

# Section 1: Introduction

Why is it so important for Golden Valley to plan for and manage its natural resources? Because the benefits of being surrounded by a healthy natural environment are many. They include a clean and abundant supply of groundwater, surface water; clean air to breathe; and a healthy mix of terrestrial and aquatic habitats, such as forests, prairies, and wetlands. These features are necessary to promote a vibrant and diverse human, animal and plant community. Although not always visible, but every bit as important, is their contribution to the quality of life enjoyed by Golden Valley residents.

While natural resources are part of what makes up the urban environment of the City – both public and private - those publicly owned spaces that have been identified as Nature Areas, Nature Preserves, Greenbelts, and Open Spaces will be the primary focus of this Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP).

An overarching goal of this plan is to provide the City and the community with natural resources management information, i.e., how to rid one's property of buckthorn, etc., volunteer opportunities (nature area clean-up), and inspiration (public outreach) with the hope of creating a public-private partnership to care for all of the green and natural areas within the city - regardless of ownership.

## **Purpose of the Plan**

The purpose of the NRMP is to guide decision makers and staff on how to best manage Golden Valley's natural resources (water, land, vegetation, and wildlife) based on the community's vision, goals, objectives, and policies. It will help determine what actions could best be taken to help preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the City of Golden Valley's nature areas, green corridors, and open spaces.

## **Planning Process**

The City of Golden Valley hired Short Elliott Hendrickson, Inc. (SEH) in 2014 to work with the Environmental Commission, the Open Space and Recreation Commission, City staff, and the public to prepare the Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP). Planning efforts began by reviewing related planning documents including the updated Natural Resources Inventory and Parks and Land Use sections of the City's 2008 Comprehensive Plan. A community survey was

also developed requesting input from residents on the existing nature areas and on their future desires and needs.

The Plan includes goals, objectives, policies, natural resource management recommendations, specific nature area management action plans, and an implementation program identifying specific and achievable projects, include priorities, timelines and responsibilities.

## **Plan Approach**

The planning process goes well beyond reacting to problems after they occur and, for the purposes of this Plan, the following action steps define the general approach to developing the plan:

1. Assess the current condition of natural resources based on the 2013 Natural Resources Inventory Update.
2. Review related planning and natural resource management efforts
3. Garner public input on Golden Valley's natural resources including condition and use of nature areas and open spaces.
4. Identify issues and needs based on Public, Environmental and Open Space and Recreation Commissions, Nature Area evaluations, and City staff knowledge.
5. Establish realistic, attainable, and affordable goals, objectives, and policies.
6. Develop a process to implement those goals, objectives, and policies. Develop management strategies and action plans for specific nature areas, based on an Adaptive Management model for achieving goals and objectives.
7. Identify opportunities to provide natural resource education and community involvement, including volunteer opportunities.
8. Identify partnerships and grant opportunities to help the City achieve its natural resource objectives.

## **2013 Natural Resources Inventory Update**

Golden Valley's desire to develop a natural resources management plan is not a new idea. The impetus began back in the late 1990s with a discussion among residents, City staff and the Environmental Commission, which had been established by the City Council. The results of that dialogue resulted in a list of natural resource based needs for the City. The needs included:

- Controlling nuisance (invasive) vegetation in wetland and upland plant communities within the city.
- Identifying restorable ecological communities on city property.
- Identifying potential green space and greenways.
- Inventorying rare or uncommon plant species.
- Conducting a wetland quality assessment.

It was decided at that time the implementation of management plans and management strategies would be the best approach to solving these identified issues. To begin the planning process, it was determined that the City's natural resources needed to be inventoried.

Fortunately for Golden Valley, the 1990's was the beginning of a collaborative effort to complete vegetative mapping of the entire Twin Cities Metro Area. Participants included the Metropolitan Council (Met Council), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), and county and city governments. Coinciding with this effort was work done by the MNDNR to develop a new vegetative and land use mapping system known as the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS). This method was to be used statewide, and while completed in portions, it integrated and standardized land use classifications for more effective and efficient use.

In 2001, by recommendation of the City's Environmental Commission, the City Council issued a resolution to prepare a natural resources inventory. Golden Valley participated in the MNDNR "Metro Greenways Planning Grant" that required a 50 percent match from the City. The following year, the City commissioned SEH to complete a natural resources inventory throughout the city, using the MLCCS classification system.

An update of the natural resources inventory was completed in 2013, and followed the same methodologies and land use definitions of the 2002 inventory. High resolution 2013 aerial photographs were used to review changes to land use in the 10 years between the two surveys. The two primary purposes were to track the gain or loss of natural areas, and the change in percentage of invasive species present.

