Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park:
Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska - Harriet Master Plan

A 25 year vision for park improvements
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The passion and dedication of individuals who love the parks and volunteer their time help make the Minneapolis park system what it is today.

Bde Maka Ska

The Dakota people inhabited the area around the Chain of Lakes for thousands of years before European settlers arrived. European surveyors in the early 1800s named the largest of the water bodies in the Chain of Lakes Lake Calhoun, but the Dakota already had a name for it: “Bde Maka Ska” or Lake White Earth. In 2015 the MPRB Commissioners directed legal counsel to explore the actions required to change the name of Lake Calhoun and in September directed staff to add “Bde Maka Ska” to all the Lake Calhoun monument signs.

One of the first recommendations approved by the appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in March 2016 relates to the restoration of the name Bde Maka Ska to Lake Calhoun.

“The CAC recommends that the Park Board support the official and legal restoration of the name “Bde Maka Ska” to Lake Calhoun and advocate for such restoration in all appropriate fora, including the Hennepin County Board, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota Legislature. To the extent that the Park Board determines that such restoration requires legislative action, the CAC recommends that the Park Board include such action in its legislative agenda.”

A summary of the discussion about this topic and the rationale behind the recommendation are included in the Master Plan document that follows.

For this document and until such time as the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board of Commissioners approves the recommendation for the name restoration and takes additional action with Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Lake Calhoun remains the name of record. If the name is restored, references to Lake Calhoun in the Master Plan will be changed to Bde Maka Ska.
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“The cordon of beautiful lakes encircling our city has long been a pride of the city and our people have for many years cherished a hope...that in the near future they would establish in the vicinity of the lakes...a grand system of parks with wide connecting boulevards extending around those lakes.”

Charles Loring
Startribune, Sept. 7, 1880
Introduction
1.1 Overview

On a fine summer day, as many as 10,000 people enjoy the trails around Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet in southwest Minneapolis. Trail users make up a large majority of the estimated five million annual visits to the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, the most heavily-used regional park in the seven-county metropolitan area. Within a highly urbanized context of busy streets, neighborhoods, and business centers, the Chain of Lakes offers a refuge of clean water, shady lawns, woodland habitat, and safe places to play and recreate.

Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet are the largest and most popular lakes within the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park. As iconic destinations within the Minneapolis park system, these two parks form the backbone of the historic Grand Rounds: a system of parkways, trails, and green space that have made Minneapolis world renowned.

Although 90% of operating and maintenance costs for the Chain of Lakes are born by Minneapolis taxpayers through its Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), capital investment in the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park is largely funded by the citizens of Minnesota through appropriations from the State and the Metropolitan Council (Met Council). MPRB manages many regional parks and trails and allocates state and Met Council funding on a rotating basis. The Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet portions of the Chain of Lakes have not received significant capital investment since 1997. Since then, Met Council has adopted new policies requiring local agencies to prepare updated master plans in order to receive funds.

In 2015-2016 the community met to develop a master plan for Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet. The public was eager to
discuss the many issues facing these parks. The following master plan, once approved by the Board of Commissioners of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and adopted by the Metropolitan Council, will set a 25 year vision for Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet. The master plan will guide future investment in the parks, most immediately the $2.5 million to Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet available for constructed improvements in 2017.

List Of Abbreviations

AIS Aquatic Invasive Species

BMPs Best Management Practices (Stormwater Management)

CAC Community Advisory Committee

MPRB Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

MCWD Minnehaha Creek Watershed District

Met Council Metropolitan Council

SWLRT Southwest Light Rail Transit

TMDL Total Maximum Daily Load regulatory term in the US Clean Water Act describing a value of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can received while still meeting water quality standards.

Universal design or Design for All is used in this document in reference to playgrounds and beaches. Universal design is a barrier-free built environment with access for all, regardless of ability or age. This could include adaptive or assistive technology.

