



A FIELD SCAN OF OLDER ADULTS AND NATURE IN MINNESOTA

April 2024



Photo credit: Minnesota Master Naturalist Program

Acknowledgments

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Special thanks and deepest appreciation to the organizations and people doing work throughout Minnesota to connect older adults with nature. Your dedication and efforts are inspiring and help make Minnesota a better place to grow old.

Advice for readers: This document is intended to be **viewed electronically** rather than printed, when possible. To optimize readability, we recommend using Adobe’s PDF reader. Download the free Acrobat Reader, [available here](#), if necessary.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	4
Older Adult Demographics	4
Challenges and Opportunities	5
Age-Friendly Minnesota	6
Defining Nature	6
Benefits of Nature to Humans	7
Nature and Social Determinants of Health	9
Minnesota’s Natural Diversity	10
Palettes of Place: Green, Blue and White Landscapes	10
METHODS	13
FINDINGS	15
What Do Older Adults Want in Nature?	15
Older Adult Voices	17
Considerations, Barriers, and Supports Needed	21
Examples of Current Opportunities	26
RECOMMENDATIONS	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	69
ONLINE RESOURCES	71
APPENDICES	85
A. Key Informant Interviews	85
B. Organizations Responding to Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey (2023–2024)	86
C. Key Informant Interview and Survey Questions	87
D. Age-Friendly Loppet Foundation: Summary of 2023 Older Adults Survey Results	88
E. River Bend Nature Center: Summary of 2023 Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey of Older Adults	93
F. Arrowhead Regional Development Commission: Summary of 2024 Age-Friendly Community Survey, Superior Hiking Trail	96
G. Share Your Information and Feedback	99



Photo credit: Wilderness Inquiry

All flourishing is mutual.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer
Braiding Sweetgrass

Let Nature be your teacher.

—William Wordsworth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the beginning of human existence, we have been part of and tied to the natural world. While for some these ties have lessened, many Indigenous cultures live with a fundamental perspective of reverence, reciprocity, and a holistic understanding of the interdependence of all life. Over the past fifteen years, awareness of the importance of human beings' relationship to nature has increased worldwide. Increasingly, the human world is remembering and acknowledging that connecting with nature is important for people at all ages and stages, from childhood to elderhood, and that, in turn, our reciprocal attention to and care of the natural world is paramount.

This unique lens has received particular attention in growing a global children and nature movement, thanks in part to books like Richard Louv's [*Last Child in the Woods*](#) and the emergence of groups such as the [Children & Nature Network](#), which works to grow equitable access to nature so that children—and the natural world—can thrive.

However, while it is widely recognized that older adults who spend time in nature enjoy health and wellness benefits—including reduced social isolation—participation in outdoor and nature-based opportunities can come with challenges and barriers for this demographic. Biological age is not the only metric to use when thinking about how best to facilitate greater access to nature for people in the later parts of their lives. Functional ability and general health are also important factors, as are access to nearby nature and/or transportation and safety considerations.

Minnesota, a state known for its natural beauty and diverse outdoor spaces, provides an ideal environment for people of all ages to engage with and enjoy being outdoors in nature. However, little has been assembled about opportunities created specifically for older adults with an informed awareness of their particular set of needs, interests, and challenges.

It is hoped that this Field Scan of Older Adults and Nature Opportunities in Minnesota (field scan), supported with funding from an [Age-Friendly](#)

[Minnesota](#) community grant, will begin to fill this knowledge gap and serve as the starting point of deeper conversation, learning, and development of more opportunities for later life. The report shares the perspectives of organizations and individuals across Minnesota, and efforts were made to surface as much information about what is happening as feasible.

Information shared in this report comes from three primary sources: key informant interviews (see [Appendix A](#) for a list of participants), a statewide survey of organizations and people doing such work (see [Appendix B](#) for summary results), and a review of other available information (see [Online Resources](#)).

The report examines the emerging field of older adults and nature and explores some of the possibilities and considerations for how to do this work well. It presents statewide strengths, opportunities, challenges, and needs regarding older adult outdoor and nature experiences, and makes recommendations for the future. It compiles information on models, key players, perspectives of diverse groups including older adults, and suggests program, policy, research, funding, and field-building opportunities.

Undoubtedly, there is much more happening and a broader story to tell. It is hoped that this report will also offer a vehicle for readers to share more about what they know on this topic (see [Appendix G](#)). We welcome communication from others about programs and opportunities not encountered in our research—or further information about those we did! As we hope to have demonstrated in this report, there is a clear need for widespread support for and appreciation of the need for opportunities for older adults to engage with nature in our beautiful state.

This report is intended for the organizations, volunteers, and older adults themselves who are—or wish to be—creating and growing opportunities for older adults to be outside in nature. In addition, we hope it helps inform a broader conversation with policymakers, funders, community leaders, friends, families, neighbors, and anyone who can imagine taking steps to strengthen access to nature for people in the later stages of life.



BACKGROUND

Photo credit: Joelle Hoefl

Older Adult Demographics

Opportunities for older adults to connect with nature in Minnesota are vast and varied and come with challenges and considerations. Both are best informed by first considering the state’s aging demographics; the very definition of nature; its benefits and impacts on social determinants of health; and the land itself.

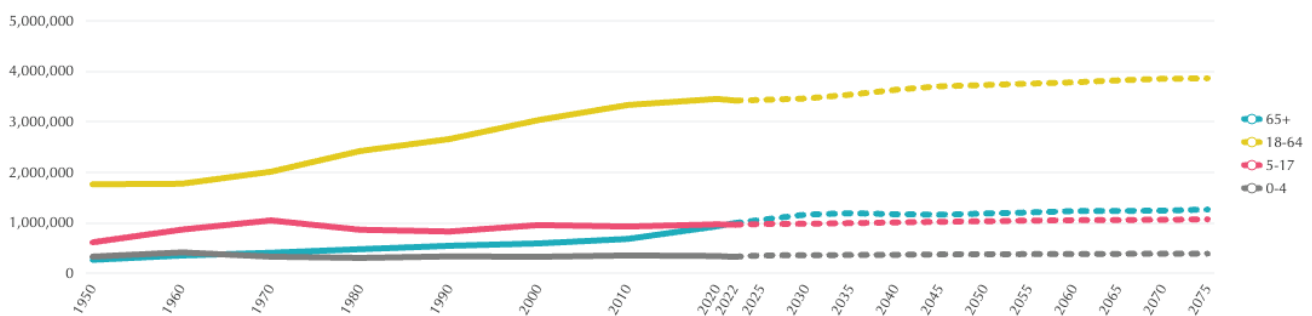
According to [Minnesota Compass](#), a project of Wilder Research, in 2022 Minnesota’s older adult population, defined as 65 years and older, was approximately 998,000 and growing. This demographic group is projected to exceed the population of school-aged

children by 2025 and to continue to increase over the next few decades. While every region in Minnesota has seen relative growth in its older adult population over the past decade, most greater Minnesota counties have a larger share of older residents than the Twin Cities metro area.

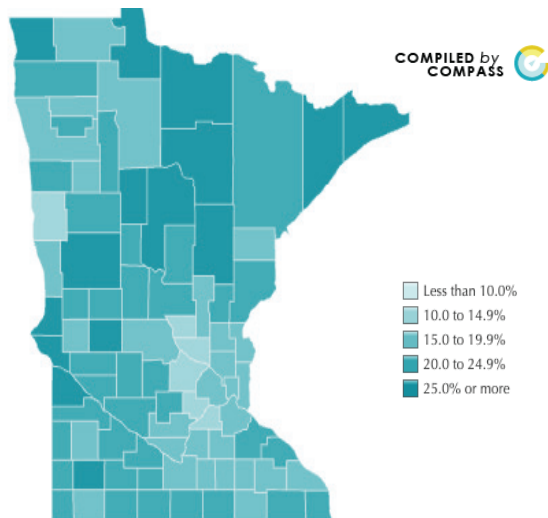
In its [“7 Things to Know About Minnesota’s Older Adults”](#) article, Minnesota Compass notes that older Minnesotans are less diverse than the state’s younger populations, with only 73,000 older adults of color in 2022—or approximately 7% of the state’s population—compared to 21% of working-age people

Population by select age groups

Minnesota, 1950-2075



COMPILED by COMPASS



Population age 65 years and older
By county, 2022

and 32% of children. In that same year, 538,011 of Minnesota older adults were female compared to 459,521 who were male. Ninety percent (90%) of older adults in Minnesota live independently in their own homes, with another 6% living with relatives or roommates, and 4% living in group facilities.

Minnesota Compass further finds that “while about 1 in 14 Minnesotans under 65 have a disability, that figure rises to 1 in 5 for Minnesotans ages 65–74, 1 in 3 for those 75–84, and 2 in 3 for those 85 and older.” These realities have implications in many spheres of community life, including access to nature.

Challenges and Opportunities

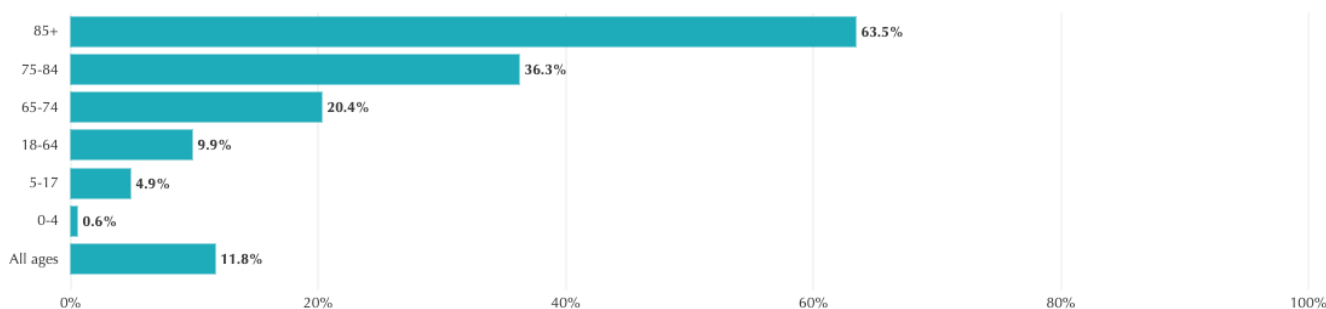
The expanding aging population in Minnesota presents both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, older adults may experience decreased mobility, social isolation, and health issues that limit their ability to engage with nature. As disabilities and other challenges increase with age, attention must be given to the wide range and often diverse and individual needs of older adults. Frequently, the focus in providing nature-based opportunities is on able older adults who are better positioned to advocate for their needs and interests. Such opportunities do not always meet the needs of people who acquire new disabilities or experience other challenges with age.

In addition, as older adults experience declines in abilities and other challenges, it is not uncommon for them to internalize the idea that they must give up things that present challenges, especially if they perceive that they are inconveniencing others. Older adults across the ability spectrum must be invited and supported to participate and remain engaged in all ways of life—including time in nature, and they deserve to live in a world where they feel valued and a sense that they belong.

On the other hand, this demographic shift provides an opportunity to develop innovative programs and policies that promote active, healthy aging, greater social connections, and environmental stewardship. These benefits compound when we recognize that

Individuals with a disability

By detailed age, Minnesota, 2022



COMPILED by COMPASS

Source of illustrations pages 4–5: Chmielewski, Megan. “7 Things to Know About Minnesota’s Older Adults.” April 29, 2022. Minnesota Compass. <https://www.mncompass.org/data-insights/articles/7-things-know-about-minnesotas-older-adults>

they accrue not only to participating older adults as individuals but also to other generations with whom older adults share so much.

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of Minnesota’s older adults report volunteering in the past year, a theme that was reinforced in key informant interviews and surveys conducted for this field scan. According to Minnesota Compass, “Minnesota’s aging population brings challenges for our state’s workforce, housing, and health care systems, but we start out with the advantages of an independent and civically engaged older adult community.” In many ways that are too seldom acknowledged, this volunteer engagement and support is a driver for many of society’s foundations.

According to the Outdoor Foundation’s [2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report](#), the number of outdoor recreation participants 55 years and older increased by more than 14% since 2019, and participants 65 years and older were the fastest-growing age category overall, with a nearly 17% increase since the start of the pandemic.

Age-Friendly Minnesota

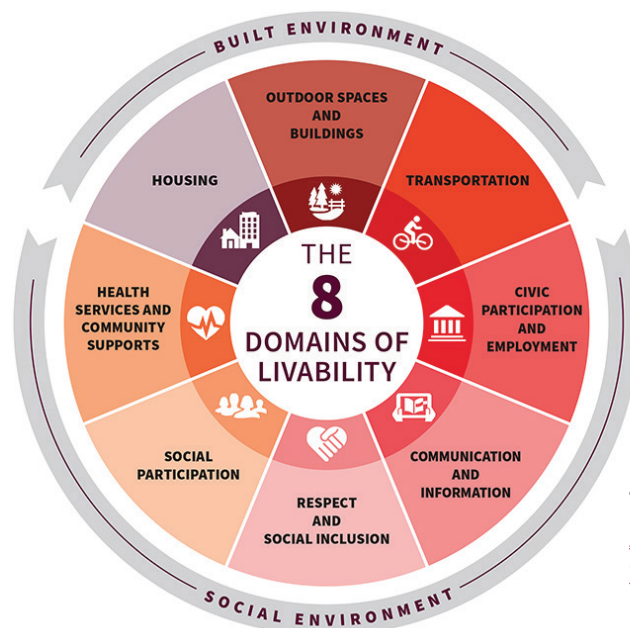
Because a rapidly aging population is a global phenomenon, there are efforts in many locations to improve the physical and social environments in which to grow old. The [World Health Organization’s Age-Friendly Cities and Communities](#) is a network

consisting of more than 1,300 cities in 44 countries with such a focus. In the United States, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) launched its [Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#) in 2012, and Minnesota recently became the 10th state to receive its “age-friendly” designation.

The [Age-Friendly Minnesota](#) (AFMN) initiative is a collaborative statewide effort to make systems and communities more inclusive of and responsive to older adults statewide. More about the initiative’s priorities can be found on [their website](#). Through a [Community Grant program](#), Age-Friendly Minnesota is supporting a variety of [local innovations and efforts statewide](#), including this report. AFMN has adopted AARP’s [eight domains of livability](#), and added a ninth, emergency preparedness. These livability domains include outdoor spaces.

Defining Nature

What do we mean when we say “nature”? *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines nature as “the phenomena of the physical world collectively; esp. plants, animals, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations.” There is a growing remembering, understanding, and acknowledgment that, along with trees and rivers and animals and rocks, we humans are nature, and that our mutual existence is connected in a reciprocal relationship.



The 8 Domains of Livability
[AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#)

While we are apt to think of nature as being exclusive to remote and vast landscapes, nature also exists on a much smaller scale. Nature is all around us in everyday spaces, including nearby parks and trails, our backyards, and even in the potted plants in our home or a bird at the feeder hanging outside our window.

As in other spaces and contexts of contemporary life, there have been calls to “decolonize” nature, in other words, challenges to the ways in which Western colonial ideologies, practices, and policies have thus far shaped our understanding and relationship with the natural world. The movement to decolonize nature calls for recognizing and rectifying historical and ongoing injustices related to land, resources, and knowledge. This movement embraces the following diverse tenets, among others:

- Emphasize coexistence, reciprocity, and stewardship.
- Value Indigenous knowledge.
- Recognize the historical and ongoing connection of Indigenous peoples to the land they have cared for.
- Address environmental injustices.
- Promote education that incorporates diverse perspectives on nature and environmental issues.

This field scan considers a broad range of activities that occur in and are directly related to interacting with and appreciating the natural world. Programs or activities that simply take place outdoors, such as pickle ball, outdoor concerts, or urban biking clubs, are outside its scope.

Benefits of Nature to Humans

Increasingly, the human world is remembering and acknowledging interconnections with the natural world and recognizing that strengthening and maintaining such connections across the life course is essential to our well-being.

With this understanding has come greater attention to building the scientific evidence for the physical, mental, social, and spiritual benefits of spending time in nature. As examples:

[Parks Rx America](#), a community health initiative whose mission is to prescribe time outdoors in parks to prevent and treat chronic disease and promote wellness, has compiled a list of [physical and mental health benefits](#) of time in nature.

REASONS TO GET OUTDOORS

- ✓ There is something for everyone! The types of activities you can do in nature are limitless. From reading, sunbathing, gardening, and walking to hiking, fishing, and canoeing. Whatever your physical capabilities might be, there is something for you!
- ✓ You don't have to go it alone! There are many groups out there to join. Volunteer Friends groups, hiking clubs, bicycle clubs, and canoeing/kayaking clubs are just a few of the available options.
- ✓ Nature, fresh air, sunshine, and exercise all produce physical and mental health benefits. With just 20 minutes in nature, you can begin to feel them.

THAT'S RIGHT! OUTDOOR ACTIVITY...

- Enhances mood
- Fights chronic illness
- Improves cognitive abilities
- Strengthens immunity
- Improves Sleep
- Prevents social isolation

Visit www.paparksandforests.org for information about state parks and forests near you!

PENNSYLVANIA
Parks & Forests
FOUNDATION

A [downloadable flyer](#) defining nature’s benefits for older adults from the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation.

The [Children and Nature Network](#), while primarily focused on increasing connections with nature for young people, keeps a searchable [research library with over one hundred articles specific to older adults](#) (65+).

The University of Minnesota’s Minnesota Landscape Arboretum’s [Nature Heals Initiative](#) designs programming that engages nature’s ability to heal, soothe, restore, and connect. They also have compiled a broad range of [research articles showing scientific evidence](#) about how nature impacts our lives.