In general, the changes made to the inventory were relatively minor. A total of 73.69 acres of land changed classification, and of that roughly half were clarifications that could be made using better resolution on the 2013 aerial photographs. The changes constitute a little over 1% of the

land area of Golden Valley. A summary of some of the more significant changes are summarized below.

Area 1 – General Mills: The General Mills Corporation completed a major expansion of their corporate center. This expansion resulted in an increase of new buildings and parking lot, and a reduction of forested habitat.

Area 2 – General Mills Nature Preserve: The City of Golden Valley completed the construction of a wetland bank, which added emergent marsh, native prairie, and expanded the floodplain of Bassett Creek.

Area 3 – Residential Development: Several small residential developments occurred. Most notable is the development of the wooded ridge between Twin and Sweeney Lakes.

Area 4 – New Storm Water Ponds: Through completion of the City's Pavement Management Program, the City added several storm water ponds for additional water quality treatment.

Both the 2002 and 2013 inventories both reviewed the cover of invasive species within the nature areas, open spaces, and parks. Of particular interest was the percentage cover of buckthorn, although coverage of reed canary grass, purple loosestrife, smooth brome grass, and crown vetch were also measured. Between 2002 and 2013, the overall coverage of invasive species has not changed significantly. Buckthorn, for example, is still prevalent, and can be found throughout the city. Management efforts, however, have demonstrated improvements. Decreasing density can be verified in areas where active management of buckthorn has occurred. Where management has not occurred, some areas are relatively unchanged, or buckthorn density has increased. Specific changes are discussed in the individual nature area descriptions, but the overall message is that effective control takes a dedicated program, many hours of implementation, and is most effective when coordinated at a large scale.

## **Review of Related Plans, Studies and Programs**

A number of planning and management efforts related to natural resources have taken place within the city of Golden Valley and surrounding area within recent years. This document builds upon the work done by Golden Valley and other groups and governmental entities. It is important to understand that this body of work serve as working documents. As such, the intent of this plan is to complement, not conflict, with information found within these key documents.

The following is a summary of the natural resource-related policies, goals, and studies used in development of the NRMP.

**Envision Golden Valley, A Shared Vision for Golden Valley's Future (2002):** A Visioning Guide produced by the City of Golden Valley and the Golden Valley Rotary that summarized input from the city's residents to create a shared vision on topics such as development, transportation, community engagement, environment, recreation, and government. The vision of the NRMP is based in part upon the environmental section of this guide.

**City of Golden Valley Comprehensive Plan 2008-2018 (2008):** A decennial update to its (1999) comprehensive plan produced by the City. The Plan contains natural resource related chapters including Parks (Chapter 6) and Surface Water (Chapter 10). While a Natural Resources Chapter was not included in this update, a brief section discussing the Nature Areas and Preserves of the city including objectives and policies was included in the Parks Chapter of the comprehensive Plan.

**Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan (2010):** The plan was produced in 2010 and updated by the City of Golden Valley in 2012 to outline Golden Valley's objectives and approaches to be used to meet current and anticipated impact of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) on the City's urban forest resource. The plan is also to be used as a pest management blueprint for staff and residents to follow.

**A Sustainable Vegetation Management Plan for Golden Valley (2012):** A report produced by University of Minnesota students in cooperation with the City of Golden Valley and the College of Food, Agricultural and Nature Resources. The study addressed options for sustainable management of the City's natural resources with the overall goal of creating a plan that would increase aesthetic and ecological benefits throughout the parks, ponds, and golf course, while lowering maintenance costs. Students presented their ideas and recommendations to the Environmental and Open Space and Recreation Commissions, City Council, and staff. One recommendation was the development of a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP), which the Environmental Commission included as the top priority in its 2013 work plan.

**City of Golden Valley, MN, Natural Resources Inventory & Minnesota Land Cover Classification System Mapping, Hennepin County Department of Environmental Services (2008):** A city-wide inventory and Minnesota Land Cover Classification System mapping of

Golden Valley's natural resources prepared by Hennepin County. The inventory includes a natural resource inventory, results, and management recommendations. The Hennepin County inventory is similar to what was prepared by the City of Golden Valley in 2002.

**Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission (BCWMC) *Watershed Management Plan*** (2004): The plan provides information on climate and precipitation, topography, soils, geology and groundwater resources, land use and public utilities, surface water resource information, natural communities and rare species, and pollutant sources in the Bassett Creek Watershed. The plan also outlines issues, goals and policies related to water quality, flooding and rate control, erosion and sediment control, stream restoration, wetland management, groundwater, public ditches, and public involvement and information.

