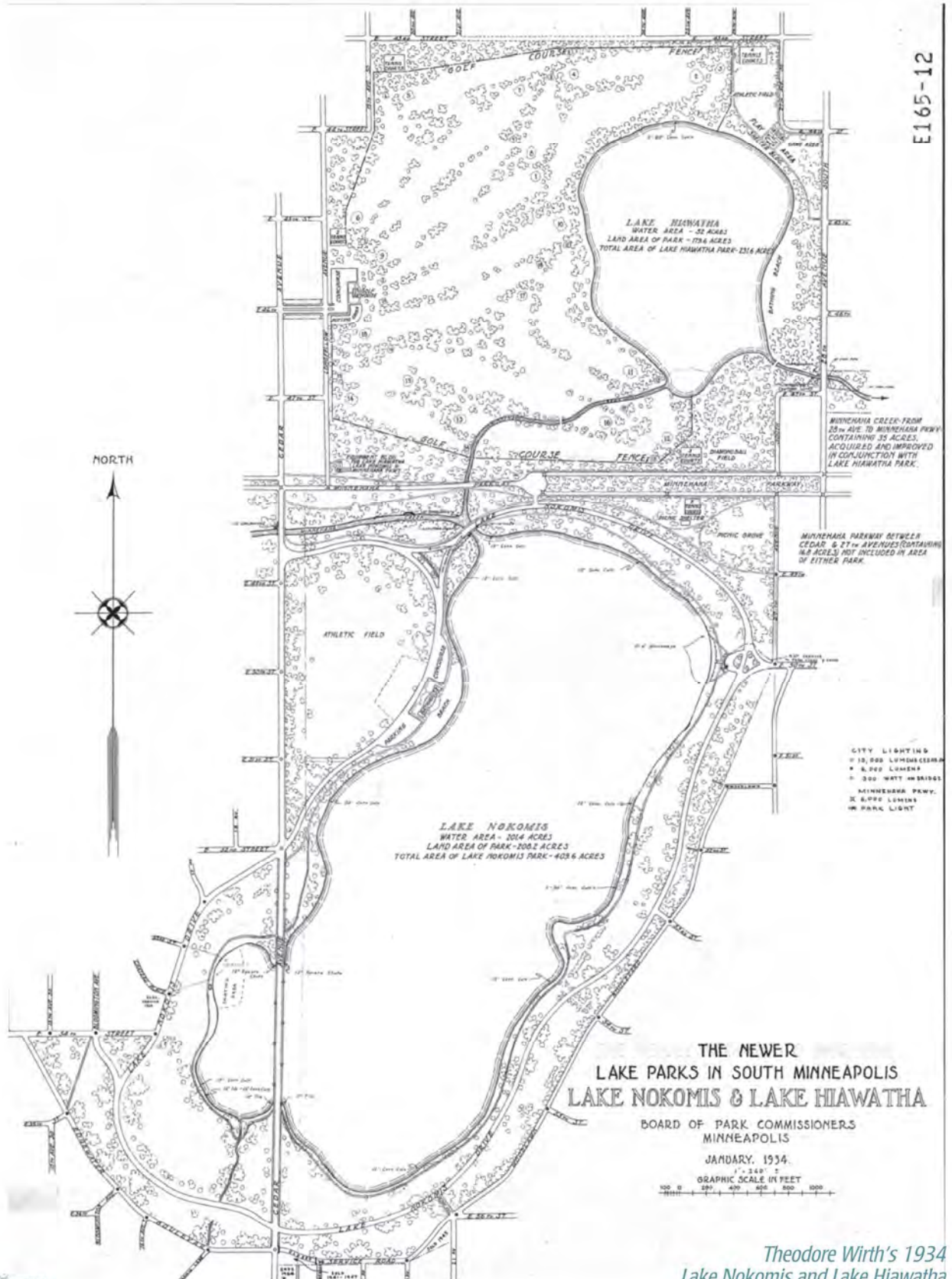
**This plan was adopted by the MPRB on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015.**





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Theodore Wirth's 1934 Lake Nokomis and Lake Hiawatha Park Master Plan



# SECTION 1: PLANNING FRAMEWORK

## Introduction and Purpose of the Master Plan

Within the urban context of friendly neighborhoods, busy streets, and bright lights, Minneapolis Parks offer expansive havens of fresh water, lush green retreats, and miles of uninterrupted recreational trails. Bordering leafy parkways, these trails connect the places where people gather to picnic, sail, play, and escape in a truly integrated open space and recreation system.