While not exhaustive, the following physical, mental, and social and emotional benefits for older adults have been shown to come from time in nature:

Benefits of Spending Time in Nature

Physical Health

Increased physical fitness

Nature encourages physical activity such as walking, hiking, gardening, and even birdwatching, which can help older adults maintain their mobility and overall fitness.

Nature activities can enhance balance, flexibility, and coordination, reducing the risk of falls and injuries.

Decrease in diabetes and hypertension (high blood pressure) and improvements in cardiovascular health are linked with increased time spent in nature.

Outdoor activities like walking, gardening, and swimming reduce the risk of chronic conditions like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.

Improved immunity

Being in nature reduces stress hormones, which can lead to improved cardiovascular health and a stronger immune system.

Improved bone health

Exposure to natural sunlight can boost vitamin D levels, promoting healthier bones and potentially reducing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.

Pain management/relief

Nature and green spaces have been shown to have a pain-relieving effect, which can be beneficial for older adults.

Longevity/longer life

One major study from Harvard University found that living near trees and other types of vegetation can help people live up to 12 years longer, on average.

Mental Health, Cognition, and Vitality

Stress reduction

Being in nature has been demonstrated to reduce anxiety and depression symptoms.

Enhanced mood and energy

Time spent in nature is associated with improved mood and an overall sense of well-being. It has also been shown to improve sleep and help eliminate fatigue.

Cognitive benefits

Activities such as birdwatching or learning about local flora and fauna stimulate cognitive function, concentration, and memory.

Social and Emotional Well-Being

Purpose and fulfillment

Many older adults find purpose and fulfillment in gardening, which allows them to nurture living things and see the results of their efforts.

Enhanced relationships and community building

Participating in group nature activities fosters social connections and combats loneliness and social isolation.

Reduced feelings of isolation

Being in natural settings can help older adults feel more connected to the world around them, reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection.

Strong intergenerational bonds

Interacting with younger generations during nature experiences strengthens family bonds.

Environmental stewardship

Involvement in nature conservation and volunteering can provide a sense of purpose and contribute to their communities and a healthier planet.

Sense of awe/appreciation of beauty

Nature offers beautiful and awe-inspiring sights, fostering a sense of wonder and appreciation, which can improve emotional well-being.

In addition to what scientific research tells us about the benefits of being in nature for older adults, program practitioners also have important perspectives. As part of the field scan work, a survey, *Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota*, was conducted in late 2023. With over 130 responses from staff, volunteers, and others involved in the work of increasing older adults' access to and time in nature, the following broad category of benefits were identified:

- decreased isolation
- increased social engagement
- increased nature appreciation
- increased mental well-being
- increased physical well-being
- increased community engagement/
sense of purpose

The work of Minnesota native Dan Buettner on **Blue Zones**—regions in the world where people are known to live longer, healthier lives compared to the global average—emphasizes among key contributors that having a **sense of purpose** in life is important in promoting well-being and longevity. The city of Albert Lea, in Southeastern Minnesota, was the first Blue Zones Pilot Project.

[Read more about what Albert Lea is doing.](#)

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's 2020 report *[Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults](#)* found that more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and that nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated. Loneliness is defined as the feeling of being alone, and social isolation is defined as a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated. Time in nature, whether alone or with others, can be a powerful experience for humans, including older adults, often leading to feelings of connection, meaning, learning, and even awe.

"Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world."

—Dacher Keltner

Nature and Social Determinants of Health

The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODHP) a department within the US Department of Health and Human Services, leads disease prevention and health promotion efforts across the United States. Healthy aging is a top priority. The ODHP examines [social determinants of health](#), that is, the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. As part of [Healthy People 2030](#), an initiative that helps individuals, organizations, and communities committed to improving health and well-being address public health priorities, five domains of social determinants of health are identified:

- [Economic stability](#)
- [Neighborhood and built environment](#)
- [Social and community context](#)
- [Education access and quality](#)
- [Health care access and quality](#)

Two of these social determinants of health are of particular interest when it comes to older adults and nature. First, [neighborhoods and the built environment](#), which they note, "greatly affect our chances of aging well," explaining that "safe, wheelchair-accessible sidewalks, trails, and green spaces make it easier for everyone, including older adults, to get regular physical activity." Second, the relevance of social and community context. The ODHP shows how "[social cohesion](#)—strong relationships and a sense of solidarity within a group—can positively affect health: People who have strong social connections have a lower risk of health conditions like heart disease, stroke, dementia, and depression. They're also better able to cope with stress and the challenges of daily life."

Increasing time in nature is an important factor in improving the social determinants of health for people across the life span, including older adults.

Minnesota's Natural Diversity

Minnesota, which is located on [Dakota and Anishinaabe land](#), enjoys an array of natural wonders, including lakes, rivers, forests, and prairies, many accessible via parks, trails, wildlife sanctuaries, and public lands. According to [DNR's most recent park visitor study](#), there were nearly 12 million day visits to Minnesota state parks in 2022. Older adults 55+ comprised 32% of visitors, or over 3.8 million day visits. In other words, older adults are showing up in large numbers in state parks and other natural areas across the state.

According to the DNR, Minnesota consists of the following [four biomes](#) (the naturally occurring flora, fauna, and fungi that live in a location):

[Coniferous forest](#)

[Deciduous forest](#)

[Prairie grassland](#)

[Tallgrass aspen parkland](#)

These varied natural landscapes offer diverse opportunities for outdoor activities such as walking and hiking, birdwatching, swimming, hunting, fishing,



Source: Minnesota's Biomes. <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/index.html>

gardening and much more. Many older adults, however, face barriers that limit their ability to enjoy these opportunities fully. These barriers include physical limitations, lack of transportation, lack of awareness of opportunities, and a lack of programming, among other things that will be explored further throughout this field scan.

Palettes of Place: Green, Blue and White Landscapes

The natural world provides endless varieties of materials and opportunities for interactions and experiences. The term “[therapeutic landscapes](#)” was first coined by health geographer Wilbert Gesle, in 1992 in his exploration of why certain environments seem to contribute to a healing sense of place. More recently, researchers have noted the benefits of various “palettes of place,” including green, blue, and white palettes—colors reflected widely in Minnesota’s landscapes and biomes.

Researcher Jessica Finlay and colleagues, for example, have examined how [green and blue landscapes](#) specifically impact older adults, learning from 65- to 86-year-olds in metropolitan Vancouver, Canada. According to this research, landscapes embedded with therapeutic qualities include “parks, gardens, street greenery, lakes, and the ocean.” They find that “[i]nteractions with these spaces influenced participants’ perceived physical, mental, and social health. Issues of safety, accessibility, and personal perception complicated this relationship. Overall, the findings indicate that nature plays a nuanced and influential role in the everyday lives of older adults.”

While studying at the University of Minnesota, Finlay and colleagues conducted a study of 125 community-dwelling older adults in Minneapolis (mean age 71 years) examining how white landscapes—specifically winters in Minnesota—impact the perceived well-being of older adults. Finlay and her colleagues’ findings, reported in the article [‘Walk Like a Penguin’: Older Minnesotans’ Experiences of \(Non\)Therapeutic White Space](#), are illuminating and resonate with what older adults shared in field scan interviews. Their research found that “white spaces can both promote and diminish physical, mental, and social well-being. White spaces were fluid and relational, with potentially therapeutic effects uniquely negotiated by each participant.”

Tettegouche State Park naturalist Kurt Mead visits older adults in a veterans' home and another senior living facility in Silver Bay, along Lake Superior's North Shore. He brings a wide range of educational programming in the off-season to people who aren't able to make it to the park. One topic he has spoken on is "Life Under the Ice," a nod to the state park's Lax Lake. At times and in smaller groups with those physically able to navigate the park's rugged terrain,

he has offered field trips to the lake for ice fishing outings, providing safe and meaningful opportunities for some older adults to engage with white landscapes.

Considering the palettes of various natural places—green, blue, white, and other colors—is one way to open up our collective thinking about how nature is beneficial for older adults and what opportunities are worth exploring and building.



Fishing on Lax Lake. Photo credit: Kurt Mead, Tettegouche State Park Naturalist



Artist Point, Grand Marais. Photo credit: Joelle Hoeft

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking
new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*

—Marcel Proust

METHODS

The field scan is focused on one main question: What can be done across Minnesota to facilitate greater access to nature for older adults? Older adults are defined as 55 years or better, a broad category that encompasses people with often greatly varied needs and realities. It considers a broad range of nature-based activities, but explicitly does not include outdoor activities such as pickleball, outdoor concerts, or urban biking clubs. Instead, the focus is on pursuits directly related to the natural world.

The primary focus of this report is on the organizations, volunteers, and people doing the work to connect older adults to nature, including older adults as individuals. Scanning the field for what is happening across Minnesota is a first step. By collecting examples and learning from people doing the work, the intention is to begin to raise visibility and help inform a statewide conversation. A next phase of the work will seek to create a space for these organizations and individuals to share information, resources, research, and opportunities.

This report has already benefited from the generous sharing of results from three other Age-Friendly Minnesota community grantees (described in more detail later in the report and through survey summaries shared in the Appendices): Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, Loppet Foundation, and River Bend Nature Center. Each has surveyed older adults directly, thus contributing an essential and too often overlooked voice.

The information collected and shared in this field scan comes from three primary sources:

- Key informant interviews (see [Appendix A](#))
- A statewide survey of organizations and people doing such work ([Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota](#); see [Appendix B](#) for summary results), and
- A review of other available information (see [Online Resources](#)).

A snowballing technique, where people doing this work were asked to help identify others, and engaging statewide networks (e.g., Age-Friendly Minnesota networks, DNR, Minnesota Department of Health, Area Agencies on Aging, Minnesota Master Naturalists, Let's Go Fishing, senior centers, Association of Nature Center Administrators, Southeast Minnesota Parks Rx, and more) were key approaches to surfacing people and organizations doing such work. Efforts were made to engage underrepresented communities including Black, Native American, and members of communities of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and older adults with disabilities. Comprehensive online research about this topic was conducted too, both for Minnesota and elsewhere.

A word about language: A few older adults providing input to the field scan shared their preferences for the language used to describe older people. For some, identifying a person's age or using labels such as "retired" were thought to be unnecessary and even unhelpful. Some preferred the more general words "people" or "adults," adding age only when necessary. Some organizations working with this demographic use "seniors" and some use "older adults." Given the pervasive ageism present in our world, being intentional and inclusive around language is important, and open dialogue is healthy and ongoing. The field scan chose primarily to use "older adults" both because at times it was the more streamlined term and also because the [FrameWorks Institute's Communications Toolkit](#) recommends more neutral terms such as older people and older adults.

What is shared in this report should be considered an initial overview of this topic and the starting point for a collective understanding of what is happening in Minnesota to support older adult access to and engagement with the natural world. More and diverse voices are needed. It is hoped that a more robust and evolving statewide story will emerge and that deeper field exploration, learning, development, and support can occur. [Appendix G](#) offers a vehicle for readers to share more about what they know on this topic.



Photo credit: Minnesota Master Naturalist Program

What do we wish for? To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separated from.

—Terry Tempest Williams

FINDINGS

What Do Older Adults Want in Nature?

There is evidence that humans are biologically wired to seek connections with nature, a phenomenon known as the [biophilia hypothesis](#). However, the desire of older adults to spend time outside in nature varies widely based on individual preference, ability, and interest. When asked what they seek in nature-based opportunities, older adults typically mention one or more of the following reasons:

Physical health and well-being

Many older adults appreciate the physical health benefits of spending time in nature. They find that outdoor activities like walking, hiking, or gardening help them stay active, maintain mobility, and improve overall fitness.

Mental well-being

Nature is often seen as a source of stress relief and relaxation. Older adults express a desire to be in natural settings to reduce stress, alleviate symptoms of depression or anxiety, and promote mental well-being.

Social interaction

Outdoor activities can be a great way for older adults to socialize with friends, family, or community members. They enjoy group outings, picnics, or nature-based events as a way to stay connected with others.

Connection with the environment

Some older adults have a strong affinity for nature and express a desire to connect with the environment, whether through birdwatching, gardening, or simply being in the beauty of natural landscapes.

Recreation and leisure

Outdoor activities can provide a sense of leisure and enjoyment. Older adults mention hobbies like fishing, hunting, gardening, or sitting in a park as their preferred ways of spending time outdoors.

Spiritual connection and restoration

For some older adults, being in nature holds spiritual or philosophical significance. They feel closer to a higher power or find a sense of purpose and meaning or restoration in natural settings.

Preservation and conservation

Older adults who are passionate about environmental conservation express interest in being outdoors as a way to appreciate and protect the natural world for future generations.

Sensory enjoyment

The sensory experience of nature, including the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations, can be particularly appealing to older adults.

Lifelong learning

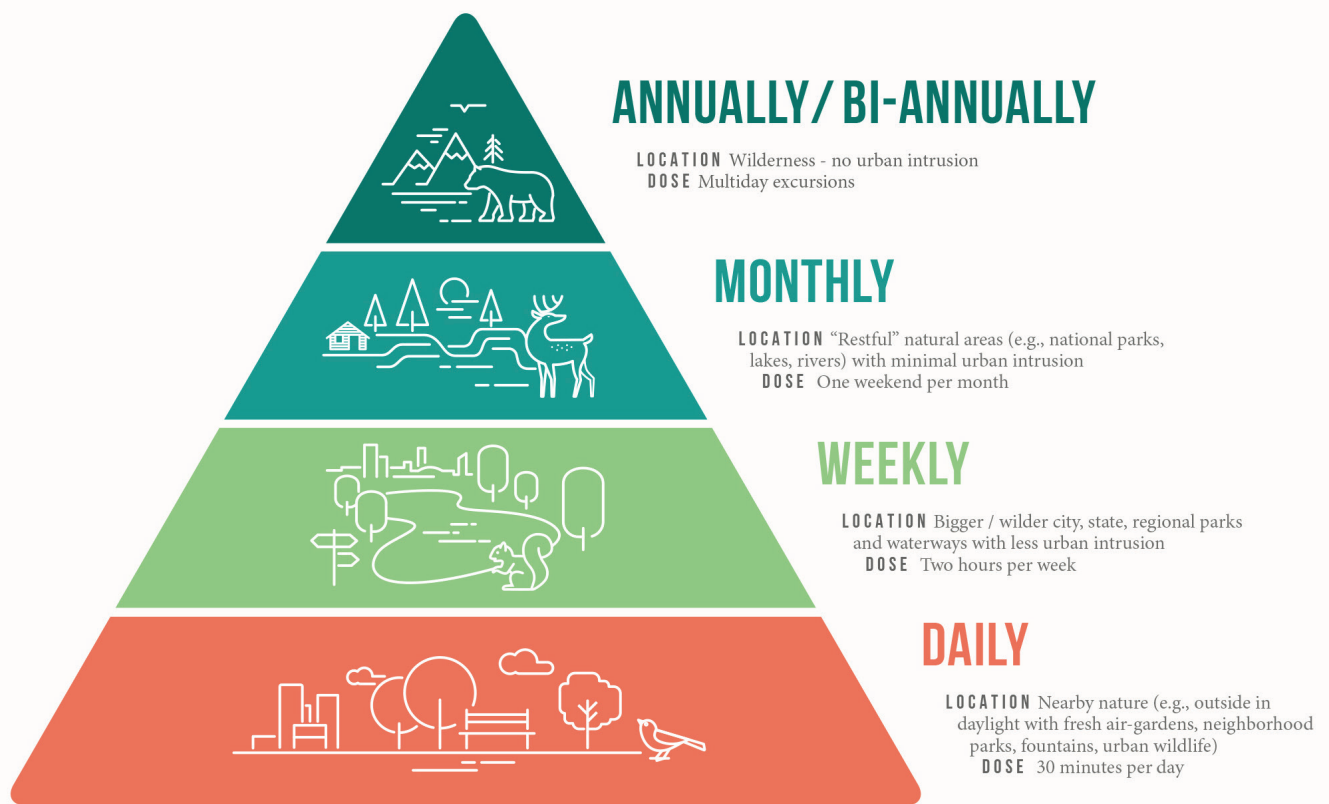
Learning about plants, wildlife, and ecosystems can be a lifelong interest. Many older adults want to continue learning and exploring nature throughout their lives.

In her 2017 book *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*, Florence Williams explores the science behind the biophilia hypothesis. She also created a Nature Pyramid, modeled after the Food Pyramid, with recommended doses of nature exposure.

While no “minimum daily requirement” of nature has yet been determined, Williams’ Nature Pyramid can be helpful in thinking about the right amount of exposure for an individual or group. The benefits of

being in nature for older adults vary based on individual preferences and physical abilities. Some older adults may prefer a peaceful walk on a paved trail in a local park, while others may engage in more strenuous activities such as hiking in the woods.

Encouraging and facilitating access to nature for older adults that accommodates individual preference and ability can have a positive impact on their overall health and well-being.



Florence Williams’ Recommendations for Time in Nature, Modeled After the Food Pyramid

“Living in the upper Midwest, it tends to be quite important to people to be able to spend time outdoors when the weather is nice.”

—Activities Director
Moorhead Rehabilitation and Health Care Center

Older Adult Voices

Asking older adults and those working closely with them what they want to do in nature is essential to providing meaningful and engaging opportunities. Survey responses provide valuable insights into the diverse motivations and interests of older adults.