WPA Work Progress Administration was a New Deal agency that, from 1935-1943, employed 8.5 million people to build public works projects. Minneapolis parks were the recipient of many of their efforts, including the existing stone and concrete walls around the shorelines of Lake Harriet and Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska.
1.2 Parks in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

**Metropolitan Regional Parks System**

The regional parks system was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1974 when the Metropolitan Council (Met Council) was put in charge of overseeing the acquisition and development of a regional park system throughout the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation facilities are owned and operated by ten implementing agencies, including the MPRB, while system-wide funding and visioning is managed by the Met Council. Today, there are 102 regional amenities in a system that sees more than 47 million annual visits.¹ In Minneapolis, many of the regional parks pre-date the establishment of the regional system in 1974. The Chain of Lakes and other major Minneapolis parks were incorporated into the regional system and now receive funding from the State and Met Council.

¹ Met Council 2040 Thrive MSP Regional Parks Policy Plan

The Met Council works with implementing agencies such as the MPRB, to realize improvements according to the Met Council policies and practices. The Met Council’s planning requirements, set forth in documents such as the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan and Thrive MSP 2040, help to ensure consistency throughout the region. Master plan approval by the Met Council is necessary in order to receive acquisition, development, and operational funding.

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Map of Met Council’s Regional Parks System.

Image Credit: Met Council
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) oversees parks in the City of Minneapolis. The park system receives approximately 22 million visits each year across 179 park properties. Parks range from local neighborhood play lots to large natural areas, and includes the 55-mile Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway. MPRB provides administration, planning, development, programming, maintenance, and police protection for parks and recreational facilities in the system. It also offers environmental, recreation and other programs and services for park users of all ages and abilities.

Established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1883, MPRB is the governing agency responsible for improving, operating, and maintaining the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes 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 who serve at-large. This unique structure allows independent decision-making so that MPRB can efficiently oversee a diverse system of land and water.

Capital Improvement Plan Or CIP:
A six-year plan for spending funds for major planning projects and on-the-ground improvements. The CIP is approved by the Board of Commissioners every year along with the annual budget process.

Capital Project:
A single undertaking, be it large or small, to improve a park in some way. A Capital Project may be anything constructible, from playground replacement to trail work to new buildings. Capital projects are budgeted in the CIP.

Regional Park Funds:
Money that can be used by MPRB only in regional parks. Several sources contribute to overall regional park funds, including: the statewide Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment of 2008, construction bonds authorized by the state and the Met Council, Minnesota Lottery proceeds dedicated to operations and maintenance, and donations from outside parties. This Master Plan was funded with Parks and Trails Legacy dollars, one part of the sales tax funded by the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment of 2008.
1.3 Content and Organization

The Master Plan is divided into three distinct documents.

The first is an executive summary: a workbook that succinctly describes key features of the plan and provides an easy reference of recommendations and plan graphics, as well as spreadsheets identifying project priorities.

The second, is the master plan report: an explanation of the master plan recommendations in more depth, with detail about the master plan context, planning process, and rationale. It includes project cost estimates, implementation strategies, and master plan ramifications to MPRB operations and maintenance.

The third is the Appendix: a compilation of critical reports, memorandums, and background information that will be coupled electronically with the master plan report for future reference.
1.4 Regional Park Boundary and Master Plan Study Area

The Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park is located in the southwestern quadrant of the City of Minneapolis. It includes 1066 acres of water and 489 acres of land (1555 total acres) associated with Lake Harriet, Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska, Lake of the Isles, Dean Parkway, Cedar Lake, and Brownie Lake. The boundaries of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park have not changed in the last half century and no additional acquisitions are planned as a result of this master plan.

