

## Section I

# Introduction and Planning Framework

### Overview

The project focused on the preparation of a comprehensive master plan for St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park. The planning process took into consideration past master plans for the site, the setting, recreational and educational needs of the region, and the natural and cultural resources of the park itself. The master plan establishes a vision for the park and provides the guidelines for its ecological management and physical development to appropriately accommodate public use. The plan is also a tool for public presentations and preparing funding applications.

Although comprehensive, the master plan still remains dynamic. It should be viewed as firm enough to guide park improvements, yet flexible enough to change based on increased knowledge, experience and changing public needs as the plan is implemented.

### Interrelationship with the Previous Master Plan

The last master plan for the park was completed in 1996, when it was referred to as the Ceridian Recreation Area. Although a number of the provisions of that master plan remain valid, changes in the park's size, recreational demands, and approaches to natural resource stewardship warranted a complete updating. As of the date of adoption of this plan, the past plans are no longer valid, except from a historical perspective.

### Planning Framework

The planning framework provided structure to the process of updating the previous master plan. The framework consisted of a number of components:

- ▶ Public involvement
- ▶ Washington County involvement
- ▶ Public agency involvement
- ▶ Planning process

*Through formal and informal meetings, members of the community had direct access to the consultant team and County staff.*

## Public and Washington County Involvement

Given the notable interest in the future development and protection of St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park, the general public and special interest groups were invited to participate in the planning process on a number of occasions. Through formal and informal meetings, members of the community had direct access to the consultant team and County staff. The public's input throughout the planning process proved very fruitful and strengthened the final plan. (Note that the overall project schedule of meetings is defined on page 2.11 in Section II.)

In addition to general public involvement, the Washington County Parks and Open Space Commission provided oversight of the planning process at critical check points. Being familiar with local conditions, public demand for facilities, and the history of the park, Washington County Parks staff inherently played an instrumental role in the master planning process. Under the planning framework, the commission and staff specifically focused on the following key roles:

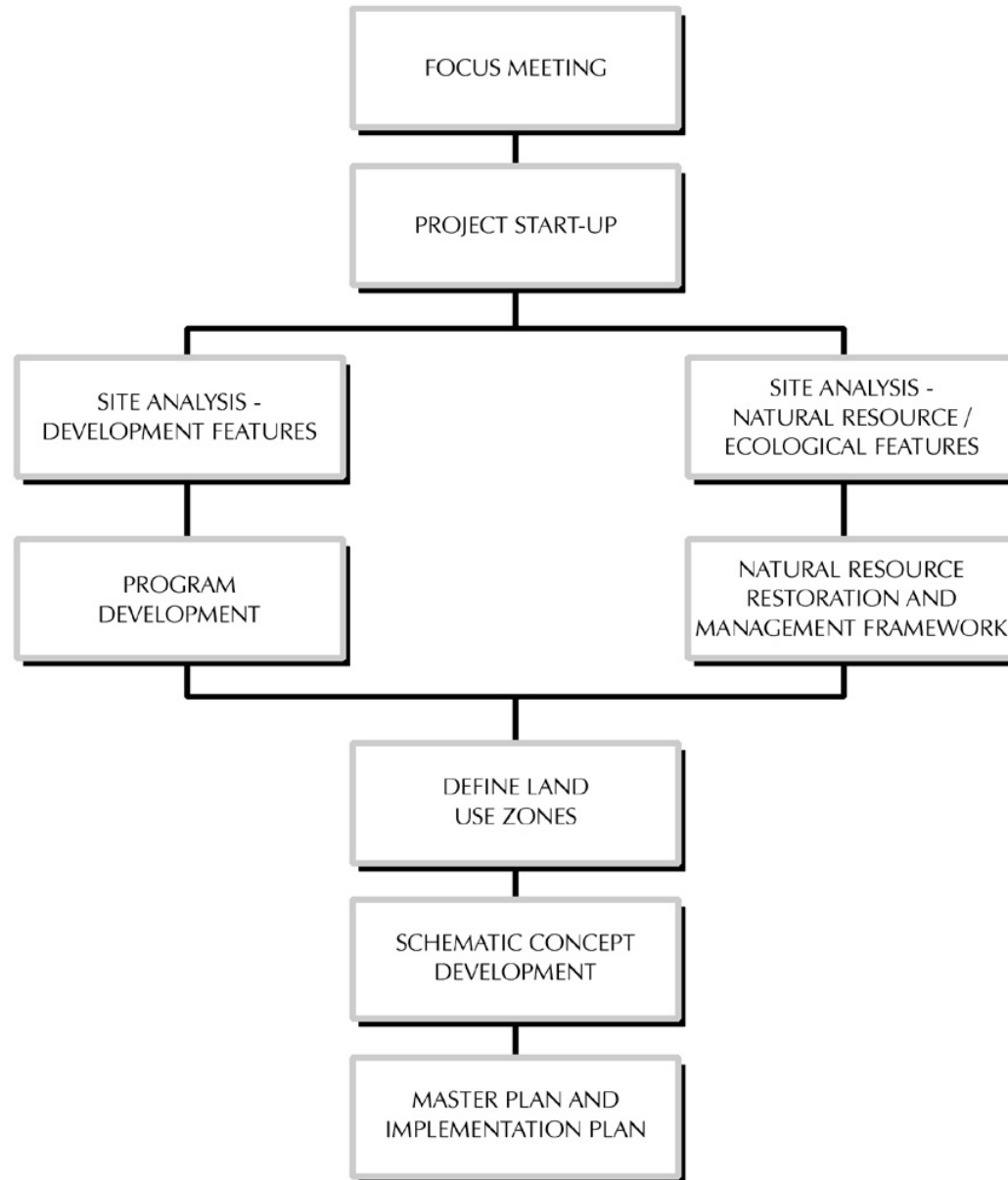
- ▶ Provide perspective and feedback on all planning issues.
- ▶ Review and comment on all findings and master plan outcomes.
- ▶ Reach consensus on a final master plan.