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR NATURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS IN MINNESOTA

The statewide survey conducted in late 2023 asked organizations, volunteers, and people doing this work what they perceived older adults' interests in nature to be. Chief among the over 130 responses were social interactions/connections with others (55

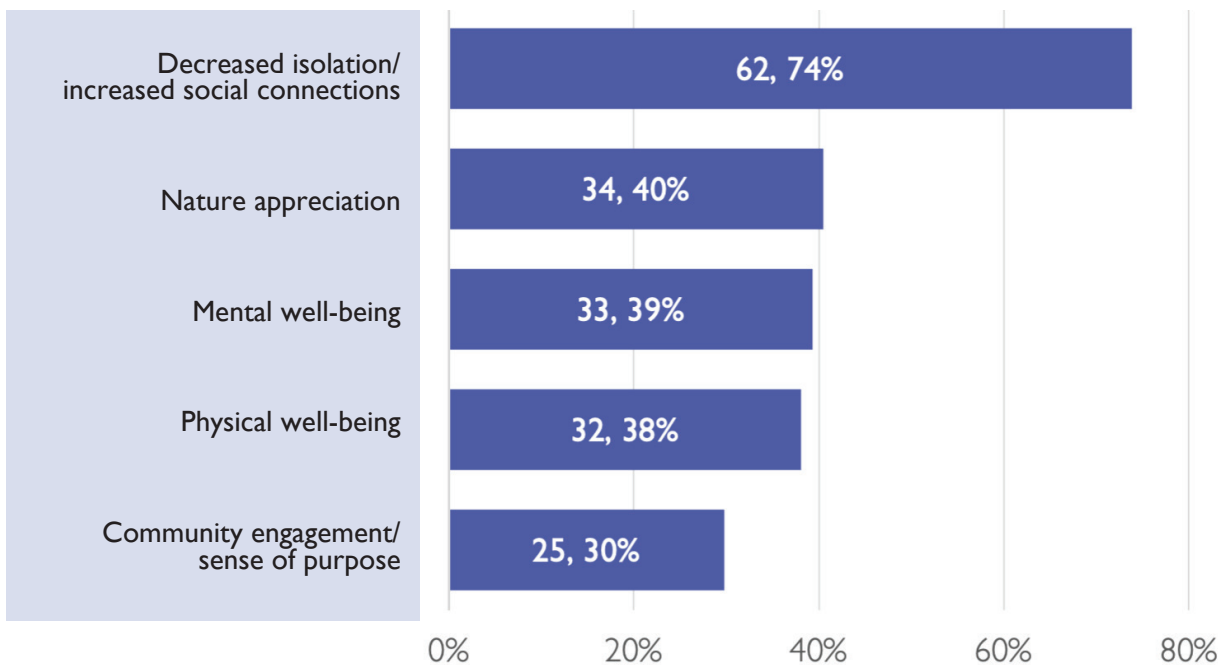
responses), being outside in nature (35 responses), fishing (25 responses), being on the lake (23 responses), and learning/education (21 responses). Organizations also shared perspectives on how they see older adults benefiting from time in nature (see chart below).

SURVEYS OF OLDER ADULTS' INTERESTS

The [2023 Age-Friendly Minnesota Community Grants](#) supported several projects that directly surveyed older adults about their interests in being outside in nature. Summaries of key findings for two of these projects—Loppet Foundation and River Bend Nature Center—follow. Additional information from Arrowhead Regional Development Commission is shared later in the report and in [Appendix F](#).

Benefits to Older Adults of Being in Nature (Organizational Perspective) (114 respondents)

When organizations doing this work identified how they saw older adults benefiting from time in nature, their responses fell into five broad themes:



Source: Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, 2023.

AGE-FRIENDLY LOPPET FOUNDATION

[The Loppet Foundation](#), which works to connect people to the outdoors through experiences that build community, is expanding outreach to and programming for older adults, with a focus on North Minneapolis and communities surrounding Theodore Wirth Park, where it is located. A survey of older adults (55+ years of age) was distributed broadly between September and December 2023, especially to residents of North Minneapolis and primarily through in-person events. Survey respondents were between 59 and 88 years old and racially diverse, reflecting the North Minneapolis neighborhood where they live: 71% were Black or African American, 27% White, and 5% American Indian or Alaska Native (responders were allowed to select multiple races).

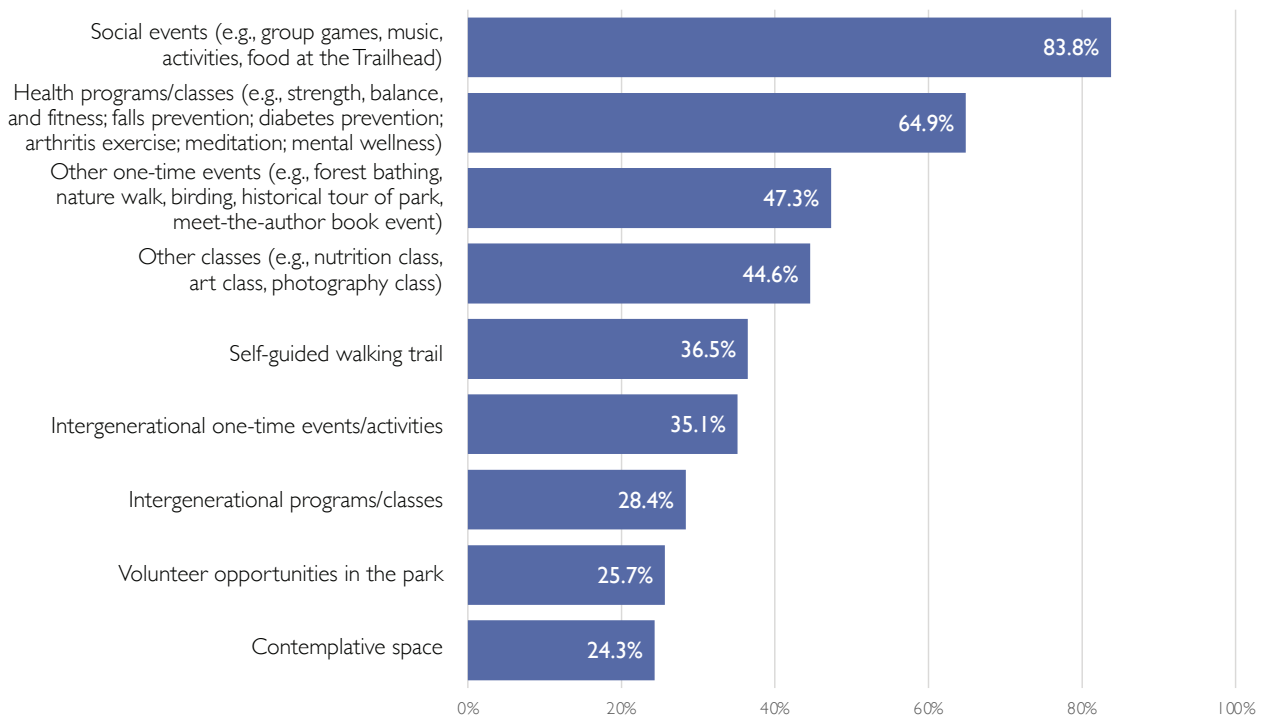
Of the 84 people who responded to the survey, a range of activities surfaced when asked their favorite things to do outside, including: walking/hiking (39), gardening/yardwork (17), biking (14), appreciating nature (9), fishing/boating (8), swimming

(6), reading (5), Nordic skiing (4), social activities (e.g., grandkids, friends, family)/classes (4), bonfires (3), and tennis (2). Other activities mentioned in the survey included: be, sleep, stay warm and safe, nothing, play, and sit.

Most (nearly 80%) of the survey respondents were interested in increasing their time outside. When asked why, responses included needing more exercise, that doing so makes them feel better, and that it's a good way to be with others. Some mentioned challenges, such as health problems and winter.

Survey respondents shared the types of future offerings from the Loppet Foundation they would like to see, including foraging classes, bodybuilding, yoga, and outdoor concerts. Respondents suggested making events free, providing transportation, getting the word out broadly (especially through community partners and churches), and, while targeting events to older adults, inviting people of all ages. Respondents also emphasized making the park a welcoming space for the surrounding North Minneapolis community.

Interest in Future Events at the Trailhead or Within Theodore Wirth Park (84 respondents)



Source: Age-Friendly Loppet Foundation Survey, 2023.



Loppet Foundation Trailhead. Photo credit (left and right): Joelle Hoeft

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

[River Bend Nature Center](#), a nonprofit nature center located in Faribault, worked with consultant Breanna Wheeler to conduct a survey targeting people with challenges to independence and fewer social connections. ([Read the full report here.](#)) They reached 203 respondents in August and September 2023 who shared outdoor activities of interest and barriers to participating in them.

The majority of respondents (68%) were female; 32% were male. One respondent identified as transgender male. Thirty-one percent (31%) of survey respondents were under age 65, 34% were between ages 65 and 79, and 35% of respondents were 80 years or better. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents reported as white, 22% as Hispanic/Latino, 6% as Black or African-American, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% Multiracial. Thirty-seven percent (37%) had a high school diploma or GED, 23% an associate or vocational degree, 16% reported some schooling, 14% a bachelor's degree, and 10% a graduate degree. Forty-three percent (43%) had incomes of \$10,000–\$39,999; 23% had incomes of \$40,000–\$69,999; 18% had incomes of under \$10,000, and 16% had incomes of \$70,000 or more.

A key takeaway of the River Bend Nature Center survey is that there is a large opportunity to increase availability of and access to nature/outdoor connections for people experiencing challenges to independence and reduced social connections. Some key findings include:

1. Levels of Interest

The highest levels of interest were expressed in unstructured, easy access, close to home, spur-of-the-moment activities that could be done whenever the person wanted.

- Driving/looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park (92%)
- Just being outside (91%)
- Being outside for social interaction (86%)
- Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (76%)
- Doing outdoor hobbies (70%)
- Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.) (68%)
- Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise (65%)
- Participating in a program or class to learn something/develop skills (49%)
- Participating or volunteering with an outdoor/environmental club or organization (27%)

2. Location Suggestions

A variety of places to participate in nature/outdoor connections were indicated (% of people indicating interest in each place):

- Nature Center (51%)
- My own backyard or shared space (50%)
- Other parks or places to walk/sit outside (48%)
- State parks or other state lands/waters (45%)
- Homes of friends, family, or neighbors (45%)
- Senior center/community center (44%)
- Community events (43%)
- Community education (39%)
- Coffee shop/restaurant/local business (35%)
- Faith community (33%)
- On my own/unstructured (33%)
- Library (30%)
- At my health care provider/clinic (21%)
- Area agency on aging programs (18%)
- Online programs (14%)



Plains cottonwood trees. Cloquet Island Park, Dayton, MN. Photo credit: Brett Whaley

“In August 2023, I got to ride in the car with my daughter and her friend to the nature center. I saw many trees that I loved and told them the names of. We took some photos. I’ve always loved cottonwood trees. When the wind blows they play music when their leaves rustle. I used to lay under one when I was a child just enjoying the sound. I want to paint a picture of a cottonwood tree!! Also enjoyed all the wildflowers that were blooming. I was not able to get out and walk but just seeing all those different trees was a big deal to me.”

—River Bend Nature Center survey respondent

Considerations, Barriers, and Supports Needed

Despite the many benefits of connecting with nature for older adults, numerous barriers and supports must be considered to ensure and facilitate access. The Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey asked organizations to rank the overall level of independence/functional ability of participants they serve in their nature-based opportunities from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the least independent. The most commonly reported response was a 3, and 83% of older adult participants were ranked 3 or higher. Notably, however, even older adults with very low levels of independence/functional ability were able to find ways to enjoy nature.

Tettegouche State Park naturalist Kurt Mead, who, as described above, brings nature-based programming to older adults who are unable to make it to the park, notes: “The residents of the Vets’ Home are all in need of a pretty high level of nursing care and are not, generally, very ambulatory. The other nursing home I work with has a more mobile population, but not by a whole lot.”

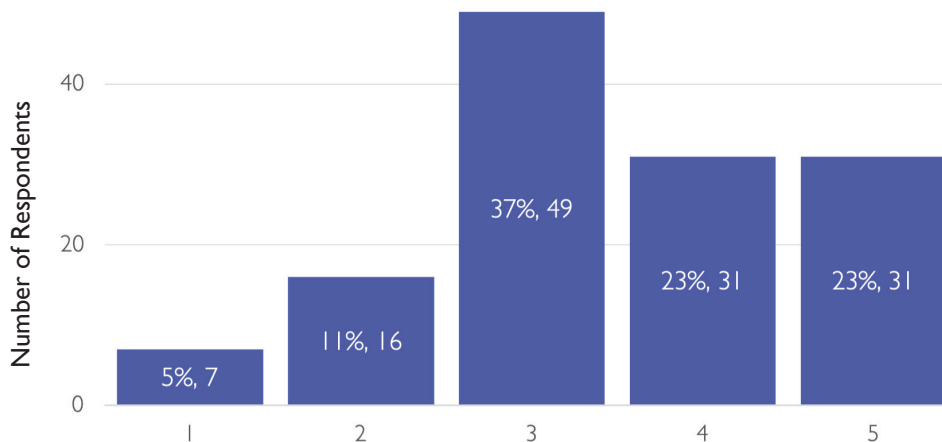
The executive director of [Volunteer Services of Carlton County, Inc./Carlton Wellness Center](#) explains, “Our gym has some very physically fit members joining in activities. Our other classes have people of varying abilities and some disabilities. Some events are all people with dementia. So, we serve all ages and abilities.”

A volunteer with the [Let’s Go Fishing – Brainerd Lake Chapter](#) notes: “Most of our guests come from senior homes and require assistance boarding, handling fishing poles and bait, and some use wheelchairs. Our boat is designed to accommodate all, and volunteers are trained to safely manage our guests.”

The Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey conducted by the [River Bend Nature Center](#) in Faribault sought input from older adults with limits to independence and social connection. They were told about the following barriers (*a full summary of results from this survey can be found in [Appendix E](#)*):

- I don’t know if there is a bathroom (69%)
- I lack energy (62%)
- The surfaces are uneven / I’m afraid of falling (59%)
- One or more of my senses is impaired (vision, hearing, balance, etc.) (59%)
- I don’t know if there is a place to sit if I get tired (57%)
- I have pain that limits me (53%)
- I don’t have the information; I don’t know what’s available (52%)
- The destination is not near me (52%)
- My physical mobility is limited, my freedom to move around depends on help from others (52%)
- Things like doors, thresholds, and stairs make it hard for me to get outside (45%)
- I don’t have money to participate (44%)
- I do not/no longer drive (40%)

Level of Independence/Functional Ability of Participants Served (134 respondents)



Source: Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, 2023.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO CONSIDER FOR OLDER ADULTS IN NATURE

Physical

Mobility challenges

Physical limitations and balance issues may make it difficult to access remote or rugged natural areas or navigate uneven terrain.

Decreased stamina

Older individuals may experience reduced endurance levels, making it more difficult to engage in prolonged physical activities such as hiking or long walks. They may need places to rest.

Vision

Limits to vision can make it difficult to read maps, navigate uneven terrain, or spot small details in nature.

Hearing

Reduced hearing acuity and greater sensitivity to background noises may affect some older adults.

Access to bathrooms

As individuals age, they may face various challenges related to mobility, continence, and personal care that make having accessible restrooms open in all seasons imperative.

Cognitive and Psychological

Cognitive impairment

Cognitive challenges, such as memory loss or difficulty processing information, may affect an older adult's ability to follow trail maps, remember paths, or engage in activities that require cognitive coordination.

Feeling unsafe or fearful in nature

These feelings can arise from both real and perceived threats and are influenced by societal factors and personal experiences. Common fears include falling, incontinence, not being able to keep up, and more.

Fear of judgment from others

Concerns about judgment from others or not wanting to stand out may lead to self-imposed limitations.

Limited awareness

Many older adults may not be aware of the available nature programs and resources.

Social and Cultural

Social isolation

Lack of nearby activities or lack of a sense of belonging can deter older adults from participating in group nature activities.

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Programs may not be designed to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. Limited representation of diverse older adults may impact individuals' sense of belonging.

Ageism

Ageism may result in the disregard of older adults' experiences, preferences, and interests, which can lead some older adults to internalize such perceptions of themselves.

Economic

Transportation

Lack of reliable transportation options can restrict access to nature.

Costs

Fees associated with some outdoor activities or equipment rentals can be prohibitive for older adults, especially for those living on fixed incomes.

Environmental

Challenging terrain and uneven surfaces

Landscapes with steep inclines or declines and uneven surfaces with roots, rocks, or potholes can be difficult for older adults to navigate.

Weather

Unfavorable weather conditions, such as extreme heat or cold, may limit the ability of older adults to spend extended periods outdoors.

Winter

Winter in Minnesota deserves special consideration. Cold temperatures, snow and ice, shorter daylight, and other realities of winter can impede older adults' access to nature.

Air Quality

As we are increasingly learning, monitoring air quality—especially for older adults with respiratory or other health conditions—is an important factor to consider.



Monica Bryand founded the [Urban Bird Collective](#) in 2018 to support birdwatchers of all different skill levels in leading walks in their own neighborhoods. She explained during a key informant interview that when she started the organization her goal was to increase people's birding skills. But it quickly became clear that a more pressing need was the *creation of safe spaces* for people often excluded from or underexposed to nature. The Urban Bird Collective now strives to create safe and welcoming spaces for all communities to come out and explore birding and the outdoors. These communities include Black, Indigenous, people of color, the LGBTQ+ communities, and more. As they describe on their website:

"We want all communities to feel the benefits of being out in natural green spaces in our various Twin Cities neighborhoods and beyond. We are passionate about birdwatching and the protection of the environment. We are here to support you in developing your birding skills while we continue to improve our own."