Due to the size and complexity of the overall regional park, and the fact that the Minneapolis community tends to see each lake as a separate park area, only two lakes are included in this master plan. Other portions of the regional park have been planned separately but not brought forward for Met Council approval (Brownie Lake Small Area Plan approved by MPRB in 2012, Dean Parkway in 2013, and South Cedar Lake Beach Concept in 2016). The most recent regional park-wide planning effort, 1997 Chain of Lakes Regional Park Comprehensive Plan, included five separate citizen advisory committees (CAC) that met with MPRB staff and consultant for more than two years. The plan was accepted, but never officially approved by the MPRB Board of Commissioners.
Most of the parkland around Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet was acquired after 1880 and in the early 1900s. Lake of the Isles, Cedar Lake, and Brownie Lake were purchased somewhat later when Theodore Wirth was park superintendent. Under Wirth, the Park Board constructed navigable channels and lagoons to connect four of the five bodies of water in what became known as the Chain of Lakes. Today, Brownie Lake forms the upper limit of the chain, flowing south into Cedar Lake which flows east through the Kenilworth Channel into Lake of Isles. A constructed lagoon and channel connect Isles to Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska, a permanent navigable channel between the two lakes was never constructed. Today a control structure between Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet keeps water levels fairly constant in the upper chain. Harriet’s water levels are controlled by another structure at the head of Minnehaha Creek, which flows out of the southeast corner of the lake. Minnehaha Creek flows in a southeasterly direction into the Mississippi River. The creek and associated parkways and trails constitute Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail, another regional park owned and managed by MPRB.

With a few exceptions, the project boundary is formed by the MPRB property line, which generally follows the outer edge of the parkways encircling Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet. The Midtown Greenway is the northern edge of the study area. MPRB parcels contiguous to the parkways are also included: Northwest Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska is bounded by Excelsior Boulevard, and southeast Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska by Lakewood Cemetery. William Berry Parkway, between Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet, is part of the project study area. Lake Harriet’s project boundaries include Lyndale Park eastward to King’s Highway and also Beard’s Plaisance. The Thomas Sadler Roberts Bird Sanctuary, on the northern shore of Lake Harriet and adjacent to Lakewood Cemetery, was excluded from the project because it has its own parallel master planning process and funding.

The two lakes in the scope of this master plan - Harriet especially - are set within a context of well-established residential neighborhoods and are near two thriving commercial centers: West Lake Street and Uptown. Major non-residential land holdings around Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska (clockwise starting west) are the Bakken Museum, Minikahda Club, the Calhoun Executive Center, and Lakewood Cemetery (SE Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska).

The map to the right identifies the project boundary and extents of the scope of work in detail.
1.3 Project Context - History

Pre-European and Early European Settlement

Archeological evidence shows that Native Americans inhabited this region for thousands of years, perhaps since the most recent glaciers receded around 12,000 years ago. Humans were probably drawn to the beauty and natural resources of the area, especially the lakes, the largest of which was known to the Dakota people as Bde Maka Ska, or Lake White Earth, referring to its white sand beaches. The lakes received water from large wetlands and lakes to the north before emptying into Minnehaha Creek and ultimately the Mississippi River. The lakes were rich in wild rice, shellfish, waterfowl, and fish. The surrounding oak savannah and prairie uplands provided abundant game.

The Dakota consider the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers to be the birthplace of their people and sacred. The Dakota have inhabited the lands and waterways of a region which included the Chain of Lakes for centuries. They lived in villages, hunted and fished, and grew crops on small plots; sharing their harvests with their neighbors so that no one starved. The Ojibwe, who expanded into the area west of the Great Lakes in the 1600s, lived to the north in the forests. They would enter Dakota lands to hunt and trade. Sporadic conflicts between the Ojibwe and Dakota occurred up until the 1830's.

For several decades prior to 1800, European explorers and traders interacted with the indigenous Dakota. In the Treaty of 1805, negotiated by Zebulon Pike, two of seven Dakota leaders agreed to sell, “for an unspecified amount of money,” land at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, a place sacred to the Dakota because they believe it to be the origin of their people. The Dakota were never paid the value of the land and the Treaty was never ratified. In 1820 the U.S. military established its presence in the area with the construction of Fort Snelling and extended its influence to the Chain of Lakes. The church also arrived and built several missions, seeking to convert native people to Christianity. As whites explored the area and began to settle, Bde Maka Ska became known as Lake Calhoun, named after John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War until 1825 under President James Monroe, and Bde Uman (the Other Lake) became Lake Harriet, after a military commander’s wife.

As more whites settled in the area, game became scarce. Over the harsh winter of 1828-1829 many Dakota starved. Mahpiya Wicasta (Cloud Man), a Dakota leader, decided to give white man’s farming a try. He moved his band to the uplands on the east side of Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska, naming the settlement Heyata Otunwe or the Village to the Side. With plows provided by Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian agent at Fort Snelling, Cloud Man’s band successfully grew crops for a decade.

