

## Chapter 2: Recreation Demand Forecast

### Introduction

Lake Elmo Park Reserve provides a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities that are popular with residents of Washington County and the region. The demand for specific facilities and programs is determined chiefly by trends in recreation interests and demographics. Participation in traditional activities such as hiking, swimming and nature observation continues to grow and the number of participants in newer activities such as mountain biking and orienteering is also expanding. Population growth and the fact that people are devoting more time to leisure activities create a growing need and greater demand for the type of facilities that may be offered by the county at Lake Elmo Park Reserve. The planning process considered the following information sources to aid in identifying trends affecting user patterns and recreation needs relating to the park:

- Input received from residents, county staff, county officials and other stakeholders
- Washington County 2004 Visitor Study
- Washington County Parks Division 2004 Annual Report
- MNDNR 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation survey of Minnesotans
- Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2004
- U.S. Census Data

### Demographics

The population in Washington County and the seven county Metropolitan Area has grown steadily since 1990 with the county’s growth rate being three times that of the overall state. The U.S. Census Bureau projects continued growth in the county and Metro Area through 2030. Figure 2.1 shows growth statistics for this period.

Figure 2.1

Metropolitan Council Household Forecasts for Washington County:

<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2120</u>	<u>2030</u>
49,246	71,462	93,949	116,834	138,117

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### Metropolitan Council Population Forecasts for Washington County:

<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2120</u>	<u>2030</u>
145,880	201,130	244,732	296,693	342,620

### Metropolitan Council Household Forecasts for the Metropolitan Area:

<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2120</u>	<u>2030</u>
875,504	1,021,256	1,202,539	1,369,984	1,496,607

### Metropolitan Council Population Forecasts for the Metropolitan Area:

<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2120</u>	<u>2030</u>
2,288,729	2,642,062	3,028,102	3,376,723	3,639,750

The age profile of Washington County residents (see Figure 2.2) is similar to the state averages for those under 5 and under 18, however, only 7.6% of county residents are over 65 compared to 12.1% of state residents. The male to female ratio is the same as the state average.

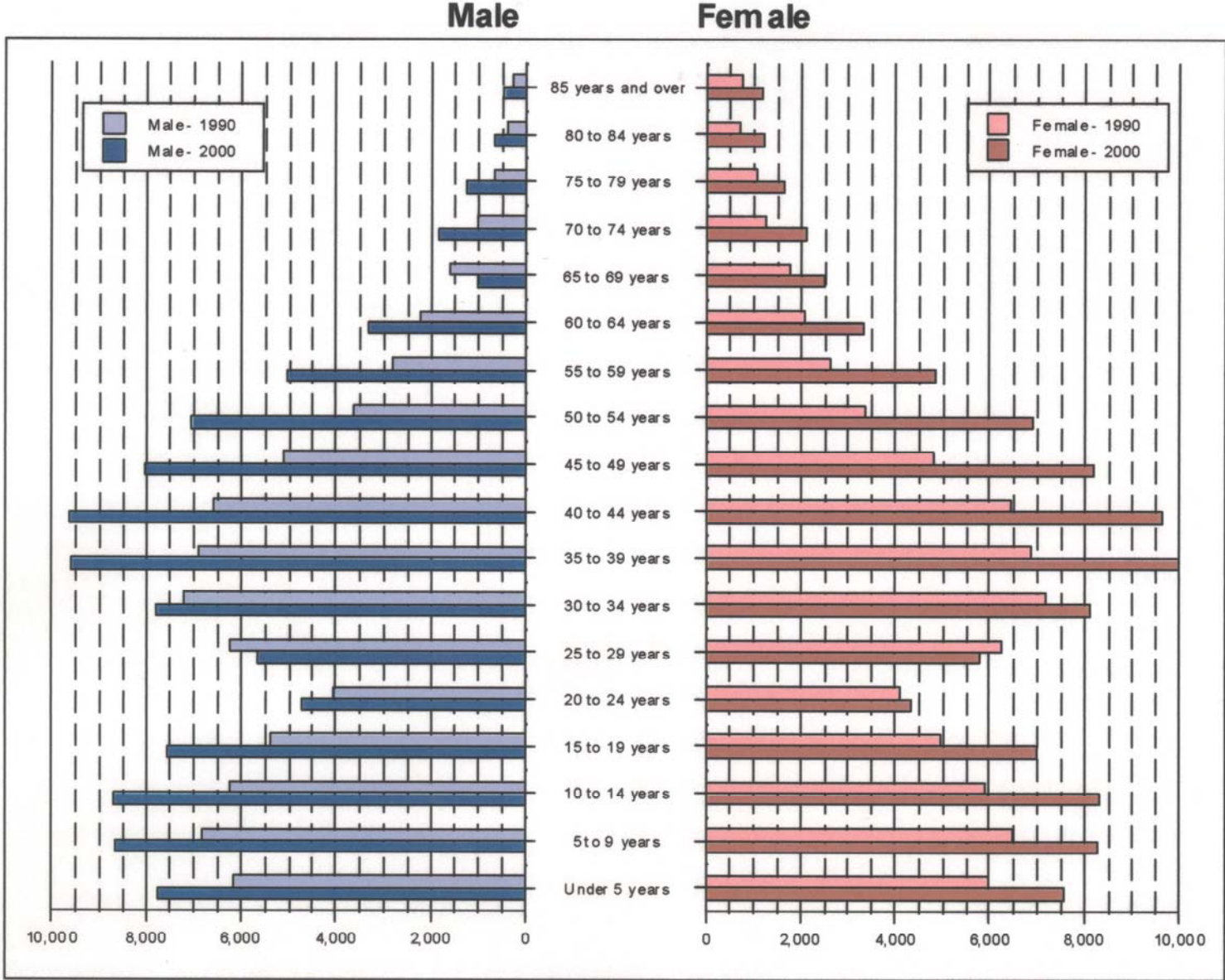
Washington County residents are somewhat more affluent than the average Minnesotan which is evidenced by a higher median household income (\$66,305.00 vs. \$47,111.00), fewer individuals with incomes below the poverty level (2.9% vs. 7.9%) and fewer multi-unit housing structures (12.5% vs. 22.3%). Income affects the ability of people to pay for equipment and fees required to participate in leisure activities and to pay transportation expenses required to gain access to the activities.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resource’s (MNDNR) ‘2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesotans’ (ORPSM) states: “Most of Minnesotan’s outdoor recreation occurs near home and within the state. Just under 70 percent (67%) of all recreation use (hours) is within a half-hour drive of home, and nearly 90 percent (89%) occurs in Minnesota.”