**Bottineau Light Rail Transit Corridor (LRT) and Station:** A proposed dedicated transit way that would extend from downtown Minneapolis to northern Brooklyn Park. The line would travel through Golden Valley along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad Corridor. Also proposed are potentially two LRT stations planned for Golden Valley – one at Plymouth Avenue and one at Golden Valley Road. While there is an opportunity to create a gateway into Golden Valley along the corridor, there is concern how its development would impact the natural resources along the corridor, particularly in the Mary Hills Nature Area.

**Sochacki Park/Mary Hills/Rice Lake Nature Area Initiative:** A 2014 initiative between Three Rivers Park District, and the cities of Robbinsdale and Golden Valley to explore opportunities for creating a joint partnership parks complex. The complex made up of Robbinsdale's Sochacki Park and Golden Valley's Mary Hills and Rice Lake Nature Areas would provide a range of natural resource based activities including additional trail connections between Sochacki Park, Mary Hills and Rice Lake Nature Areas, and to the future Crystal Lake and Bassett Creek Regional Trails. Proposed projects would also include water quality improvement and invasive species management, an increased vegetative buffer adjacent to the propose Bottineau LRT, and an off-leash dog exercise area.

**Theodore Wirth Park Master Plan:** A Master Plan for Theodore Wirth Regional Park is being developed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, with adoption planned for 2015. The focus of the plan is two-fold. The first is to protect and enhance Wirth Park's unique natural and ecological resources and the second is ensure that Wirth Park's natural resources will be a catalyst for recreational and visitor experiences.

## Public Participation

Community input is key to natural resource management planning including the management of the city's nature areas. Understanding the needs, desires and concerns help to determine future priorities, such as, vegetative management and provisions for amenities within the nature areas such as trails, benches along the trails, water access, habitat education signs, and pet clean-up systems.

### Project Committee Meetings

The overall design and execution of the natural resources planning process relied on monthly Environmental Commission meetings and joint meetings with the Open Space and Recreation Commission that were open to the public and meetings with City staff. Meetings focused on the planning process, issues and opportunities, planning element updates and reviews.

### Community Survey

To help inform the planning process, the City of Golden Valley developed an on-line Natural Resources Survey. The purpose was to obtain input from citizens regarding Golden Valley's natural resources, nature areas, and open spaces early on in the process. Questions asked ranged from which nature areas/open spaces do people visit and why to user satisfaction with the quality of the nature areas. Questions also asked what could be changed to improve the nature areas and what was felt to be most effective in protecting them. The survey also asked if responders would be interested in volunteer opportunities related to maintaining and enhancing Golden Valley's nature areas.

## Organization of the Plan

The Natural Resources Management Plan is presented in six sections with accompanying appendices and is described as follows:

**Introduction:** Describes the Plan's purpose, planning process, approach, 2013 Natural Resources Inventory Update summary, related planning, study and program efforts, public participation, and organization and use of the Plan.

**Background:** Provides a summary of Golden Valley's regional setting and natural history including geology, geomorphology, soils, hydrology, pre-settlement vegetation, existing land

cover conditions, current natural resource management practices and natural resource related public outreach and education programs.

**Goals, Objectives, and Policies:** Provides a planning and management framework including the formulation of a vision statement, along with goals, objectives and policies based on current conditions and issues and needs identified by the Environmental and Open Space and Recreation Commissions, city staff, and public input.

**Issues and Needs:** Provides a summary of key issues and opportunities related to the overall condition and management of Golden Valley's natural resources. This section also provides a summary of issues and opportunities pertaining to the nature areas, green corridors, and open spaces in the city. Issue analyses and needs assessments are based on results of the 2002 Natural Resources Inventory and 2013 update, review of related planning studies, meetings with City commissions and staff, community survey and site evaluations.

**Natural Resource Management Strategies:** Provides a series of prioritized recommendations for each city-maintained nature area including vegetation management, restoration, enhancement and site amenity improvements such as signs, trails, benches, fences, etc. Also includes recommendations for more general management strategies that can be applied across all nature areas and open spaces in the City.

**Implementation:** Provides guidance for maintaining accountability, monitoring activities, procuring funding, developing procedures and regulations, and community education and involvement.

**Appendices:** Provides supplemental material.

## **Use of the Plan**

The Natural Resources Management Plan presents a vision for the future management of Golden Valley's natural resources and a framework for community action. The Plan is derived through public input and is based on the community vision, goals, objectives and policies. City Council, commission members, staff, other governmental entities, organization or any citizen interested in the city's vision for managing its natural resources, particularly Golden Valley's Nature Areas will find this document useful for understanding the goals, objectives and policies



guiding land acquisition, improvements and maintenance. City staff will use this document to establish priorities and annual work plans for natural resource related projects.