A 1835 map by Taliaferro shows the Cloud Man Village as extending slightly north of present day W 34th Street, south into current Lakewood Cemetery, and east past Fremont.
An 1898 survey of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska - Harriet was annotated by Peter Sussman, a local architect and historian.
In 1834 Gideon Pond and his brother, both missionaries, arrived at Bde Maka Ska with the purpose of converting the Dakota to Christianity, teaching them farming, and assimilating them into white culture. The Pond brothers renamed Heyata Otunwe or Village to the Side, “Eatonville”. They built a cabin in 1834 at the edge of the high bank on the east side of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska where St Mary’s Greek Orthodox Church now stands. The Pond brothers wrote the first dictionary of the Dakota language in order to translate the Bible and speed conversion. They are commemorated today by a bronze plaque on a boulder along the lake located below the site of their cabin.

In 1839, Mahpiya Wicasta’s band of Dakota left their village at Bde Maka Ska because the site was vulnerable to attack by the Ojibwe. The band moved to what is now Bloomington. Following the Dakota War of 1862, Dakota all over Minnesota were rounded up and imprisoned. Approximately seventeen hundred elderly individuals, women, and children were imprisoned in a concentration camp at Fort Snelling over the winter of 1862-63. Many, including Mahpiya Wicasta, died. The following spring, survivors were loaded onto a steamboat and sent up the Missouri River to Crow Creek in South Dakota.

The effects of the forced expulsion of the Dakota people from Minnesota after 1862 and subsequent historical trauma of the unacknowledged genocide are still deeply felt today. Dakota returning to the Chain of Lakes area have expressed that they do not feel welcome in the park because there is little recognition or expression of their history. The only acknowledgement of Native American history or of the Dakota inhabiting the area within the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park is a small plaque on a boulder on the south side of Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska near a cedar tree. The very name Lake Calhoun is particularly onerous to Native Americans because John C. Calhoun, as Secretary of War, drafted the treaties that removed indigenous peoples from their homelands and set up the Bureau of Indian Affairs as part of the War Department. Other minority communities that have experienced oppression and discrimination by Euro-Americans also object to the name of Lake Calhoun, because John C. Calhoun was a slave owner.

Members of the Dakota community were active in the master planning process. They articulated that their history and culture must be interpreted at Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and should include a memorial to Mahpiya Wicasta (Cloud Man) and to Heyata Otunwe (Village to the Side). Place and language are of enormous importance to the Dakota; interpretation should be in the Dakota language as well as English. They want restoration of the name Bde Maka Ska to Lake Calhoun and for the MPRB to engage the Native American community in addressing their environmental concerns, including restoration of indigenous plant communities. The acknowledgement of the Dakota past, including restoration of place name, is seen by many as a racial equity issue. ¹

**Sources:**

History of the Santee Sioux, United States Indian Policy on Trial. By Roy W. Meyer. 1967, University of Nebraska Press


¹ DiversityFoundation.org
In 2012 the MPRB Board of Commissioners passed a resolution to allow a memorial to Chief Cloud Man in the William Berry Park area. The memorial was to include a tree, a rock, and a plaque, and would be funded by neighborhood contributions. When the selected site flooded in 2014 and with the master plan for Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska-Harriet on the horizon, the memorial planning group decided to include memorial plans as part of the scope of the master plan.

In September of 2015, in response to advocacy from community members, the MPRB Board of Commissioners passed a resolution to add Bde Maka Ska to all the park monument signs identifying Lake Calhoun. Although members of the Native American community thought this was a “nice gesture,” they continue to seek restoration of the name Bde Maka Ska and elimination of the name Calhoun from only the lake and park (not from the parkways or other place names in the area). A majority (15-4) of the Community Advisory Committee, led by its Equity Subcommittee, supported a resolution to restore the name (see Chapter 7: Equity).

In early 2016 MPRB applied to the Minneapolis Art in Public Places program to fund art which would interpret the Native American and Dakota history and culture of the area and memorialize Mahpiya Wicasta. The project was awarded $225,000 to create public art that would be planned, installed, and maintained by the City of Minneapolis in the Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska area. The engagement with the community began in the fall of 2016. The public art will be integrated with construction improvements in the southeast corner of Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and perhaps elsewhere around the lake.