Photo credit: Monica Bryand, photographer and Urban Bird Collective founder

In partnership with the [Superior Hiking Trail Association](#), the [Arrowhead Regional Development Commission](#) (ARDC) is creating an age-friendly accessibility index to enhance ease of access to the Superior Hiking Trail for people age 60+. This work is supported through an Age-Friendly Minnesota community grant. The Superior Hiking Trail: A Trail For All survey, conducted in early 2024 through various online forums, including Facebook group-sharing and emails from different groups and organizations, attracted 74 responders. A summary of survey results can be found in [Appendix F](#).

Top concerns of older Minnesotans interested in the Superior Hiking Trail included:

- Not knowing where to go,
- Parking accessibility,
- Weather considerations,
- Fear of getting lost,
- Perceptions of the trail being too difficult,
- Lack of information about the trail, and
- Lack of toilets.

AGEISM AND PROMOTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Ageism, or the stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals based on their age, can impact older adults' interest and experiences in being outdoors in nature. Its effects, both direct and indirect, influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences. Ageist stereotypes may portray older adults as frail, dependent, or physically incapable, which can lead to assumptions that older individuals are not fit for nature-based experiences, limiting their opportunities.

This field scan shows some of the many ways that older adults are accessing nature across Minnesota. In nature, as in all areas of society, steps must be taken to stop ageist thinking. To counter the impact of ageism and promote inclusive engagement with nature for older adults, the following actions should be encouraged:

Challenge Stereotypes: Raise awareness about the diversity of older adults and challenge stereotypes related to age and ability.

Promote Inclusivity: Encourage organizations serving older adults to develop inclusive programs that cater to a wide range of ages and abilities.

Enhance Accessibility: Advocate for the creation of accessible outdoor spaces and amenities that accommodate the needs of older individuals.

Celebrate Older Achievements: Highlight and celebrate stories of older adults actively participating in outdoor activities to inspire and counter negative stereotypes.

Minnesota is lucky to have many organizations working directly to confront ageism. One example, the [Vital Aging Network](#), offers programs on ageism designed for organizations and individuals interested in addressing the negative impacts of ageism in their work and business environments. Visit their website for more information about their [Confronting Ageism](#) work and trainings.

Creating accessible spaces in nature where people feel safe and feel they belong requires intention, representation, engagement, listening, and much more.

Kao Thao, a naturalist at Fort Snelling State Park, described his many years of working with Hmong elders, introducing them to Fort Snelling and other state parks. He notes that most of the organizations he had worked with that had served this population have disappeared due to either funding or workforce challenges. In his perspective, "Currently there are too few organizations that provide Hmong elders with outdoor activities, aside from Hmong senior care centers. Most Hmong seniors are now exclusively involved in senior care centers designated for adult day services." He adds that while some of these centers bring groups to city parks and trails, they rarely visit areas that charge fees, such as state parks.

"A priority for interpretive staff is to connect underserved communities to the park."

—Tiffany Muellner
Interpretive Naturalist, Blue Mounds State Park



Photo credit: Kao Thao, Fort Snelling State Park

ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS NEEDED

Workforce challenges, knowing what to do, funding constraints, and having the capacity to try new things are examples of barriers mentioned by organizations doing this work to support older adults to access nature. A few noted that thinking specifically about nature-based opportunities for older adults is a new concept, pushing their own thinking about what is possible. Several shared that collaborations and partnerships with other organizations—parks, housing providers, nonprofit aging service providers, health care, volunteer groups, and more—is an important strategy for building opportunities for older adults to be in nature.

[Nature-Based Therapeutics \(NBT\)](#), a partnership between the [University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing](#) and the [Minnesota Landscape Arboretum](#), provides group and individual programming and services to improve social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual well-being through connecting to nature. One aspect of this programming involves professionally facilitated interactions with plants, animals, and

natural landscapes to support improved health and well-being. NBT contracts with senior living homes and the Struthers Parkinson's Center to provide participants with access to raised-bed gardens, plants, therapy animals, and season-specific activities. This is just one example of the way partnerships can expand opportunities for older adults to be outdoors in nature.

The Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey asked what qualities organizers found most important and/or useful in supporting older adult participation in these opportunities. The top responses were as follows (numbers of similar responses are in parentheses):

- **Accessibility** (30) *accommodations for ability levels, fitness, age, transportation needs*
- **Community** (28) *socializing with various ages, sense of purpose*
- **Recognition** (11) *participants are thanked, recognized, treated with respect*
- **Affordability** (10) *reasonable cost, adequate funding*
- **Well-being** (10) *improving physical and emotional health*

- **Safety** (9) *safe setting, trustworthy volunteers*
- **Nature** (8) *interact with, learn about*

There is a tremendous opportunity to better support organizations' interest in and abilities to do this work across Minnesota. The next section shares a range of examples of work underway.

Examples of Current Opportunities

In exploring the topic of what older adults are doing in nature around Minnesota, a range of activities, groups, and areas of focus emerged. Some are statewide, with multiple chapters. Some are activity-specific—hunting, kayaking, hiking, birding, biking/cycling. Others are simply organized as clubs or groups for all, but have a substantial number of older adults participating.

Local, state, and national parks, wildlife refuges, nature centers and preserves, arboretums, nature-education organizations, and other outdoor-based organizations offer programming inclusive of or targeted to older adults. Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), cities, senior

housing and community centers, nonprofits, health and wellness providers and collaboratives, community education, churches, and other organizations are also embracing the work of providing opportunities for older adults to be out in or near nature.

This section introduces some of the diverse offerings currently available in Minnesota that help connect older adults to nature. It is by no means an exhaustive account, but rather a sampling of some of what is happening in and around the state.

From informal to formal, individual to group-based, and covering a wide range of types of activities, this section aims to demonstrate the breadth of what is occurring and inspire future thinking about what more may be possible. [Appendix G](#) offers a vehicle for readers to share more about what they know of nature-based opportunities not included.

While many are formal programs sponsored by an organization funded to do so, others are entirely self-organized and volunteer-led. Groups such as the [Ely Field Naturalists](#), [Women of the Woods](#), [Cannon Valley Elder Collegium](#), and undoubtedly many more began as people gathering because they shared



Photo credit: Minnesota Landscape Arboretum

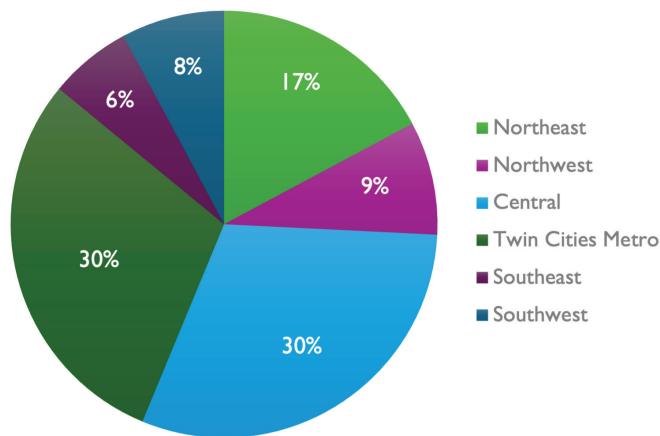
common interests and goals and wanted to learn and be out in the natural world with others.

Still others represent slightly adjacent sectors such as media. For example, KAXE/KBXE [North Community Radio's Phenology Program](#) provides nature-based radio programming and a Season's Watch newsletter and Facebook page that are wonderful sources of education and connection.

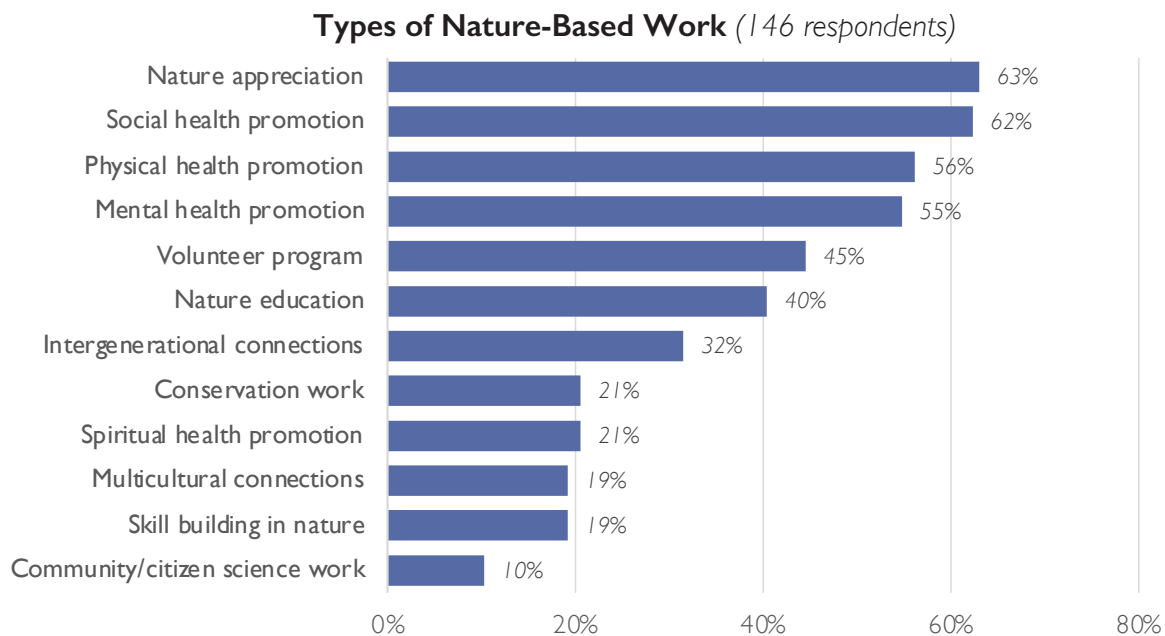
According to responses to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, work to connect older adults to nature is happening in all corners and across all biomes of the state, as described in the graphic below.

Survey respondents represented a wide range of activity types. The most common categories selected by survey respondents characterizing the nature opportunities for older adults included nature appreciation (63%), social health promotion (62%), physical health promotion (56%), mental health promotion (55%) and volunteer opportunities (45%). The graph below shows a more complete picture of what types of nature-based efforts are happening in Minnesota.

Most organizations doing this work (77%) are interested in expanding what they offer to older adults in nature, though nearly 18% of survey respondents were not sure.



Where This Work Is Happening in Minnesota (by Region)



Source (both graphs): Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, 2023.

INFORMAL ACTIVITIES

Many of the activities older adults say they enjoy doing outside in nature—gardening, walking, swimming, skiing, and much more—are simple things people like to do by themselves or with family and friends. These often require very little in the way of planning, specialized equipment, or support.

For some, accessing nature opportunities at home, in nearby nature, or at a local trail or park can be as easy as stepping out the door. In fact, Minnesota boasts some of the best park access in the country. According to the Trust for Public Land’s annual [ParkScore Index®](#), St. Paul was number 2 and Minneapolis was number 3 on a list of the largest 100 cities in the United States with the best park systems in 2023. One measure of this index is the percentage of a city’s residents who live within a walkable half-mile of a park, the average distance most people are willing to walk to reach a destination. For St. Paul this percentage was 99%, and for Minneapolis it was 98%.

Ely Field Naturalists

The [Ely Field Naturalists’](#) mission is to “develop science education opportunities and educational resources, facilitate communication through nature-related activities, and coordinate events and partnerships in community service and collaborative learning for northeastern Minnesota residents and visitors.” The Ely Field Naturalists are a self-organized group of people, open to anyone, though older adults comprise a significant portion of their membership according to group leader Bill Tefft, a retired Vermillion Community College teacher. They have an active [Google Group](#) with more than 650 members, and share information on a wide range of topics, from local wildlife—plants, birds, mammals, fish and more—to geology, climate, community science opportunities, and beyond. They do this work, which is entirely volunteer supported, because it is meaningful and important to them.



Birding in Ely. Photo credit: Joelle Hoeft

Three Rivers Park District has identified older adults as a target audience that is commonly underrepresented in its [2040 System Plan](#), which all sites, including Silverwood Park, are working toward addressing. They have particularly identified adults 75 and older as an underrepresented group.

A dedicated group of self-organized hikers meets informally every Wednesday at Silverwood Park, one of the Three Rivers Parks in St. Anthony, to walk the beautiful paved trails. The group used to meet at a nearby community center, but when Covid hit, they changed to meeting and walking outside at the park. The park has been their gathering spot since, and after a hike, they move inside for coffee at the café or when it's nice out, on the patio overlooking Silver Lake. A few of the hikers have known each other since high school, but most of the fifteen to twenty people who attend became part of the group by showing up at the community center. One couple recently moved from out-of-town and said they felt very lucky to have found this group of friendly and active people. Another quipped, "They are my financial advisors, my jeweler, my support group, and so much more!"



Post-hike coffee. Photo credit (both above): Joelle Hoefl

FORMAL PROGRAMS

Other more structured activities are offered by a wide range of organizations, from cities and senior centers to nature centers, parks, activity clubs, health providers, and more.

Minnesota Master Naturalist Program

While conducting key informant interviews for the field scan, it was notable how many people mentioned the [Minnesota Master Naturalist Program](#) provided by the University of Minnesota Extension. Whether as volunteer naturalists themselves or as someone who had participated in Minnesota Master Naturalist-led work, the program has clearly had a wide impact on nature access for older adults in Minnesota. According to Amy Rager, Extension Educator and Master Naturalist & Volunteer Manager, approximately 900 or at least 50% of the current “MNats,” are 55 years old or better, and this is an undercount because some people do not provide their age.

The mission of the Minnesota Master Naturalist Program is to promote awareness, understanding, and stewardship of Minnesota’s natural environment by developing a corps of well-informed citizens dedicated to conservation education and service within their communities. The Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteer Training Course consists of 40 hours of in-classroom training, with annual requirements for volunteer hours and ongoing training. The program is open to “any adult who is curious and enjoys learning about the natural world shares that knowledge with others and supports conservation.” As their website describes: “If you enjoy hiking, bird watching, following tracks, or identifying wildflowers, you’ll love being a Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteer. Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteers are a motivated group of fun and interesting people: teachers, retired professionals, nature guides, hunters, eco-tour operators, farmers, and . . . YOU!”

Ron and LeeAnn Plinske of Brainerd, older adults themselves, are Minnesota Master Naturalists who are engaged in many different ways in helping people in their community connect with the natural world. Lakeland PBS recently featured the couple on its Common Ground show. Watch Common Ground Episode 1506: [Birding Brainerd with the Plinskes.](#)





Photo credit (all this page): Let's Go Fishing

Let's Go Fishing

[Let's Go Fishing](#) is a statewide program that “brings nature’s healing and well-being to seniors, veterans, and the disabled.” They take participants on accessible pontoon boat and fishing outings, often paired with nature appreciation and education. Since the program’s inception in 2002, they have served over 200,000 people. Independent chapters are located in all parts of the state and are supported by very active volunteers—often older adults themselves. In addition to providing time outdoors on Minnesota’s beautiful lakes, Let’s Go Fishing and other programs like it provide opportunities for social connection, engagement and, for volunteers, a strong sense of purpose.



CITIES, COUNTIES, AND COMMUNITIES

Many cities, counties, and community organizations provide opportunities for older adults through senior services, park and recreation opportunities, public health, and more. Some have [AARP's age-friendly designation](#). They frequently engage in all of the Age-Friendly community livability domains and are central to community-driven solutions. Whether by bringing programming outdoors or offering nature-based specific programs, volunteer activities, and events, they are an important area of focus for connecting older adults with nature.

City of Cohasset

The [City of Cohasset](#) offers weekly snowshoe hikes in the winter at Tioga Recreation Area, which become walks along the paved path near Tioga Beach during the rest of the year. They offer monthly full moon hikes at Blackwater Environmental Area in the winter months. Both events are well attended and usually have repeat participants. It brings residents and non-residents together in a very social, outdoor, positive environment. As the Parks and Recreation Coordinator notes: "One woman has come regularly and views most of these repeat participants as her friends, which is common. She has enjoyed having this social event to go to weekly because she is a widow living alone . . . It has improved the quality of her life."



Redhead Redfeet Night Hikes. Photo credit: Jessica Schuster

Libraries

Libraries can be important partners in enhancing the well-being of older adults in communities. Jodi Grebinoski, director of the public library in Virginia, where approximately 30% of the population is over the age of 60, is interested in doing more to connect older adults to nature. The Virginia Public Library offers programs and events such as Book Club, an author program, and art classes that create a place for older adults to connect, meet new people, and learn a new skill. This work is supported through the Friends of the Public Library, already budgeted staff time, and partnering with other organizations. As part of the national [Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#) initiative, several St. Paul libraries are [Nature Smart Libraries](#), providing access to nature-oriented resources, green space, and nature programming. Libraries in Austin, Ely, and Rochester have a [telescope loan](#) program that can be used to support nature appreciation and education activities. Other libraries, including [Hennepin County](#) and [Dakota County](#), have established seed libraries. These are only a few of the ways that libraries can be creatively engaged in this work.

Senior Centers

Community and senior centers throughout Minnesota often provide outdoor and nature-based opportunities.