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is a key link in this system. In 1914, work began to reshape Lake Amelia into what has become present-day Lake Nokomis. Land donation, acquisition, and dredging established more than 200 acres of parkland around a 200-acre lake. To the north, Lake Hiawatha – with enough surrounding land to fit a new golf course – was acquired 7 years later, and the first plan for the combined Lake Nokomis and Lake Hiawatha Park was created by Theodore Wirth in 1934.

The 1934 Plan has remained the guiding scheme outlining improvements for the two-lake park—until now. This document provides a much needed update to the Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park Master Plan. Today, the park encompasses approximately 660 acres of land and water, including Lake Nokomis, Lake Hiawatha, and part of Minnehaha Creek. Popular for its sailing, picnicking, beaches, and trails, it is one of the most visited parks in Minneapolis and in the seven-county metropolitan area.

The purpose of the Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park Master Plan is to provide a long-term vision for improvements to park facilities, recreation, landscape, trails, and shorelines. Hiawatha Golf Course, which is not considered for improvements or change within this document, was specifically excluded from the master planning process. The Master Plan otherwise studies the existing conditions of the park, assesses community needs in relation to park use, and proposes specific improvement projects. This is envisioned as a 25-year plan, with implementation in three broad timeframes: Short-term (up to 6 years), Medium-term (6-12 years), and Long-term (12 or more years). Study and development of a new master plan will be needed again in 25 years to reassess the conditions, vision, and necessary improvements of the regional park at that time.

A significant public process informed the development of this Master Plan. Additional details outlining this process are found in Section 3. The plans and recommendations included here underwent thorough review by public participants, an appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC), the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) and, finally, were adopted by the Metropolitan Council. Approval and adoption by these entities allows access to future funding for capital improvements.

# REGIONAL parks SYSTEM



	Regional Park or Preserve		Boat Access
	State Land		Canoe, Canywn Access
	Federal Land		Off-leash Dog Area
	Park Entrance		
	Regional Trail		
	State Trail		

0 1 2 3 Miles



**Map Advisory:**  
This map is published for general reference purposes. Although reasonably detailed and believed to be accurate, the regional park boundaries depicted on this map are intended only to reflect the general location of the park boundaries and areas of the regional parks. Features and trails are not shown or using those facilities. Changes to regional park boundaries may have occurred after the publication of this map.

*Twin Cities Metropolitan Area  
Regional Parks System Map*

# Metropolitan Regional Parks System

The regional parks system was established in 1974 when the Metropolitan Council (Met Council) was put in charge of overseeing the acquisition and development of regional parks throughout the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The combined efforts of implementing agencies, counties, and special districts allow the parks to be maintained and operated with free admission for park users. Today, there are 52 parks and park reserves in a system that sees more than 47 million annual visits.

The Met Council, with assistance from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, facilitates planning and funding for the regional parks system. Policies guiding this work support the regional goals for parks and open space, including protection of the region's water quality, implementation of best management practices, and coordination with other regional functions like housing and transportation.

The Met Council works with implementing agencies, such as the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, to realize improvements according to Met Council policies and practices. The Met Council's planning requirements help to ensure consistency throughout the region. Plan approval by the Met Council is necessary in order to receive acquisition, development, and operational funding.

# Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) oversees parks in the City of Minneapolis. The park system receives approximately 18 million visits each year across 197 park properties. Parks range from local neighborhood play lots to large nature areas, and include the 55-mile Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway. The MPRB provides administration, planning, development, maintenance, and police protection for parks and recreational facilities in the system. Environmental, recreational and other programs and services are provided for park users of all ages and abilities.