Dakota elder and Cloud Man descendant Sydney (Syd) Beane, second from left, leads a sunrise ceremony on the southeast shore of Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska in 2009 as part of the MN 150 Year Sesquicentennial. Joining him are fellow Cloud Man descendants, community members, and local politicians Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak and City Councilmember Robert Lilligren.
History Since Statehood
In 1857, only one year after Minneapolis was incorporated as a town and five years before the Dakota were exiled from Minnesota, Captain Edward Murphy donated two blocks of land to the city for a public park. 26 years later in February of 1883, legislative authority for a system of parks and parkways in the City of Minneapolis was approved by Governor Lucius F. Hubbard. One of the primary reasons the Board of Park Commissioners was created was to create parks at Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet.

Within weeks of its official inception, the Board of Commissioners hired H.W.S. Cleveland, a prominent landscape gardener, to create a comprehensive plan for development of parks in Minneapolis. In 1883, Cleveland outlined his vision of large parks connected by a system of pleasure drives or boulevards that took advantage of existing natural features, including Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet. The system later became known as the Grand Rounds. Between 1883 and 1907, the newly established Board of Park Commissioners sought through purchase, donation, and condemnation the acquisition of the shoreland around Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet.

Throughout its history, the Park Board has manipulated and altered the natural landscape for two main reasons: function and aesthetics. The most substantial changes took place during the tenure of Theodore Wirth, superintendent of parks from 1906 to 1935. Under his guidance, the park system grew from 1,810 acres to more than 5,000. Lakes were dredged, shorelines filled, islands lost and rebuilt, springs buried, creeks rerouted, ponds built, swamps drained, and a lake or two eliminated. Wirth wanted the people of Minneapolis to enjoy their park system and built many recreational amenities. In 1911, Wirth completed the dredging of the lagoon between Lake of the Isles and Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and the construction of bridges over the linking channel; one for the railroad and the other for traffic on Lake Street.

During the Great Depression, many federally funded projects were built, including the stone walls (1940s Work Progress Administration or WPA) along the shores of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet. The next great investment in the Chain of Lakes came in the 1970’s when a team of landscape architects Eckbo, Dean, Williams and Austin made improvements to the parkways and lighting along the Grand Rounds.
1888
All of Lake Harriet was under the Park Board’s jurisdiction.

1910
All of Lake Calhoun came under the Board of Park Commissioners’ control.

1890
Land between the two lakes was acquired to create Interlachen Park, which is now known as William Berry Park.

1911
The channel between Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake of the Isles was completed.

1971
The Citizens Parkway Committee’s recommendations for Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Lake Harriet were published.

1997
Comprehensive Plan for the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park is completed.

2012
A charrette study is conducted for the North Calhoun and South of Lake of the Isles areas.

Image of east Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska Parkway at 36th Street in the early 1900’s. Source: Minnesota Historical Society
Excerpts from David Smith’s 2008 “Parks, Lakes, Trails and So Much More”, contained in the Appendix, give a much more detailed history of the acquisition and development of the two lakes and of William Berry, the parkland between them.

In the 1990’s MPRB helped form the Clean Water Action Partnership to make improvements to water quality in the lakes and also hired the landscape architecture firm of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates to prepare the 1997 Chain of Lakes Comprehensive Plan. These two major planning efforts and subsequent construction projects, including wetland restorations, did result in improvements to lake and parkland conditions. In 1997 separated bicycle and pedestrian trails around the lakes were widened and repaved. Almost twenty years later, annual visits have doubled to an all-time estimated high of 5.5 million (2014) and much of the park infrastructure is aging. A charrette or workshop in the fall of 2012 to discuss issues impacting north Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska showed that the community was eager to discuss the future of the two most popular lakes in the Chain of Lakes. With $3.7 million slated for planning and capital improvements, a master planning process began in 2015.
“Look forward a century, to the time when the city has a population of a million, and think what will be their wants.”

Horace W. S. Cleveland

Source: Minnesota Historical Society