## Public Agency Involvement

To ensure congruency between agencies, Washington County invited representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (through the Natural Resources Inventory Study), and Denmark Township to participate in the planning process. The master plan takes into consideration the results of meetings with representatives from these agencies.

## Planning Process

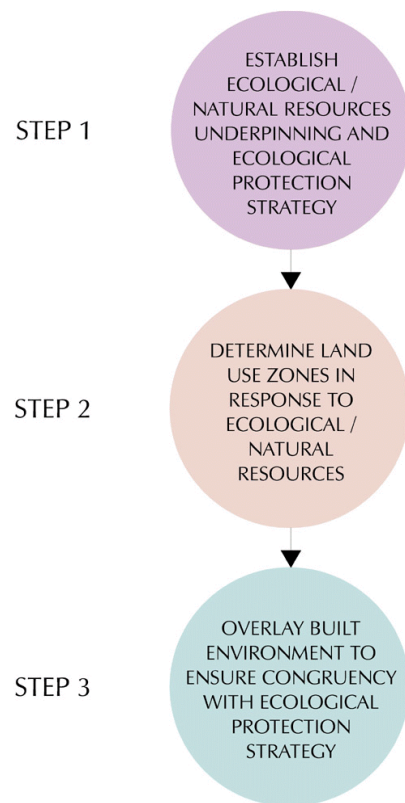
The planning process followed a step-by-step procedure in which public participation was an integral part. The process was structured to allow for a series of internal checks and balances, which ensured that pertinent issues were considered and addressed in the proper sequence and with due diligence. It also ensured that ecological issues were kept at the forefront of all discussions and land use decisions. Figure 1.1 illustrates the key benchmark steps in the planning process.

*Figure 1.1 - Key benchmark steps in the planning process.*

## Balancing Human Use and Ecological Protection

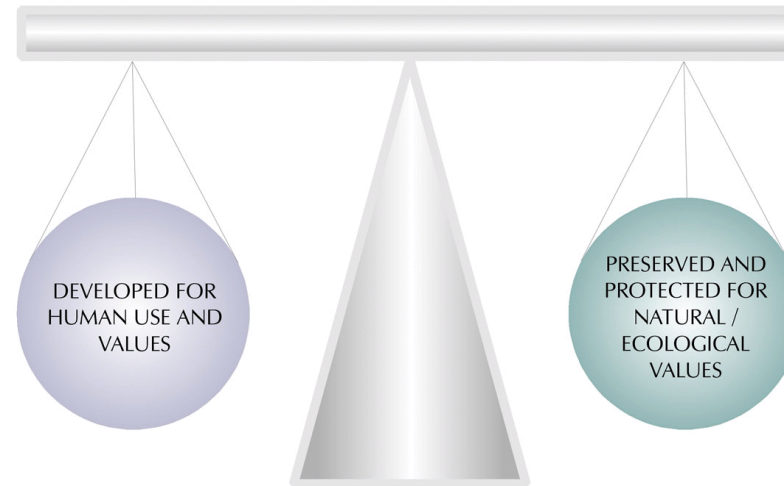
*Inherent to this project was finding the right balance between human use of the park and its ecological preservation and protection.*

*Figure 1.3 – Ensuring that ecological values set the stage for human uses.*



Inherent to this project was finding the right balance between human use of the park and its ecological preservation and protection, as illustrated in figure 1.2.

*Figure 1.2 – Balancing human use and ecological preservation.*



Since regional parks place significant emphasis on preserving ecological values, the planning process went to extensive lengths to ensure that the natural qualities historically present within the park would be restored and become a major aspect of the final master plan. In addition to its intrinsic values, restoring the park's natural landscape will also enrich the human, or cultural, experience for those visiting the park – especially in light of the recreational trends defined in Section II.

Given that the stewardship of the natural landscape is central to the park's vision, establishing its ecological underpinnings was the first fundamental step in the planning process, as shown in figure 1.3. Once this was established, the physical development of the park for recreational uses was considered, as defined by steps 2 and 3 in the illustration. Under this model, the planning strategy recognized the importance of the park in accommodating the public's expectation for pleasure, health, and well-being through the provision of recreational facilities. At the same time, the ecological values of the site would also be respected in determining the type, extent, and location of these facilities.