Established in 1883, The MPRB is the governing agency responsible for improving, operating, and maintaining Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park. The nine-member Board of Commissioners is an independently elected body responsible for maintaining and developing the Minneapolis Park system to meet the needs of Minneapolis citizens. Every four years, commissioners are elected to this Board: one from each of the six park districts within the city and three that serve at-large. This unique structure allows independent decision-making so the MPRB can efficiently oversee a diverse system of land and water.

# Related Planning Efforts

The Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park Master Plan is not the only document influencing park development, use, and quality. Other planning efforts, governing agencies, and partnerships impact the park and its users. Examples of agencies whose work impacts this Master Plan include:

- » Minnehaha Creek Watershed District – water quality and biodiversity
- » Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – water quality and biodiversity
- » City of Minneapolis – ongoing transportation and stormwater management
- » Hennepin County – ongoing transportation and stormwater management
- » Three Rivers Park District – Intercity Regional Trail connection

## Required Plan Elements:

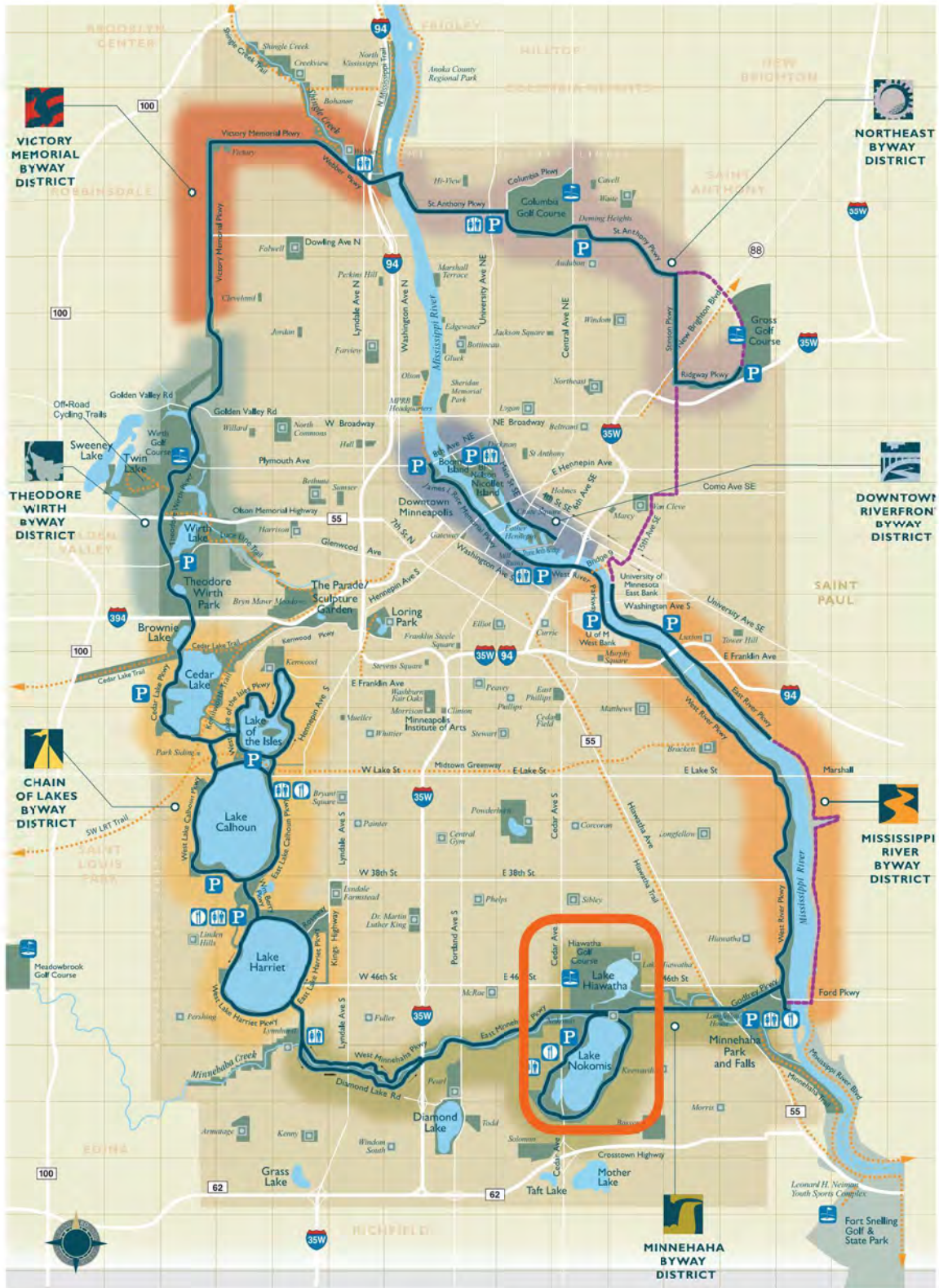
The Nokomis-Hiawatha Master Plan is consistent with Metropolitan Parks and Open Space plans and policies. Required plan elements include:

- » Boundary descriptions and a listing of properties to be acquired
- » Recreation demand forecasts
- » Natural resources management
- » Park development concept
- » Park implementation schedule
- » Development and management/operational cost projections

## MPRB System-wide Plans:

The MPRB has system-wide plans in place that will affect ongoing prioritization and detailed design, development, and maintenance at Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park:

- » Skate Park Activity Plan (DRAFT- not yet adopted)
- » South Service Area Master Planning (in progress)
- » Ecological Systems Plan (in progress)
- » Pavement and Signage Plans (in progress)
- » Court Sports Facility Plan (in progress)
- » Hiawatha Recreation Center Master Plan (Approved in 1990)



*Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park within the Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway*



# SECTION 2: PARK BACKGROUND

## Park Description / Existing Conditions

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is one of the most visited parks in the Minneapolis Park System. It is connected to the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes to the west and to Minnehaha Park and Falls to the east by Minnehaha Creek and the adjacent parkway and trails. Because of this connection, the park is also part of the Grand Round National Scenic Byway route.

The park has some unique offerings that make it a local gem with a regional draw. Lake Nokomis is one of only three sailing lakes in Minneapolis (Lake Harriet and Lake Calhoun are the other two). One of the most popular beaches in the system can be found on its western shore, which offers amenities that include a restaurant, as well as bicycle, canoe, and kayak rentals. Hiawatha Golf Course, just west of Lake Hiawatha, provides one of the few opportunities for public golfing within the City of Minneapolis. And because of its location, the park offers some of the best views of the Minneapolis skyline found in South Minneapolis.

Recreational opportunities are plentiful within the park, which currently maintains two supervised beaches, one unsupervised beach, two community recreation centers, a beach house, restaurant, athletic fields, sailboat buoys, a boat launch, canoe and kayak rental and storage, fishing piers, tennis, pickleball, basketball, playgrounds, picnic areas, and a multi-use trail system. Larger recreational events are hosted year-round at Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park, including the summer Monarch Festival with educational activities, fun runs, and dancing, as well as the Lifetime Fitness triathlon each July and annual pond-hockey tournament every winter.

On the quieter side, Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is loved for its natural amenities. Recent park improvements have led to the creation of larger wetlands and additional wildlife habitat, which has contributed to the popularity of birding in the park. Nokomis-Hiawatha's well-developed network of trails offers visitors prime access to the park's lakes, creek, and wetlands, and has made passive modes of recreation like walking, running, and cycling some of the most popular ways to experience the park.





*Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park  
Existing Conditions*

## Location and Context

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park comprises 660 acres of land and water located in the southeast part of Minneapolis, just north of the border with the City of Richfield. It sits roughly between Cedar Avenue on the west and 28th Avenue on the east; 43rd Street to the north and Edgewater/Woodlawn Boulevards (1 block north of 57th Street) to the south. The southwest portion of Lake Nokomis and surrounding parkland continues west of Cedar Avenue where the Cedar Avenue Bridge crosses north-south over the lake.