Red Wing Senior Center

[Red Wing Area Seniors](#) has walking and hiking groups and an outdoor patio that they would like to increasingly use as part of their programs. One participant, Bob, started coming to exercise class three times a week and said his balance improved so much he was way more interested in going out during the other days of the week.

Eden Prairie Senior Center

[Eden Prairie Senior Center](#) provides recreation programs at all levels for older adults, including educational programs, hands-on games and activities, large- and small-group social opportunities, and monthly special events that include entertainment, food, and friendship. They also offer volunteer opportunities for participants to give back to the community and to feel needed and fulfilled. They focus on engaging seniors in recreational activities outside their residence. They offer a biking group where participants bike 15 to 20 miles, eat lunch and bike back to the senior center, and a walking group that meets weekly for a stroll—in a local park in the summer and indoors in the winter. In 2024, the Recreation Supervisor plans to work closely with the Eden Prairie Outdoor Center to implement additional nature-related activities and education.



Nordic walking. Photo credit: Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board



Photo credit: Breanna Wheeler

SENIOR HOUSING/LONG-TERM CARE

Several senior living organizations completed the statewide Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, including SummerWood of Plymouth, Croixdale Senior Living, Ecumen, Oakdale Assisted Living, Broadwell Senior Living, Walker Methodist Care Suites, Grand Village, The Green over 55 HOA, Hastings Domiciliary Veterans, Sholom Home West, and more. Each has its own interests in connecting older adults to nature. Key informant interviews reflected that when housing was near enough to walk to natural settings or paved trails, residents' access to nature increased. Most respondents described efforts to increase access to nature onsite at the senior living facility, such as through raised-bed gardening. When dedicated staff are assigned to arrange transportation and plan for off-site outings and trips to connect with the community, residents of these homes are able to experience nature and have better quality-of-life outcomes.

Silverwood Park

[Silverwood Park](#), part of the Three Rivers Park District, is a park just outside Minneapolis on Silver Lake, with a restored prairie and mature oak savanna. It is “devoted to supporting the practice, appreciation and awareness of creative interactions between people and the natural environment.” The park offers a “Rooted in Art” paid monthly program blending a seasonal nature topic and related art project each month, specifically created for, and marketed to, adults ages 50+. It also offers a free monthly art and nature program called Spark!—part of [Spark! Alliance](#), based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin—for individuals living with memory loss and their care partners to attend jointly.

In addition, Silverwood has on- and offsite programs for hire. The offsite programs are often in community centers or independent/assisted living settings. Silverwood Park delivers approximately 24 public programs specifically for seniors annually and has delivered approximately 80 offsite programs to groups in the Metro Area. In total, these programs have engaged approximately 1,152 participants. Their unique approach of blending art and nature for older adults in a wide range of settings stands out as a powerful model that meets older adults where they are and provides opportunities for learning and creativity.

THERAPEUTIC AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Recognizing nature’s healing power and many well-being benefits, some individual therapists are now adopting a nature-based therapy approach.

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum

The University of Minnesota’s Minnesota Landscape Arboretum’s [Nature Heals Initiative](#), led by [Dr. Jean Larson](#), designs programming that engages nature’s ability to heal, soothe, restore, and connect. Group classes offered at the Arboretum in Chaska include forest bathing, AWE (A Wonder-filled Experience) walks, nature journaling, and mindfulness. Their website also offers ideas for people to follow on their own, and compiles [research showing nature’s healing power](#).

Minneapolis Nature-Based Therapy

One such practice is [Minneapolis Nature-Based Therapy](#), which offers individual and family mental health therapy in outdoor nature settings in the Twin Cities Metro area. While they do not specifically target older adults, all ages are welcome. As founder Kari Kleven notes: “One of the benefits of participating in nature-based therapy is that clients of any age increase the amount of time they spend outside and potentially the quality of time as well, since intentional practices for deepening experiences in nature are often part of the therapeutic process.” She points to the combined healing power of nature with therapy in order to address current struggles, stating that people who choose nature-based therapy receive “encouragement to get themselves outside, and reduced isolation.”

Charlson Meadows

[Charlson Meadows](#), 142 acres of lakeshore, meadow, and forestland in Victoria, at the edge of the West Metro, has a mission to use its resources to create and provide environments that renew, inspire, and enrich all life. They do this through event space and programming. Programming, while not targeted by age, includes day events, such as forest bathing and silence retreats, and weekend writing, self-care, and silence retreats. One of its offerings, the Life Journey Program, invites participants to partner with nature for healing insights and creative restoration. This can include reflective walks, self-guided time in nature, and volunteering in the Giving Garden.



Triangle Lake. Photo credit: Joelle Hoefl

GROUP CLASSES

When conducted in a safe setting outdoors, group classes—which already bring social connection opportunities—provide added benefits to participating older adults associated with being outdoors and/or in nature. Evidence-based health promotion classes—for example, Walk with Ease, a group exercise class for people with arthritis who want to learn safe ways to stay active, reduce pain and move more easily, and Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance—are sometimes hosted outdoors and/or in nature, weather permitting.

Walk with Ease

[Windom Area Health](#), a critical access hospital in Southwest Minnesota with an onsite wellness center, offers a Walk with Ease class that is exclusively outdoors on the paved path around its campus. Senior classes are free for members. They also have outdoor gym equipment that they use for other classes when there are enough people who are able to safely make it outside.

As the Wellness Center Supervisor shared, “In the last two sessions of Walk with Ease we had a lady in her 80s who was recovering from several medical procedures. When she initially started, she could walk only about a quarter of the 2/3-mile-long path. The path includes one uphill section and one downhill. By the end of the two sessions she was able to complete the entire path.”

She also noted, “Because the active aging population relies heavily on printed materials, we try to get out to senior dining, community events, and places where we will be able to interact face to face with prospective class participants. When doing that, we can then hand out materials they can take home.”

Photo credit: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board





Tai Ji Quan class at Semers Park on Shagawa Lake (above). Photo credit (both this page): Northwoods Partners

Northwoods Partners Exercise Classes

[Northwoods Partners](#), an Ely nonprofit organization that provides resources that promote independence and healthy aging, sponsors outdoor group exercise classes—some of which include nature-based exposure. For example, [Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance](#) classes are often held at Semer’s Park overlooking Shagawa Lake.

The organization also offers a Men’s Memory and Movement group that meets weekly at the Ely Senior Center. Participants share memories, stories, and life experiences over coffee and snacks, and each session ends with movement and light exercises to keep participants active and help increase balance, range of motion, and strength.



NATURE APPRECIATION, EDUCATION, AND SKILL BUILDING

Being outdoors in nature provides ample opportunities for nature appreciation, education, and skill building, whether on one's own or with others. Older adults, like all humans, do best when they have opportunities for lifelong learning and engagement.

Healthy Older People

Whitewater State Park in Southeast Minnesota hosts a monthly education group called the [Healthy Older People \(HOP\)](#) program. Organized by [Friends of Whitewater State Park](#) in partnership with the DNR, HOP offers a lecture series in the park that sometimes includes an outside activity. Educational topics include a wide variety of topics relevant to the Whitewater watershed, from history and land management to wildlife and cultural education. Recent HOP topics have included the American Kestrel Partnership, Hiking All Year Long, and Ho-Chunk Black Ash Splint Basketry. The DNR provides the space to meet (usually in the park's visitor center) and the Friends of Whitewater State Park provides organization and light refreshments. HOP typically meets every second Tuesday of the month in the morning, and is free and open to the public.

Master Naturalist tree walk. Photo credit: Sara Holger



University for Seniors Program

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) [University for Seniors](#) program provides lifelong learning for those over the age of 50 in a variety of categories: physical education, liberal education, science, literature, history, and more. Supported by UMD staffing and students, it is a peer-led, peer-learning model and relies on volunteers from their membership. Older adults join because they are interested in community and a sense of belonging, lifelong learning, and volunteer opportunities to serve with the program and assist others. In a series called the Journey Jargon & Lecture Series, lectures on such topics such as “An Introduction to the Sax-Zim Bog,” “From Duluth to the Arctic Circle,” and “Fly Fishing in Mexico” are offered free to the public. Hiking and cross-country skiing groups often fill quickly and have waiting lists.



Photo credit: University for Seniors, University of Minnesota Duluth

Walk with a Doc

[Walk with a Doc](#) is a national program that pairs walking outdoors, often in nature, with informal health-education conversations with physicians. Participants learn about a current health topic from a healthcare professional, and then spend the rest of the hour enjoying a walk and conversation. According to their website, there are at least eight Walk with a Doc sites in Minnesota. While not exclusively for older adults, a 2017 evaluation of the program found that approximately 60% of walkers were 60 years or older. The top reasons participants cited for attending were: the health benefits of exercise, health education, the camaraderie of being with others, and spending time in nature.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

Intergenerational or multigenerational opportunities in nature offer a range of physical, mental, social, and educational benefits for both older adults and children and parents. These interactions contribute to the overall well-being of participants and can also promote environmental stewardship and strengthen community ties across generations. These programs are increasingly popular, and many parks and recreation facilities have developed intergenerational programming and events. Older adults often find that it is the young people in their lives who provide the most motivation to stay active and be outdoors and in nature.



AGE to age

[Northland Foundation's AGE to age](#) program: Since 2008, [AGE to age](#), a program bringing the generations together in Northeastern Minnesota, has been connecting young people with elders and adults age 55 and older to build friendships and social connections and benefit their rural communities. There are AGE to age programs in Aitkin, Barnum, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Chisholm, Cloquet, East Range Communities, Ely Area, Floodwood, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Hibbing, International Falls, Itasca Area-Bigfork, McGregor, Moose Lake, Proctor/Hermantown, North Shore Area, and Two Harbors. Each local AGE to age site develops its own action plan, receiving technical support, funding, and learning opportunities through the Northland Foundation and its partners. Several of the intergenerational activities occur outdoors and in nature, including building community gardens or walking trails, park improvement and flower planting, fishing outings, hayrides, and cultural sharing and education.

Photo credit: Northland Foundation



Castle Park. Photo credit: Polk County Public Health

Polk County Public Health

As a public health agency, policy, system and environmental changes are a priority for [Polk County Public Health](#). Since 2012, nature-based engagement, play, and experiences have been prioritized. Castle Park, a natural play space was conceptualized, developed, built, and maintained by the City of Crookston and community partner volunteers with efforts mainly coordinated by Polk County Public Health and the Kids at Castle group. Incorporating intergenerational aspects of nature experiences have been a guiding principle since its inception. Learn more about these and other efforts at [Children and Nature in Northwest Minnesota.](#)”



Photo credit: Minnesota Master Naturalist Program



Photo credits: Friends GreenTouch. Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, <https://www.parksandtrails.org/friends-groups/> (left); A volunteer. Voyageurs National Park, <https://www.nps.gov/voya/index.htm> (above)

VOLUNTEERING

As noted in the older adults' demographics from Minnesota Compass, Minnesota enjoys volunteer engagement from a substantial percentage of older adults. We see this in the natural world as in all aspects of community and civic life.

Several key informants to this field scan described the importance of “Friends Groups” in ensuring the well-being and sustainability of local parks and trails. Friends Groups typically work as volunteers to provide additional help, resources, and advocacy for organizations they care about. They also frequently note that these groups of dedicated older adults are made up primarily of older adults. [Park & Trails Council of Minnesota](#) provides support to Friend Groups representing state parks, state trails, regional parks, regional trails, and statewide systems (such as Back Country Horsemen of Minnesota, Minnesota Nordic Ski Association, and others working statewide).

Just as with state and regional parks and trails, national parks and refuges in Minnesota engage older adult volunteers in myriad ways. The [Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends](#) supports the Partner School Program at the Refuge, which provides environmental education and interpretation lessons to students in the Twin Cities Metro Area. [Friends of Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Northwest Minnesota expressed interest on the statewide survey in starting an OWLS (Older Wiser Livelier Seniors) program of sorts, with guest speaker and lunch, “to enhance nature knowledge among local decision makers, connect with more surrounding residents, enhance the knowledge of current volunteers and create more social connection among regular visitors and volunteers.”

Some parks, such as [Voyageurs National Park](#) on the Canadian border, offer [summer residential volunteer opportunities](#). While open to adults of all ages, many volunteers are seniors who typically work and live in the park for four months over the summer. The park offers free housing, either in a cabin or RV site. Volunteers participate in two weeks of parkwide seasonal ranger training in May, followed by opportunities to interact with the public, help with interpretive programs, and enjoy using the park’s boats on the beautiful lakes all summer long.

What is a Friends Group?

Friends Groups typically work as volunteers to provide additional help, resources, and advocacy for organizations they care about. The Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota operates a [Friends Group Partner membership program](#) where such groups can receive support and connect, network with, and learn from similar groups.

CONSERVATION/COMMUNITY SCIENCE

Conservation volunteering offers older adults a holistic set of benefits, encompassing physical health, mental well-being, social connection, and a sense of purpose. Engaging in such activities can enhance overall quality of life and contribute positively to the community and the environment.

Many older adult volunteers choose to pursue the growing number of community science (also known as citizen or crowd-sourced science) and/or conservation opportunities in Minnesota's natural world. The DNR, for example, keeps a [list of community science opportunities](#) on its website, including the [Minnesota Frog and Toad Calling Survey](#) or the [Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program](#), among several others.

The DNR also suggests the following resources for science enthusiasts:

[iNaturalist](#): An app where everyone can connect with nature, just by documenting what they observe. There are many Minnesota-focused projects on iNaturalist, including birds, butterflies, moths, plants, mushrooms, and more. Plus, the iNaturalist community helps you identify the things you are noticing.

[Amphibian and Reptile Survey of Minnesota](#): This is a collaboration between [HerpMapper](#), the [Bell Museum of Natural History](#), and the [Minnesota Herpetological Society](#). You can learn more about Minnesota reptiles and amphibians, upload observations, and more.

[Minnesota eBird](#): Minnesota eBird is an online hub of information about Minnesota's birds and projects that anyone can participate in. This collaborative project is managed by the [Minnesota Ornithologists' Union](#).

While these opportunities tend not to be targeted by age, older adults interested in science and the natural world may discover new areas of interest or deepen knowledge they already have by engaging in citizen or community science opportunities. They also contribute to emerging scientific learning and discovery.

Photo credit: Minnesota Master Naturalist Program





Cedar Lake Point Beach. Photo credit: Joelle Hoeft

Older adults frequently participate in individual conservation efforts in Minnesota with a personal goal of protecting and preserving the state's diverse natural world, including its forests, wetlands, lakes, and wildlife.

One such example is Steve Kotvis in Minneapolis. Steve has volunteered to restore some “nearby nature” important to him. In a forested area near Cedar Lake Point Beach, Kotvis has been clearing the area of invasive species, such as buckthorn and mulberry. In [his blog about this ecological restoration](#), he describes the buckthorn removal process he calls: “cut, shuck, pluck, huck, plant, and repeat.”

To passersby, his progress is remarkable. While he works in coordination with the Cedar Lake Park Association and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, much of his work is done on his own and for its own reward, which he describes in this way:

“Every day I get to be outside and practice this restoration, I give thanks. Thank you for the fresh air I get to breathe inside the wonderful woods. Thank you for the earthly aroma from playing in the dirt. Working in the woods most often means working in the cool shade, even on the hottest of summer days. The joy of hearing kids playing at the nearby beach can’t make me do anything but grin. The chirping of birds, the breeze blowing through the trees, the lapping of waters on the shoreline, a buzzing bee or the silence of solitude, all are nature’s beautiful soundtrack. After a physical exertion that could be counted as a CrossFit workout if I was to record it, I am grateful for the ability to physically move. And later, sleep, and the next day ache a bit with the satisfaction that I did something. And finally, there is such a sense of reward after purposeful and meaningful time spent.”

—Steve Kotvis, Volunteer

Great River Greening

[Great River Greening](#) is a Minnesota environmental restoration nonprofit with a mission to inspire, engage, and lead local communities in conserving and caring for the land and water that enrich our lives. Its services extend throughout Minnesota in partnership with local communities, governmental agencies, conservation and agricultural organizations, individuals, and businesses. They provide multigenerational hands-on volunteer restoration events throughout the state, with approximately 20% of volunteers being 55+. They are currently developing an environmental education and appreciation initiative to help connect older adults to guided tours of ongoing conservation work. As they noted in their survey response, they “value connecting people of all ages with the land and waters on which we live and mutually depend. As a part of this wider commitment to environmental stewardship, we recognize that older adults are often overlooked for their interest and capacity in enjoying natural systems and spaces.” More about Great River Greening’s volunteer opportunities can be found [here](#).



Photo credit: Great River Greening



*Outside long enough, I lose the contours of my
body and become part of something larger.*

—Camille T. Dungy

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aging is a dynamic and universal process. As we grow older, we gain wisdom, skills, and insights that can benefit ourselves and others. How well we thrive as we age is in part a question of how well-equipped our communities are to tap into that momentum, while also accommodating and supporting the needs of older adults and the people who care for them. Collectively we can enjoy and benefit from the positive aspects of aging if we start to think differently about how we access, interact with, and give back to the places that surround us, including the natural world.

To address barriers and expand opportunities in Minnesota for older adults in nature, a range of approaches, strategies, and investments are needed. Fundamentally, building such opportunities requires collective imagination, commitment, and action. At a high level, the following eight recommendations have emerged from scanning this field in Minnesota:

- 1** See older adults and recognize their need for access to nature across the life course.
- 2** Seek out and listen to the varied and diverse voices of what older adults want with respect to nature and elevate their visibility and influence.
- 3** Plan for and create spaces addressing the specific needs of older adults at all levels of ability and in all seasons.
- 4** Recognize and promote opportunities nature presents for connecting with others and ourselves.
- 5** Engage with older adults as adult learners and embrace the power of sharing stories with others.
- 6** Invest in opportunities that support older adults' access to nature.
- 7** Consider and support those caring for older adults.
- 8** Build the emerging field supporting older adults to access nature.