LEPR is a 15 minute drive from the heart of St. Paul and approximately 30 minutes from Minneapolis. Development is spreading rapidly from the Metro core in all directions to Anoka, Carver, Scott, Dakota and Washington Counties. As development expands into rural areas, urbanites must travel farther to experience fewer havens of green open space.

Many people have an inherent need to escape, occasionally, from city environs to a rural or “natural setting”. LEPR joins Afton and William O’Brien State Parks, St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park and the St. Croix Valley as major, regional, recreation open space destination in Washington County. LEPR is the nearest of these facilities as recreators travel east from the Twin Cities area into the county. The park’s

Figure 2.2  
 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary of Tape File 1 (100% Data) Matrices P1, P5, P11, P12.  
 U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census, Census 2000 Summary File (SF 1) 100 – Percent Data, P12. SEX BY AGE [49] – Universe: Total population



proximity to I-94, I-694 and Hwy. 36 provides clear, convenient access. The 2004 Washington County Visitor Study indicates that, during the years 2001 - 2004, 40% of the park visitors were out-of-county residents.

The number of visitors to LEPR in 2004 was 476,859. In view of the fact that statistics indicate a growth trend in leisure time among the general populace, it would be reasonable to expect that the number of visitors will increase at a rate greater than population growth. If, at some future time, the number of visitors exceeds the carrying capacity of the park and its facilities, Washington County may elect to impose limitations on park access.

It is expected that the useful life of the Master Plan will be at least 15 years. Projections based on population growth statistics shown on Figure 2.1, suggest that the number of visitors to LEPR will increase by approximately 158,725 or 30% during that period. Some of the existing park facilities such as the modern campground, picnic shelters and archery range are currently operating at full capacity during heavy use periods. The projected visitor increase highlights the need to revisit the Master Plan and prepare recommendations that will provide guidance to the county for effectively managing future development and maintenance of the park.

### **Recreation Demand**

Outdoor recreation is an important part of most people's lives. The MNDNR '2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesotans' (ORPSM) reports that 57% of Minnesotans indicate that outdoor recreation is 'very important' to their life, while another 25 percent indicate it is 'moderately important'. The remainder - comprising one in five Minnesota adults (18%) - believe outdoor recreation is of little importance. The survey also mentions that outdoor recreators have the following reasons for going outdoors (listed in order of survey rank):

1. Enjoy nature
2. Exercising and feeling healthier
3. Build bonds with family and friends
4. Escape pressures of modern life
5. Experience peace and quiet
6. Learning and Exploring

The ORPSM further indicates that the following activities are popular among Minnesota adults (listed in order of survey rank based on numbers that participate):

1. Walking/hiking outdoors for exercise or pleasure
2. Boating of all types
3. Swimming
4. Driving for pleasure
5. Picnicking
6. Fishing of all types
7. Biking
8. Visiting outdoor zoos
9. Camping of all types
10. Visiting nature centers
11. Nature observation of all types

The 'Washington County Visitor Study - A Summary of Results Among All Respondents from 2001 - 2004' indicates that responses recorded during four years of surveying park visitors resulted in the following ranking of recreational activities (based on activities in which respondents participated):

1. Biking on pavement
2. Camping
3. Walking
4. Swimming
5. Fishing
6. Boating
7. Play areas
8. Gardening
9. Nature walks/trails
10. Running

The findings of the MNDNR and Washington County surveys are generally consistent with recreation trends that have been apparent in the use of facilities at Lake Elmo Park Reserve and with input received from stakeholders during the planning process. The facilities that are existing or considered for future development in the Master Plan include the following:

- Trails including hiking, biking, skiing, snowshoeing and horseback riding
- Family, group, primitive and equestrian camping sites
- Picnic facilities/shelters and amenities
- Fishing pier
- Boat landing improvements (no expansion)
- Nature center/interpretive center
- Natural and cultural resource protection, restoration and interpretation
- Outdoor program area
- Field and traditional archery ranges

The recreation opportunities provided by these facilities are a close match to the list of the most popular activities cited in leisure and recreation studies and voiced by area recreators during the planning process. The ‘Development Plan’ in Chapter 5 of the Master Plan contains detailed information about the addition and expansion of facilities at LEPR.