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is surrounded by residential neighborhoods of mostly single-family houses. The Standish and Ericsson Neighborhoods are located to the north and northeast and are represented by the Standish-Ericsson Neighborhood Association (SENA) for community involvement and civic engagement. The Keewaydin and Wenonah neighborhoods border the park to the east and southeast. Along with the Morris and Minnehaha neighborhoods, Keewaydin and Wenonah comprise the Nokomis East Neighborhood Association (NENA) for the City of Minneapolis. To the west and southwest are the Hale and Diamond Lake Neighborhoods, part of the Hale-Page-Diamond Lake Community Association. While not technically bordering the park, the Northrop Neighborhood is located west of Cedar Avenue and northwest of the park. Community representation and involvement from each of these groups has been integral to the development of the Master Plan. More information about this can be found in Section 3.

The closest commercial-retail nodes are located at the intersections of Cedar Avenue and Minnehaha Parkway, 28th Avenue and 50th Street, and 28th Avenue and 42nd Street.

The area surrounding Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is rich with recreational amenities. These include parkland along Minnehaha Creek, and neighborhood parks like Keewaydin Field and Bossen Field Park to the east, Solomon Park (undeveloped) to the southwest, Todd and Pearl Parks to the west, and the adjacent Lake Hiawatha Park (see Appendix for the plan). The park is less than one mile away from Minnehaha Park, a popular destination, and also part of the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space System.

## Historic Background

In the late 1800s, growing interest in the concept of a larger “lake parkway system” prompted expansion of Minneapolis parks to include two lakes and surrounding land in southeast Minneapolis. At the time, Lake Amelia was a shallow expanse of wetland, and Rice Lake, to the north, was considered a swamp. Despite their less than desirable characteristics, increasing demand for parks and for a connection to Minnehaha Falls motivated efforts to establish a new park in this area. Beginning in 1900, the Minneapolis Park Board moved to acquire property around Lake Amelia, and in 1908 secured 409 acres, including nearly 300 acres of water. At this time, suggestions were made to purchase Rice Lake as well, but this was put off in order to focus on improvements to Lake Amelia.

In 1910, Lake Amelia’s name was officially changed to Lake Nokomis, in honor of the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem “Song of Hiawatha” that made Minnehaha Falls famous (Nokomis was Hiawatha’s grandmother, and the word means “my grandmother” in Ojibwe). That same year, park superintendent Theodore Wirth presented his plan for improving Lake Nokomis. One of the most ambitious land-altering schemes in the history of Minneapolis parks, Wirth’s plan involved a large amount of dredging and grading to reshape the lake and surrounding parkland. His dramatic design reduced open water from 300 acres to 200 acres and increased the lake’s average depth.



*Passive recreation at Lake Hiawatha*



*Families enjoy the trails for exercise*



*Lake Nokomis is one of three sailing lakes in Minneapolis*



*Water toboggan at Lake Nokomis*



*Lake Nokomis Beach post card*



*WPA picnic tables and benches remain*

Work began in 1914 to dredge Lake Nokomis and build up the surrounding land. Dredges worked for four years to realize Wirth's vision, moving a total of 2.5 million cubic yards of earth. The fill was allowed to settle for five years before further grading and planting completed the park's transformation. A new bath house was built at the beach on the west shore. Upon its opening in 1920, Lake Nokomis immediately surpassed Lake Calhoun as the most popular beach destination in Minneapolis.

At this time, a newly introduced form of recreation began to change perceptions of how land around Rice Lake could be used. In 1916, the park board opened its first golf course at Glenwood (now Wirth) Park. It was an instant success. The course was expanded in the following years, and the Park Board began to seek locations for additional golf courses. In the 1920 annual report, Wirth suggested that a new course be laid out between Rice Lake and Cedar Avenue – an idea that was supported by the board. In 1922, the Park Board decided to acquire Minnehaha Creek's entire corridor from Rice Lake to Minnehaha Falls - including the lake and the land west of it- making Wirth's golf course concept a reality. At the same time, the city council was pushing for transformation of the 'swamp' so that people would build houses in this part of town.