This final section of the field scan dives deeper into each of these recommendations, exploring program, policy, research, funding, and field-building opportunities.

1. See older adults and recognize their need for access to nature across the life course.

In conversations with numerous organizations about older adults and nature for the field scan, a common response was heard: “We do not specifically target older adults.” This is hardly surprising, given that older adults can already be found in parks and on trails, attending nature-based programming and events, volunteering as Minnesota Master Naturalists, in conservation work, in Friends Groups, and more.

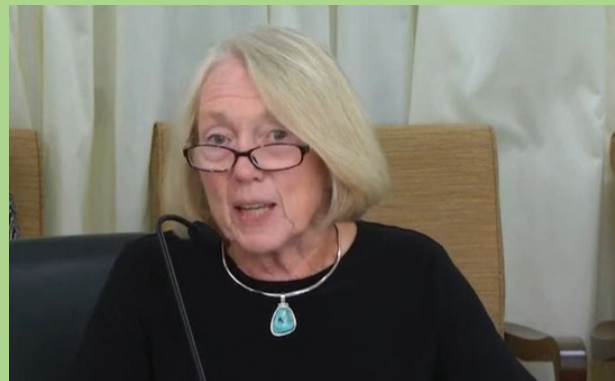
Yet, seeing older adults and understanding their unique wants, needs, and value is of great importance.

Ann Bussey, an advocate of healthy aging and herself an older adult living in rural northeastern Minnesota, has worked hard to bring attention to the needs of people in her region. During the pandemic she kept a Healthy Aging email list that reached hundreds of area residents. She has advocated in Virginia, Chiselm, and Hibbing for year-round places to walk safely, with access to port-a-potties and places to rest.

In a part of the state where winter can last six or seven months out of the year, Ms. Bussey has made the case that older adult mental health is tied to their ability to safely be outside and to connect with others. Ms. Bussey testified in February 2023 to the Minnesota legislature’s [Legislative Task Force on Aging](#), sharing perspectives about older adults not always being seen (read her full testimony [here](#)):

“It is not an option to age well in many of our rural communities. Our rural economic strategies focus on the recruitment of families with children to sustain our communities while inadvertently ignoring or minimizing the contributions of our aging population, a population that continues to grow, contributing both to the tax base and the sustainability of our communities. Aging is what’s happening, but it is not the recognized culture.”

Minnesota’s [Reframe Aging Initiative](#) is co-led by the University of Minnesota’s [Center for Healthy Aging and Innovation](#) and the [MN Leadership Council on Aging](#). The initiative seeks to counter ageism by



Ann Bussey (above) walks with a friend every day in Side Lake:

“We walk Perch Lake Road and often walk the trails in the woods too. Everyone knows that walking time is at 10:00, and others join us when they can. We visit with our neighbors who are ‘out and about’ along the way, and cars passing by often stop to visit too. We walk every day unless the temps are below zero or if it is raining or snowing. However, we have been known to walk with umbrellas if it is not raining too hard, and in light snow too. As the Norwegians say, ‘There is no bad weather, only bad clothing.’ ”

Photo credit (this page): Ann Bussey



changing how we talk about aging through a range of strategies, including educating leaders, offering supports, and ending ageism. The initiative is part of broader work from the [FrameWorks Institute](#), whose [Gaining Momentum Toolkit](#) explores how the aging field can help build a better understanding of age, ageism, and what it will take to create a more age-integrated society. The [National Center to Reframe Aging](#), led by The Gerontological Society of America with other aging partners, builds on this work as well, and its learning center has helpful resources. Ending ageism is necessary in all domains of livability, including the outdoors and in nature.

Much has happened nationally and in Minnesota over the past fifteen years to support and expand children's access to nature. In 2022, Minnesota became one of at least [fifteen states and six cities](#) to adopt a [Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights \(COBOR\)](#). Minnesota's COBOR has a [vision](#) of creating "a state where all Minnesota children and families are inspired to engage with the natural world in ways that support physical activity, mental well-being, creativity, and appreciation for nature." As a state, we have an important opportunity to build on and extend this vision to people across the age spectrum, including older adults, by adopting a companion Older Adults Outdoor Bill of Rights or adopting one for all ages. Acknowledging this right to nature for older people creates space for seeing the opportunity to connect with nature across the life span.

The [Governor's Council for an Age-Friendly Minnesota](#) does not currently include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) among its state agency members. Given that the outdoors and built environment is one of the Age-Friendly domains of livability, this is a missed opportunity, and the DNR should be added to the Council. The DNR would bring a nature-based perspective to the Council, and in return would gain an Age-Friendly Minnesota perspective.

Addressing older adults' access to nature should be included in Minnesota's [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#), currently under development by the state together with other public, private, and independent sector partners.

The [Minnesota State Plan on Aging](#), which outlines Minnesota's [Older Americans Act](#) plans and spending,

and [Juniper](#), a statewide network of community-based organizations and health systems that makes evidence-based health promotion programs available to people throughout Minnesota, could showcase how programs such as Walk With Ease, Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance, and perhaps others can be conducted outdoors and in nature-based settings.

Finally, Minnesota could also make resources on the topic of nature and older adults available via its Senior Linkage Line (1-800-333-2433) and [MinnesotaHelp.info](#). Currently when asked about nature-based opportunities for older adults, the Senior Linkage Line offers limited information. They suggest the Let's Go Fishing Program and the possibility of YMCA programming. They also suggest talking to insurance providers or health systems to see if they know more.

Every organization can think about how its programs and services can better see and meet the needs of older adults. For example, recognizing that older adults could benefit from protected time in the park while encouraging them to be active and social, [Como Park Zoo & Conservatory](#) in St. Paul implemented a [Senior Strolls](#) program as a special time for adults 55+ to visit before or after regular hours.

Collectively, steps such as these would begin to initiate important state-level conversations around determining how to more fully support older adults' need for time outdoors and in nature.

2. Seek out and listen to the varied and diverse voices of what older adults want with respect to nature and elevate their visibility and influence.

Minnesota's older adult population, like the state as a whole, is diverse in many ways—race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and more. Seeking out, listening to, and elevating diverse older adult and elder perspectives is critical for the topic of nature as with all other aspects of our lives together.

As noted in the [Minnesota State Plan on Aging 2024–2027](#):

“Despite its reputation for a high quality of life, Minnesota experiences some of the most severe race-based health disparities in the country. Further, older adults who have experienced decades of inequities on many fronts—especially those who are Black, Native American, and members of communities of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups—often find themselves in a more vulnerable position in their later years. Social determinants of health (SDOH) define intersections in our overall health and well-being that include circumstances of our lives, including our families, homes, neighborhoods, education, employment, access to healthcare, and natural environment.”

Respondents to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey spoke of efforts to make programming or opportunities welcoming for all, including people of color and people with accessibility challenges. Their suggestions included the following specific recommendations:

- Build relationships and ensure that all feel welcome and supported
- Work closely with partners that have relationships with underrepresented populations
- Make sure opportunities are fully ADA-accessible and use equipment tailored for older adults
- Do extra outreach to underserved populations
- Ask what is needed, work to meet identified needs, and seek ongoing input and feedback
- Provide materials in other languages and language interpretation when needed
- Make programming free, low cost, and/or offer scholarships
- Provide transportation
- Incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring, strategic planning, and policies and practices

- Provide diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility training and continuing education for staff and volunteers
- Be an advocate for diverse older adults, e.g., support legislation that is equitable for all Minnesotans

Being aware of different individual and cultural communities’ perspectives on the natural world is important to understanding how nature might be helpful to older adult health and well-being. Understanding and acknowledging how US settler-colonial practices in Minnesota and across the country have displaced, dispossessed, and erased Indigenous peoples is a beginning point. Considering language and concepts such as decolonizing nature matters, and will take ongoing attention, engagement, and action.

Voyageurs National Park (part of the National Park Service [NPS]) shared that it defines diversity and inclusion this way:

“Diversity represents the practice of actively incorporating people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs throughout the organization to ensure that NPS is advantaged by the best thinking possible. Diversity represents the wide range of visible and invisible differences and similarities that make each of us unique.

Inclusion is the practice of intentionally building a culture that is flexible, values diverse ideas, and embraces the meaningful participation of all.”

Survival International, a global movement for Indigenous and tribal peoples’ rights, has a resource for writing or talking about conservation, climate change and nature protection. [A Guide to Decolonize Language in Conservation](#) says this about the word nature:

“The idea of ‘nature’, as something which lies outside of and is distinct from humanity, is a crucial concept for the ‘conservation industry.’ Separating people from nature goes against our own experience, as Indigenous peoples have known very well for generations. Indigenous people don’t see themselves as separate from nature: often they view wild animals as members of their own family, and people and nature as one. Many academic papers underscore how ‘nature’ is not an objective thing, but something embedded in and created by culture and perception. One person’s ‘nature’ is another person’s field, farm, garden, or dinner. What many people in the West think of as ‘nature’ is actually often the result of millennia of modification and enrichment of the environment through human activity and land management.”

The field scan includes some of the ways organizations support diverse older adults to engage with nature in Minnesota, but there is much room for greater

Arbor Trail

Arbor Trail is a very short loop that connects to Overlook Trail. It is very wide and even and is easily accessed from the north parking lot.

00:00 00:00

Characteristics:

Trail Surface	Gravel/Dirt/Grass
Length	1/4 mile
Elevation Changes	Minimal
Major Obstacles	None
Width of Trail	10 feet
Uniformity of Trail Surface	Excellent
Availability of Benches	Poor

Example of the type of trail information that can be found on [River Bend Nature Center’s website](#).

awareness of and learning from each other when it comes to making these opportunities more plentiful and accessible. Supporting organizations led by and connected to Minnesota’s many cultural communities to advance this work is key.

3. Plan for and create accessible spaces that facilitate and accommodate the specific needs of older adults at all levels of ability and in all seasons.

Accessibility to nature will be enhanced for older adults when the following are considered:

a. Surfaces, trail conditions, amenities, and differences in pace

Trail and facility improvements that support access for older adults to nature along with information and considerations such as pace, hearing, vision, and cognition are important.

AARP’s [Walk Audit Tool Kit](#) is useful for urban spaces. However, natural terrain can present much more difficult and variable challenges. Conducting an audit of the physical space in nature—considering issues such as the availability of comfortable places to sit and rest, access to bathrooms in all seasons, and the availability of shade and hydration—is a must.

Similarly, the Minnesota Department of Health’s [Statewide Health Improvement Program](#) (SHIP) has created an [Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator Guide](#), which provides specific guidance and information on how to better include people with disabilities and to highlight disability in walk audits so that planning processes are more inclusive. Given the overlap with older people and the prevalence of disabilities, such guidance is especially valuable.

Some nature centers, parks, and trails include accessibility information on their websites and/or make it available to park users through signage, maps, and other methods. River Bend Nature Center in Faribault has accessibility information, including surface, length, elevation change, major obstacles, widths, uniformity of trail surfaces, and the availability of benches for each trail on its [website](#), as shown at left.

For City of Minnetonka Senior Services Program Manager Kate Egert, top accessibility considerations include the following:

Financial Support

Since many participants are on a budget or fixed income, keeping programs very affordable is important. Some activities are free (e.g., 30 different special interest groups, where people participate and connect with others); some have a nominal fee. Day trips are more expensive, with transportation and other fees included.

Mobility and Accessibility

The Minnetonka Community Center building is accessible, and includes a circle drive for easy drop-off, with automatic doors. Staff watch for older adults entering the building and make sure people can get to where they need to go. Additional considerations include:

- Choosing the room closest to the entrance, when possible, and
- Having a wheelchair ready for those who may need one.

Transportation

Some older adults participants drive themselves to the community center for the senior events. Others use public transit such as Metro Mobility or Transit Link, or private services such as Go Go Grandparent.

Hikes

In advance of any outdoor hike—most importantly in winter—Kate walks the planned path to see what the conditions are; if it's icy, the walk will be postponed or canceled. The program has walking sticks and ski poles for people to borrow, and some people wear walking cleats. Staff communicate with participants explaining about trail conditions and let people decide whether or not to attend.



Photo credit: Wilderness Inquiry



Photo credit: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Universal design refers to the concept of creating products, environments, and systems that are accessible and usable by people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The goal is to design with inclusivity in mind, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, age, or other characteristics, can interact with and benefit from a particular design. An environment or product following universal design is one that is accessible, useable, and inclusive.

The [DO-IT \(Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology\) Center](#) based at the University of Washington is dedicated to empowering people with disabilities through technology and education. Building on work originating from the [Center for Universal Design](#) at North Carolina State University, DO-IT [expands on](#) the following seven principles of universal design:

Equitable use. *The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. A website that is designed so that it is accessible to everyone, including people who are blind, employs this principle.*

Flexibility in use. *The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. A museum that allows a visitor to choose to read or listen to a description of the contents of a display case employs this principle.*

Simple and intuitive. *Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Science lab equipment with control buttons that are clear and intuitive employs this principle.*

Perceptible information. *The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities. Video captioning employs this principle.*

Tolerance for error. *The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. An educational software program that provides guidance when the user makes an inappropriate selection employs this principle.*

Low physical effort. *The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue. Doors that open automatically employ this principle.*

Size and space for approach and use. *The design provides appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility. A science lab with adjustable tables employs this principle.*

One way of applying universal design principles is to ask, “Will this design work for both an eight-year-old and an eighty-year-old?” This is the approach employed by Gil (Guillermo) Penalosa, founder of the Canadian nonprofit [8 80 Cities](#), who believes that 8-year-olds and 80-year-olds are “indicator species” for creating good places to live. Adopting universal design—or 8 80—principles will support all people, including older adults, to participate more easily and fully.

In partnership with the Superior Hiking Trail Association and supported through an Age-Friendly Minnesota community grant, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission in Northeast Minnesota is creating an age-friendly accessibility index that will enhance ease of access to the Superior Hiking Trail for people 60 years or more. Information about each segment of the trail will be available to ensure that people of all ages can make informed decisions about where and how to enjoy the trail to its fullest.

Awareness of older adults' abilities with respect to vision, hearing, cognition, and other potential obstacles to full participation must be considered in advance of working with them. Likewise, being sensitive to the pace that works best for older adults is another important consideration. The Minnesota Master Naturalist Program, for example, trains its volunteer naturalists to go at the pace of the slowest participant in the group, so that no one feels as if they are slowing the others down. Providing training for staff and volunteers about the needs of older adults engaging in their programs and events will help ensure they can participate fully.

b. Transportation, nearby nature, safe places to walk, and bringing the natural world indoors

As revealed in the multiple surveys of older Minnesotans shared above, access to transportation options to reach natural areas can be a barrier. While some people can drive or get rides from friends and family to programs and events, public transit, such as [Metro Mobility](#) or [Transit Link](#), can also be helpful along with private transportation services. Many public transportation systems include stops in parks and other green spaces. In Minneapolis, for example, buses stop at several parks, including Theodore Wirth Park in North Minneapolis. In addition, the [Metro Transit micro](#), a shared-ride service offering point-to-point service in North Minneapolis, includes transportation to area green spaces.

In rural Minnesota, however, transportation presents an even greater challenge. Working with community leaders around transportation solutions for all and including green spaces, parks, and other places of interest to older adults in nature should be part of the conversation. As Xinyi Qian, Director of the

University of Minnesota Tourism Center within the [Center for Transportation Studies](#), notes:

“Ensuring that rural destinations have the needed resources, collaborations, and transportation infrastructure in place as they evolve will be a critical step in securing both the economic viability of many communities and the future of precious environmental resources.”

As part of the University's exploration on the [Future of Mobility](#), Qian calls for the following action steps (click [here](#) for full details):

“Tourism and outdoor-recreation-centric communities in Minnesota and beyond should identify potential collaborations with public agencies such as the National Park Service and Department of Natural Resources to coordinate on mobility issues.

State legislatures and public agencies should recognize the unique mobility challenges faced by outdoor-recreation-heavy rural communities and ensure that these areas have adequate financial and planning support to address them.

Research and Extension capacities within the state should be leveraged to support these efforts. For example, U of M Extension could help communities identify best practices, lessons learned, and case studies for transportation planning and management in different types of rural tourism and outdoor recreation areas.”

Helping older adults access nearby nature and creating infrastructure that allows people to safely connect to parks and trails without reliance on an automobile is part of the answer, as Breanna Wheeler notes in the River Bend Nature Center survey findings (see [Appendix E](#)).

As healthy aging advocate Ann Bussey notes, speaking about her community of older adults in rural northeast Minnesota: “We need safe places to walk.” In a 2018 report to the Minnesota Department of Health entitled [Older Adult Fitness: Access and Participation in Rural Minnesota](#), the Rural Health Advisory Committee's workgroup she chaired explains:

“Walking is an excellent example of an activity that builds social networks to encourage positive behavior change toward participating in physical activity, but there is still a need for structured fitness programs to provide strength or balance and mobility training. Walking is a low-cost strategy that enables individuals or groups to meet aerobic activity guidelines. Walking programs work best for individuals fit enough that they can safely go for a walk without risk of falling or injury. Walkable communities are one of the key factors that can enable older adults to start walking. Things to consider:

- Obstruction-free sidewalks without cracks or tripping hazards
- Benches to provide a place to rest

Currently, the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) works with their grantees on strategies for walkable communities such as identifying changes to the built environment and community engagement strategies that promote walking.”