Wirth submitted his first plan for Lake Hiawatha and the surrounding park in 1924, which showed the basic layout of the golf course and a playground southeast of the lake. The lake was officially renamed the following year for the hero in Longfellow's poem. By this time, the majority of Lake Nokomis' original park plan had been completed, including walkways, baseball diamonds, football fields, and a water-toboggan slide at the beach. A picnic shelter was added on the north shore, and a refectory was built to the west.

In 1929, improvement efforts could again focus on Lake Hiawatha. Dredging of the lake and construction of the golf course began. Material dredged from the lake was used to construct the terrain needed to provide interest to the golf course, which was completed in 1931. A beach and shelter were opened on the eastern shoreline in 1932. The golf clubhouse was completed in 1932, and the course was fully operational by 1934.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, very few construction and maintenance projects were completed in the parks, except those done under federal programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Significant portions of the shoreline around Lake Nokomis and Lake Hiawatha were reinforced with concrete and stone walls installed by the WPA, much of which remains. The program also created new walkways, picnic areas, tennis courts, and playgrounds during this time.

It wasn't until the early 1960s that attention to park improvements reignited. Eroded areas of Lake Nokomis were reinforced, the beach was rebuilt, and the original bath house was replaced in 1967. The Nokomis Community Center was built in 1977 as part of a system-wide effort to establish recreation and community centers in Minneapolis community parks. Lake Nokomis became the first city lake park with a community center. At Lake Hiawatha, a second ball field was added north of the lake, and the recreation center was renovated.

An effort in the early 1970s brought attention to the entirety of the Grand Rounds system, including the portion of the Grand Rounds moving through Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park. Landscape architects, Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams (EDAW) were tasked with analyzing the parkway system to identify ways to improve capacity and safety. The effort resulted in the narrowing of many parkways and added parking bays along the roads, colored paving (red asphalt) to distinguish the parkways from city streets, new park fixtures and lighting, and new signage. At this same time, the Park

Board began constructing a separated dual trail system throughout the parks, which worked to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Most recently, the park has seen a handful of new additions. A golf learning center was added to Hiawatha Golf Course in 1999, and an accessible playground and splash pad were built at Lake Hiawatha in the 2000s. Improvements around Lake Nokomis focused on water-quality and habitat, including a series of new wetlands that treat stormwater runoff (1996) and the creation of the Nokomis Naturescape Garden (1999). A key component of the Naturescape was the transformation of the hillside north of Lake Nokomis from a monoculture of turf grass into an oak savannah featuring native grasses and forbs. Gardens located adjacent to the trails also feature native plants and are meant to show people how native species could be used in home landscaping and gardening. These gardens specifically highlight plants that are beneficial to monarch butterflies.

In 2013, the historic refectory at the main beach underwent a major facelift to transform it into a restaurant, complete with a lakeside terrace.

## Reaching the Park: Transportation, Park Access, Parkways, and Transit

### Roads

The park is primarily accessed from the north and south by Cedar Avenue (which bisects Lake Nokomis) and from the east and west by Minnehaha Parkway (which bisects the park between the two lakes). Other north-south arterial roads providing access to the park include 28th Avenue S on the east and Bloomington Avenue S on the west. Local neighborhood streets provide east-west connections into the park. These primary routes include 50th Street S, 54th Street S on both the east and west sides of the park, and Derby Ave on the east.

Lake Nokomis is also fully circled by Nokomis Parkway, which intersects many of the neighborhood cross streets. Nearly all of the on-street parking available for park-users is located along Nokomis Parkway. A secondary “ring road” exists on the border of the park, and includes Woodlawn Boulevard and Edgewater Boulevard. These boulevards line the edge of the parkland around Lake Nokomis on the east, south, and southwest sides. Parkways are under MPRB jurisdiction and located fully within park-owned land. Ongoing maintenance of these parkways is a joint effort by the MPRB and City of Minneapolis.

Off-street parking is accommodated by several parking lots: one near the Nokomis Main Beach, one off Minnehaha Parkway near the Minnehaha Creek canoe launch, three near the Nokomis Community Center, and one at the Hiawatha Golf Clubhouse. There is currently no off-street parking located near the Lake Hiawatha Recreation Center.

### Trails

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is connected by bicycle and pedestrian trails to the Grand Rounds regional trail system, which runs through the park along Minnehaha Creek. City sidewalks, located along nearly all Minneapolis neighborhood streets, also connect to the park’s trail system. On-street bicycle lanes on 54th Street S connect to park trails on the west side of Lake Nokomis. Bike boulevards along 17th Avenue S and 12th Avenue S provide north-south connections to the Grand Rounds where cyclists can enter Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park. Quiet neighborhood streets with less vehicle traffic also provide bike access to the park and are considered bike routes by the City of Minneapolis.

## Reaching Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park Using Public Transit:

Light Rail Transit (LRT) runs along Hiawatha Avenue, approximately a half-mile east of Lake Hiawatha. The LRT Blue Line connects downtown Minneapolis to the Mall of America. The closest LRT transit stations to the park are at 46th Street S and 50th Street S. Both stations are near trails along Minnehaha Creek and therefore provide nearly uninterrupted off-road bicycle and pedestrian access to the park. Bus connections can be made from 38th Street and 46th Street Stations to locations closer to the park and its amenities.

At the time of print, several city bus routes provide nearby transit access to Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park:

- » Bus Route 22 travels north-south on 28th Avenue S and accesses the Blue Line LRT at the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Transit Station
- » Bus Route 46 runs east-west along 46<sup>th</sup> Street (west of the park) and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (north of the park)
- » Bus Route 14 runs north-south on Bloomington Avenue (west of Cedar), with some routes running on Cedar Avenue to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and then to the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Blue Line station
- » Bus Route 133 provides limited stop service on Bloomington Avenue





*Pedestrians crossing Lake Nokomis on the Cedar Avenue bridge*



*A flooded Minnehaha Creek*

## Conflicts Affecting Park Development

### Cedar Avenue / Minnehaha Parkway

Of particular concern is the safety and ease of crossing Cedar Avenue on foot or by bicycle. Cedar Avenue intersects with the MPRB parkway and trail system three times: at Minnehaha Parkway, at Nokomis Parkway near 52nd Street, and at Nokomis Parkway near Edgewater Boulevard. In all cases, improvements to the trail user experience will need to be coordinated with the City and County. The Cedar/Nokomis Parkway/Edgewater area has been studied over the years by the City and County. However, MPRB has not historically been interested in participating in any solution that would place roadway uses on parkland, and this has limited other agencies' exploration of all possible solutions.

Solving the traffic issues around Cedar/Nokomis Parkway/Edgewater will be necessary to improve the park user experience in this vicinity, especially upon implementation of Three Rivers Park District's Intercity Regional Trail, which will run southward from this intersection. MPRB recognizes that any solution must be a multi-agency effort led by the City and/or County.

Minnehaha Parkway is a major road running east-west through the park. It is owned by the MPRB, however, the roadway and adjacent parkway land is outside the boundaries of Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park. It is part of the Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway and includes adjacent bicycle and pedestrian trails that link into the park's trail systems. The parkway can act as a barrier splitting Lake Nokomis from Lake Hiawatha. Parkway trail crossings require enhancement to strengthen the connections between the two sides of the park. For this reason, the master plan addresses changes to Minnehaha Parkway where they support master plan features. Ongoing management and maintenance of the parkway is typically a joint effort between the MPRB and City of Minneapolis. Changes to traffic management or markings of crossings will need additional approvals from the City.

Cedar Avenue runs north-south along the western edge of Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park and bridges over the southwest portion of Lake Nokomis. The major arterial roadway presents a significant barrier to bicycle and pedestrian crossings, introduces high-speed vehicle traffic to the area, and presents challenges to water quality through stormwater runoff. Management and maintenance of the road is under joint jurisdiction with the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County. Any changes or improvements that impact the roadway require coordination with these two implementing agencies.

### Water Related Issues Beyond the Park

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is significantly influenced by water-related issues outside of its boundaries. In particular, these issues are related to upstream activities along Minnehaha Creek. Water quality in the creek is directly impacted by stormwater management within the watershed. Initiatives to improve water quality outside of the park will be coordinated and implemented by its governing body, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), as well as the City of Minneapolis.