As the models explored throughout this report suggest, there are ways to facilitate access to nature even for people with very limited abilities. As seen with organizations such as Silverwood Park, Tettegouche State Park, and Nature-Based Therapeutics, among others, nature-based programming can be brought to senior housing environments. Making nature accessible indoors, through plants or bird feeders visible through windows, for example, can also be a way of helping with accessibility for those older adults with more restricted mobility.

Photo credit: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board





Photo credit: All-Terrain Track Chairs. Minnesota DNR.
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/track-chairs.html

c. Adaptive classes and equipment

[Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute](#) in the Twin Cities and [Northland Adaptive Recreation](#) in Duluth are examples of organizations that help remove barriers to outdoor recreation for people with disabilities of all ages. Through a wide range of classes and events—skiing, paddle sports, yoga classes, curling, and more—these opportunities allow participants to be in a community that cares and makes everyone feel like they belong. Often these opportunities fill to capacity quickly, however, so finding ways to expand their availability for older adults in outdoor settings is a need.

[Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living](#) serves 12 counties in northwestern Minnesota (along with parts of northeastern North Dakota) by supporting deer hunting for people with disabilities. Many participants are 55+ years or older, with the oldest participant in 2023 being 82 years and the oldest volunteer being 94 years. Executive Director Randy Sorensen identifies the social aspects of being with other people at the hunt, getting outdoors, and testing themselves in a safe environment as the strongest areas of interest for participants. Their [website](#) provides information about accessible outdoor nature viewing, fishing, duck hunting, deer hunting, and hiking so people can determine if it is a good fit for them.

Providing adaptive equipment such as mobility aids, like all-terrain wheelchairs, and hearing assistance devices to accommodate various physical abilities facilitates opportunities for people of all ages to be in nature. The DNR recently expanded its [All-Terrain Track Chairs](#) to 13 state parks around Minnesota. These electric-powered chairs are made in Minnesota and can be used on designated trails, helping visitors explore areas of the state parks in new ways, often on trails that are not suitable for standard wheelchairs. Users must provide their own transfer to and from the chair, if needed. In addition to track chairs, the DNR has an [adaptive beach chair](#) available at McCarthy Beach State Park.

Gardening can be made more accessible for older adults when they have comfortable seating, access to nearby shade, and planters that can be accessed by people in wheelchairs.



Photo credit: Breanna Wheeler

d. Removing financial barriers

Removing financial barriers whenever possible by offering free or low-cost opportunities and making scholarships available helps ensure all older adults can access opportunities.

Many organizations across Minnesota offer free nature-based programming. Several of the models featured throughout this report are low or no-cost, something that Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey respondents reported is important. As one example, [Scott County](#) offers free beginner-friendly, low-impact, and wellness-focused programming at

Cleary Park, a partnership with Three Rivers Parks. Programs have included wellness walks, trail tours, nature journaling, qigong, and more.

The DNR offers a [free state park pass program](#) through participating libraries. The program gives users a free seven-day pass to cover vehicle entry fee. Visit the DNR's website for [a list of participating libraries](#) and to learn more about the qualifying factors.

Currently, Minnesotans aged 90 years and older do not need to purchase a fishing license. This age could be reduced to 65 years to remove potential financial barriers for older adults interested in fishing.

Buying equipment for nature-based opportunities can be expensive. University of Minnesota's [Center for Outdoor Adventure](#) located in St. Paul rents outdoor gear—including bikes, tents, sleeping bags, canoes, winter sports gear, and more—to everyone, including the general public, at reasonable prices.

e. Winter

In a 2018 University of Minnesota research brief entitled "[Older Minnesotans Love Winter. How Can We Help Them Stay Safe?](#)," Jessica Finlay, the researcher who looked at blue, green, and white palettes of place described above, writes

"[W]hite spaces—environmental snow and ice—could both promote and diminish health and safety in older participants. Participants mentioned common dangers of winter conditions including falls, mobility restrictions, worry, fear, boredom and social isolation."

The brief goes on to explain, however, that "Finlay was caught by surprise by the widespread positive comments about winter weather conditions."

"Many participants were proud at their ability to survive, and even thrive, during Minnesota's tough winters. It formed a part of their self-worth and identities," said Finlay. "One woman, for example, proudly told me that she 'walks like a penguin' by using her cane for balance and taking small shuffling steps in winter.' Participants enjoyed crisp white snow (especially when comfortably viewed through a window), winter leisure activities and



Sax Zim Bog. Photo credit: Joelle Hoefl

bonding with neighbors and family over shared experiences such as shoveling driveways and sidewalks."

The Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey found exactly this mix of positive and negative impacts on older adults from Minnesota winters—with both challenges and opportunities, as shown in the following responses:

Jill Hatfield, executive director of the [Carlton Wellness Center](#) describes how winter can be a barrier for older adult participation:

"We are very rural—so winter weather is a barrier for driving. Also, with it getting dark so early in the winter, some people don't like driving after dark for our evening classes."

Sean Hoppes, interpretive naturalist at [Wild River State Park](#), describes the park's winter-specific programming:

“Wild River State Park offers many programs for park visitors in all four seasons. Many programs are available to general audiences, but several in 2023 and 2024 were geared toward seniors. A Guided Nature Walk on a free park day was advertised at the Age Well Expo and described as a gentle walk to connect people to nature. This winter there is a Senior Stroll as part of the Wild River on Snowshoes series.”

Deb Scott, executive director at Community Partners in Two Harbors, notes:

“Winters are universally difficult even for individuals without ambulation challenges. The city is not ‘walkable’—minimal benches outside of public parks, areas lack sidewalks, or navigable walkways, snow removal is incomplete leaving drifts and snowbanks in walking areas.”

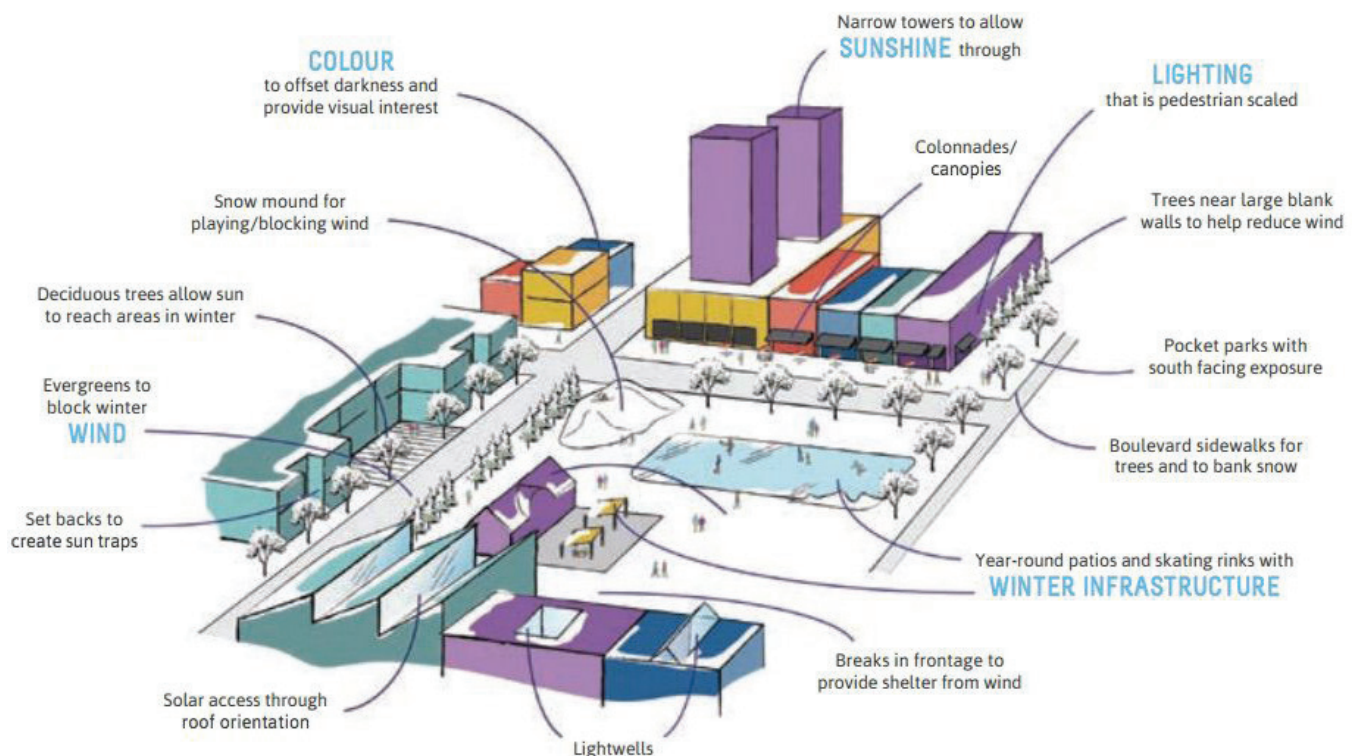
Stephanie Kessler, parks and recreation coordinator with the City of Cohasset, describes:

“The city offers weekly snowshoe hikes at Tioga Recreation Area, which become walks along the paved path near Tioga Beach the rest of the year. We offer monthly full moon hikes at Blackwater Environmental Area in the winter months. Both events are well attended and usually have repeat participants. It brings residents and non-residents together in a very social, outdoor, positive environment.”

The City of Edmonton, Canada, has embraced its reality of being a WinterCity and has developed Winter Design Guidelines that are useful from an urban perspective.

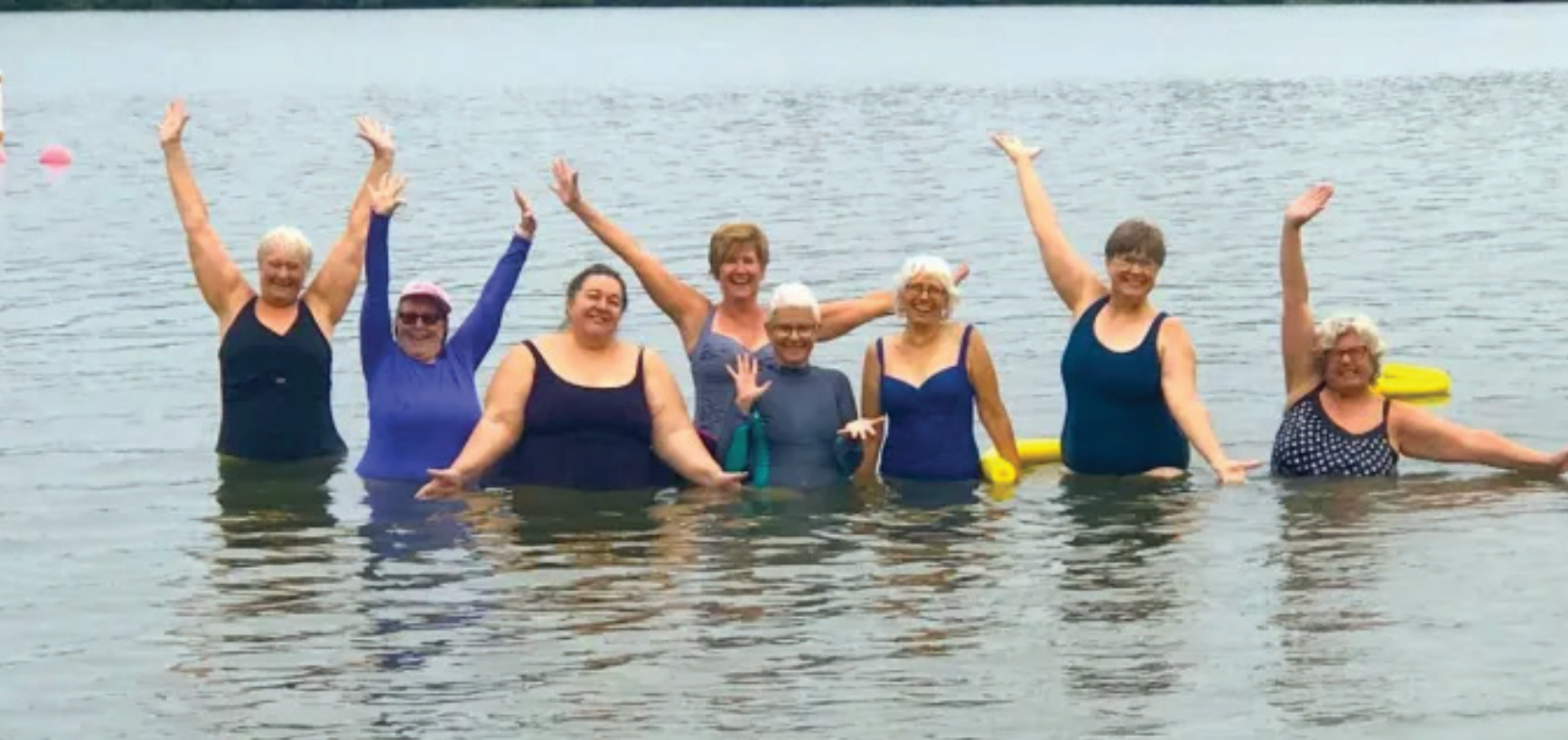
Engaging realistically with the challenges and opportunities of winter in Minnesota when working with older adults in nature is essential and worth the effort.

PRINCIPLES OF WINTER DESIGN



Source: City of Edmonton Winter Design Guidelines.

https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PDF/WinterCityDesignGuidelines_draft.pdf



The Mermaids of Lake Nokomis. Photo credit: Diane Pearson

4. Recognize and promote opportunities nature presents for connecting with others and ourselves.

Minnesota’s [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#) has four domains, one of which is Connected Communities: “Communities will have housing, transportation, environments, and access to broadband to foster well-being and maximize social connection for all ages.” Public spaces are one element of connected communities and include public spaces in parks and in nature.

As the authors of UCLA’s Luskin School of Public Affairs’ [Placemaking for an Aging Population: Guidelines for Senior-Friendly Parks](#) report note, parks can be particularly beneficial to older adults who may be at risk for social isolation. As the report calls out:

“Social isolation can lead to loneliness and mental health problems experienced by some elders, who also become more vulnerable to physical health issues and early death. Parks can reduce the prevalence of social isolation, provide opportunities for intergenerational interaction, and create a sense of place and attachment. Indeed, parks can offer a great deal more than simply a place to go outdoors. They provide settings where elders can interact with other elders, exercise, visit together with their families, or tend to their grandchildren.”

[Pocket parks](#)—small-scale open spaces that provide a safe and inviting environment for community members—have become popular in some areas. There are pocket parks targeted specifically to older adults, sometimes with play equipment, contemplative spaces, memory gardens, or intergenerational opportunities as a focus. The [Placemaking for an Aging Population: Guidelines for Senior-Friendly Parks](#) report offers many excellent park examples for older adults. In addition, AARP issued a useful case-study post-pandemic about [Intergenerational Play Spaces](#).

Throughout the field scan, Minnesota models have shown that connecting to nature also leads older adults to a wide range of other connections—to learning and skill building, to purpose, to each other, to themselves, and to the wider world.

As respondents to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey noted, just by showing up to programs and events their organizations sponsor, people become part of a temporary community. They also observe that such connections often lead to lasting social connections among participants, even after the event itself is over. For older adults who face isolation, these opportunities are essential. As one naturalist who provides forest bathing opportunities noted: "Part of why I do this work is to help older adults get out of the house and connect with other people."

Other survey respondents noted the power of nature to connect people to themselves as well, and to heal. As one person put it: "[People] discover they are not alone when in relationship with nature."

The opportunities to access the power of connection, awe, contemplation, and simply being in nature are important throughout the life cycle, including as we age, and can be experienced in something as simple as a view on a scenic drive or a plant to tend indoors or as vast as a full-moon winter hike. When older adults have the chance to share these opportunities with others, the benefits compound.



Photo credit: Northwoods Partners

"One of our Veterans, we will call him Joe, commented about nature being in our own backyard. So, I asked him to help me with a nature hike in our own backyard by the St. Croix River. We talked about what type of hike he envisioned, meaning length, difficulty, attributes of surrounding area, educational, relaxation, etc. Joe thought it

would be important to include breathing fresh air and taking in smells. Joe uses a walker and often enjoys a break when walking to look about, relax his body and see where he has passed. Joe, thinking about nature, verbally planned and promoted the hike. Organizing the hike, he thought about how others would respond to different proposed locations and their qualities of flower life, river views, and places to rest. Once on the hike he was quite quiet while walking and while sitting very social with the other Veterans. He was quick to point out items of interest and mentioned the smell of a pine tree or wildflower. When walking back to the van, he had everyone stop to look at a bush with a ton of happy bumble bees. The observation brought up a few stories among the men about the nature of bumble bees being able to fly and some of the aircraft they worked on and flew."

Holly Windingstad
Recreational Assistant
[Minnesota Veterans Home - Hastings](#)

5. Engage with older adults as adult learners and embrace the power of storytelling.

The Minnesota Master Naturalist Program trains volunteer naturalists about Minnesota's diverse natural history. They also, however, train both instructors and volunteers to be prepared to engage with adult learners. This is an important consideration, especially for organizations working with all ages, because adult learners are different from other learners.

The Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE), a technical assistance program managed by the International Rescue Committee, identifies the following six adult learning principles:

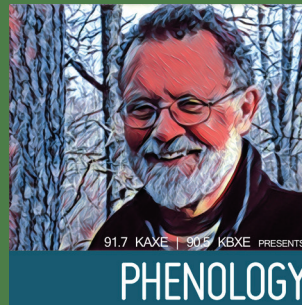
- Adults are internally motivated and self-directed
- Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning
- Adults are goal-oriented
- Adults are relevancy-oriented
- Adults are practical
- Adult learners like to be respected

In addition to the importance of working with older adults as adult learners, another theme that has emerged throughout the field scan research is that many older adults like to be givers, not takers. Whether this is generational or related to the stage of life, many older adults are hesitant to take up spots they view other people may need more. Taking steps to make sure older adults feel welcome and included, and that there is space for all who would enjoy the opportunity, may help to alleviate this concern.

One additional theme shared by many people doing work to connect older adults in Minnesota to nature is how much older adults enjoy sharing stories. Kurt Mead, the Tettegouche State Park naturalist who visits older adults living in senior housing facilities in Silver Bay, explained that he always comes prepared with a presentation that fills the time he has with residents. Frequently, however, as soon as one person shares a story or a memory related to the information he is sharing, someone else is sparked with a story of their own, and the conversation goes on from there.

Media, including podcasts, radio, television, and more, have an opportunity to elevate the voices, stories,

and experiences of older adults in nature. Programs such as North Community Radio/KAXE's Phenology Talkback segments, which bring regular reports of nearby nature-happenings from school-age children around the state through voice recordings could, with increased support, expand partnerships to include reports recorded by older adults. Or, this could be done with young people and older adults together, bringing together the generations as stories are shared.



North Community Radio (KAXE/KBXE)'s Phenology Program, now celebrating its 40th year, shares information about the natural world while elevating community observations and voices. As host John Latimer, a former mail carrier, explains each week in his report:

"Phenology is the rhythmic biological nature of events as they relate to climate."

John and his guests cover a broad range of topics, from wildflowers and wildlife to the weather and other natural world wonders. The podcast also brings the voices of student phenologists from around the state who report in on what they are seeing in their regions. The Phenology program is currently focused on incorporating Native voices and perspectives, and also on making the practice of studying phenology/observing nature accessible to people in urban settings or who are unable to access "wild" or remote areas.

[Access the Phenology resources here.](#)



Bird banding. Photo credit: Breanna Wheeler

When planning programming, events, and other opportunities for older adults in nature, consider how best to build space for participants to contribute, share and listen to each other's stories, and feel valued and respected.

6. Invest in programs that support older adults' access to nature.

Respondents to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey mentioned a wide range of funding sources that support their nature-based work. The most frequently noted source was existing programmatic budgets. Support from public funders—including cities, counties, state, and federal—as well as private foundations were also frequently cited, along with fundraising. Membership fees, fee-for-service, and event proceeds were also commonly noted, though some programs try to keep these to a minimum to ensure access by those with limited means. Many programs are supported entirely through volunteers, so do not require funding.

The following specific sources of financial support were mentioned:

- Legacy Amendment funding
- Legacy Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund

- Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment
- Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund/ Minnesota Environmental Land Trust (LCCMR)
- Friends group donations
- DHS Age-Friendly Minnesota Community Grants
- DHS Live Well at Home grants
- Minnesota State Arts Board grants
- Federal Older Adult Act Title III-B, Older Adult Act Title III-E
- Volunteer Generation Fund
- Foster Grandparent Program: AmeriCorps
- USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Caring Companion: waived program through direct billing and private pay
- United Way
- Local fundraising (e.g., raffle, silent auction, fundraisers)
- Support from local businesses or corporate sponsorships
- Support from local community organizations (e.g., Lions Clubs, Kiwanis, Rotary)
- Health insurance funding

Less than 2% of philanthropic dollars go toward traditional aging programs and services, according to Grantmakers in Aging. This is problematic, since

private funding often allows for more flexibility, greater support for innovation, and greater access for underrepresented populations. In Minnesota, a funders' collaborative known as [Finish Strong Funders Network for Aging Services](#) is comprised of private and public funders of work that focuses on older adults.

The DNR's [No Child Left Inside](#) grant program provides funding to schools, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and tribal nations to support natural resource education, outdoor recreation, and fishing and hunting programs for youth under 18 years. The program began with a state appropriation of \$1.2 million in 2019 (and yielded over \$6.2 million in requests in its initial round), and in 2023 the state appropriation nearly doubled to \$2 million. Creating a companion "No Older Adult Left Inside" grant program would be an exciting way to support greater access for older adults to nature across Minnesota

and perhaps could be linked with the children's grant to multiply benefits through intergenerational connection.

In addition, given the need for greater accessibility to nature, the state or other funders could consider establishing a dedicated fund to support transportation services, equipment, and other accessibility needs supporting older adults to access nature. As the DNR learns from its track-chair pilot, it could consider expanding this opportunity to additional state parks and/or pursue other accessibility efforts based on input from older adults.

With any expanded funding opportunities, vulnerable older adults and underrepresented populations, including Black, Native American, and members of communities of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, older adults with disabilities, and other marginalized groups should be a priority.



Photo credit: Wilderness Inquiry

The University of Minnesota Extension’s Minnesota Master Naturalist Program stood out as a particularly powerful training ground for expanded access to nature opportunities for older adults, even though it is not specifically focused on any demographic. Several people providing input into the field scan noted the importance of the program and its [regional chapters](#) as supportive to their own knowledge-building and engagement. Ensuring the program’s continued strength in supporting the creation of a corps of well-informed people dedicated to conservation education and service within communities across Minnesota is important, and with greater support, could be leveraged for even greater impact.

7. Consider and support those caring for older adults.

Given nature’s ability to heal, soothe, restore, and connect, informal (e.g., family members, neighbors, and volunteers) as well as paid caregivers of older adults, especially direct care workers, are an appropriate focus for nature-based opportunities. Being out in nature together can also be something shared between older adults and their caregivers.

Respondents to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey spoke of encouraging caregivers

to attend programs and events in nature with older adults when possible. A few directly offer caregiver support and respite. Exploring ways to expand caregivers’ access to nature holds promise, despite the inherent challenges related to the caregiving role (e.g., ability to have time away, few opportunities for respite, financial constraints).

For programs that do engage caregivers and family members, training in techniques to safely accompany older adults in natural settings, ensuring their comfort and security during outdoor activities is important.

Programs such as Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota’s [Senior Companion Services](#), in partnership with AmeriCorps Seniors, train volunteer companions who visit older adults to offer support, friendship, and transportation in the community. These volunteers could also be trained in safe ways to make nature accessible to older adults as part of their social visits. Activities might include planting or gardening, taking a drive to a nearby park or along a scenic route, or other activities suitable to the older adults’ interests and abilities. Similarly, organizations such as [Friends & Co](#), which offer volunteer companion visits to older adults in Minnesota who feel isolated and lonely, could consider doing such visits outdoors or in nearby nature, if available and doable.

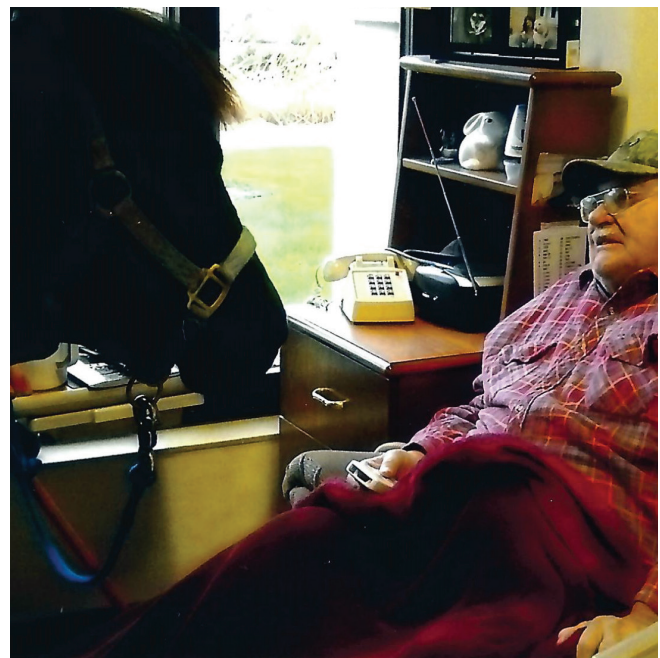


Photo credit (both this page): Breanna Wheeler

8. Build the emerging field supporting older adult access to nature.

In conducting the field scan, it is clear that Minnesota has many promising models and existing efforts to help older adults access nature. This report is a first step to begin to collect and share information about the work going on across the state. Moving forward, there is a significant opportunity to share information and learning, strengthen connections regionally and around the state, and begin to more intentionally build this emerging field for greater reach, support, and impact.

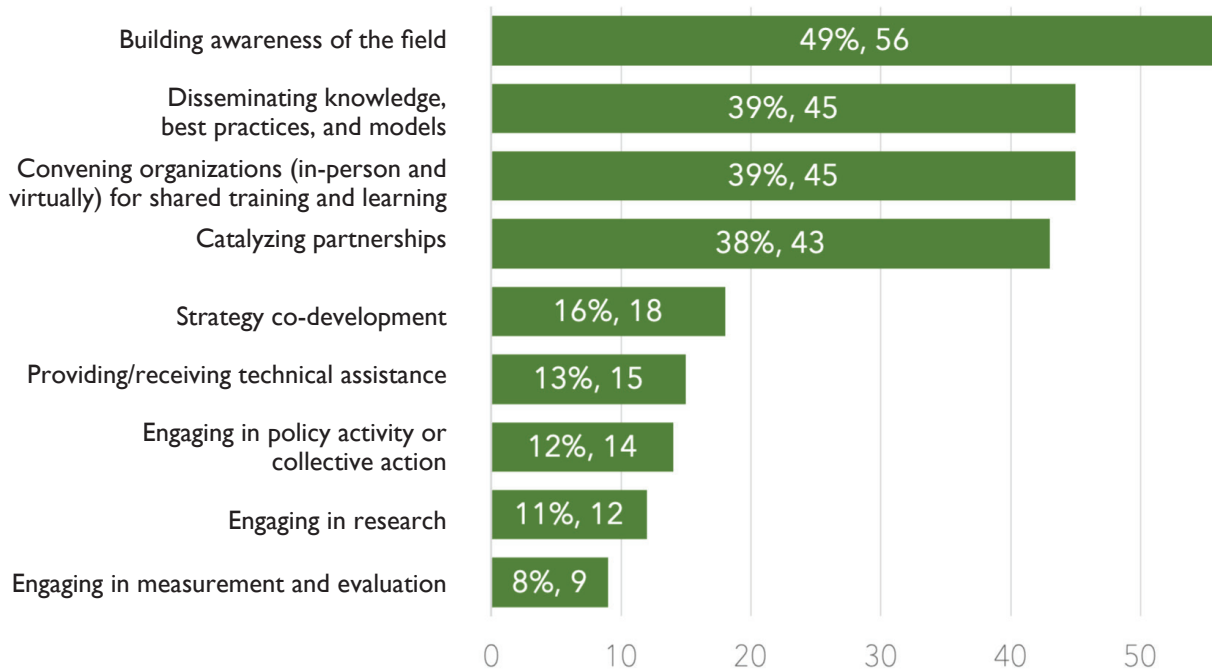
Respondents to the Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey are most interested in the following future field-building opportunities:

- Building awareness of the field;
- Disseminating knowledge, best practices, and models;
- Convening organizations (in-person and virtually) for shared training and learning; and
- Catalyzing partnerships.

Through stronger communication, coordination, and collaboration with those seeking to support and expand older adults' access to nature, we can collectively begin to consider shared priorities and amplify the importance of access to nature for older adults in Minnesota. We can also begin to build the evidence through both data and stories about the impact for older adults and our state.

There may also be opportunities to join with broader efforts in the state working toward similar goals, including the [Minnesota Landscape Analysis Partnership](#) (MLAP). MLAP is a partnership with the [Minnesota Association for Environmental Education](#) (MAEE), the [Minnesota Children and Nature Connection](#) (MnCNC), and [Wilderness Inquiry](#), which seeks to grow an environmental stewardship ethic in Minnesota through direct experiences with nature and the outdoors and to provide access to environmental education and outdoor experiences for all Minnesotans. Early conversations with an MLAP organizer suggests that the focus of this work is on Minnesotans of all ages, including older adults.

Interest in Field-Building Opportunities (114 respondents)



Source: Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey, 2023.

As the Field Scan of Older Adults and Nature in Minnesota shows, there are many ways to grow opportunities across the state for older adults to participate more fully in nature. Whether informally, through people creating opportunities for themselves, friends, and community, or grandparents building intergenerational connections kids and grandkids, or more formally through health promotion or art classes in or near nature, volunteer fishing programs, parks and trails programming, conservation and much more, there is much to build upon. Older adults have specific needs and desires when it comes to being in nature, but the benefits of doing so are clear. There is much we can collectively do to intentionally build age-friendly nature-based opportunities in all parts of the state. If we do, we all will benefit from the profound effects on health, wellness, social connections, and quality of life.



Photo credit: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.

—Rachel Carson

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ONLINE RESOURCES

A Field Scan of Older Adults and Nature in Minnesota sought out broad resources supportive of its fundamental question: *What can be done across Minnesota to facilitate greater access to nature for older adults?* The list of resources accessed is thus expansive rather than exhaustive, offering a starting point for further exploration and compiling.

- Section 1 below is a selection of additional online resources.
- Section 2 contains the full URLs of sites linked in the text of the field scan.

To share additional resources and/or report broken links, please complete the Google Form linked in [Appendix G](#), or click here: <https://rb.gy/9pbvp0>

1. Additional Online Resources (by select topic)

DATA ON AGING

Minnesota Compass City-level Data (including age)

<https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/>

Minnesota State Demographer Center/Department of Administration

<https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/aging/>

https://mn.gov/admin/assets/demographic-considerations-planning-for-mn-leaders-msdc-march2016_tcm36-219453.pdf

Minnesota's Aging Population and Disability Communities—2022 Presentation by State Demographer to Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A)

<https://mn4a.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Minnesotas-Aging-Population-and-Disability-Communities-SBrower2022.pdf>

US Census 2020 Aging Data

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/05/2020-census-united-states-older-population-grew.html>

MINNESOTA NATURE LOCATION INFORMATION

The [Minnesota Great Outdoors map](#), a partnership between the [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR), the [Metropolitan Council](#), and the [Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission](#) (GMRPTC), shows information about many Minnesota parks and trails, with information about accessibility and amenities and links to individual park and trail websites: <https://greatoutdoors.mn.gov/>

Accessible Outdoors

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/accessible_outdoors/index.html

State Public Lands

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/publiclands/index.html>

US National Parks/Monuments/Trails in Minnesota

<https://www.nps.gov/state/mn/index.htm>

US National Forests in Minnesota

—Chippewa National Forest <https://www.fs.usda.gov/chippewa>

—Superior National Forest <https://www.fs.usda.gov/superior>

US Fish & Wildlife Lands in Minnesota

https://www.fws.gov/our-facilities?state_name=%5B%22Minnesota%22%5D

The Association of Nature Center Administrators lists information for nature centers, environmental learning centers, and others who are members.

<https://www.natctr.org/membership/find-an-anca-member>

City, county, and other community parks, trails, and nature sites can be found by checking individual websites. Many others are not on any map, but rather in smaller green spaces or in our own backyards.

AREA AGENCIES ON AGING (AAA)/MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF AAAS

<https://mn.gov/board-on-aging/about-us/area-agencies/>

<https://mn4a.org/>

PRACTICE RESOURCES

While it is outside the scope of this report to provide detailed or comprehensive information about how best to help older adults prepare for being outdoors and in nature, many such guides, articles, and other publications exist. The following is a sampling of a few such resources:

The National Institute on Aging's safety tips for exercising outdoors for older adults:

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity/safety-tips-exercising-outdoors-older-adults>

National Council on Aging (NCOA) Adviser Review: Staying Active in Cold Weather: A Safety Guide for Older Adults (2023)

<https://www.ncoa.org/adviser/medical-alert-systems/staying-active-cold-weather/>

National Council on Aging's guide to staying active in cold weather

<https://www.ncoa.org/adviser/medical-alert-systems/staying-active-cold-weather/>

Activity-friendly environments for active aging: The physical, social, and technology environments

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9875594/>

Talking winter activity for older adults with University of Minnesota

<https://med.umn.edu/news/talking-winter-activity-older-adults-u-m>

Nature on PBS

<https://www.youtube.com/@naturepbs/videos>

Wilderness Inquiry's Virtual Wilderness Trips, Tours, and Learning Sessions

<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/adult-virtual-adventures/>

2. Online Sources Referenced in the Field Scan

page 3

Last Child in the Woods

<https://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/children-nature-movement/>

Children & Nature Network

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/>

Age-Friendly Minnesota

<https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/>

page 4

Minnesota Compass

<https://www.mncompass.org/older-adults>

7 Things to Know About Minnesota's Older Adults

<https://www.mncompass.org/data-insights/articles/7-things-know-about-minnesotas-older-adults>

page 6

Outdoor Foundation's 2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report

<https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2022-Outdoor-Participation-Trends-Report-I.pdf>

World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities and Communities

<https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/age-friendly-environments>

Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/>

Age-Friendly Minnesota

<https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/>

Age-Friendly Minnesota Priorities

<https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/priorities/>

Age-Friendly Minnesota Grants

<https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/grants/>

"local innovations and efforts statewide"

https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/AFMN-community-grant-awards-announcement_tcm1053-581284.pdf

"eight domains of livability"

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2016/8-domains-of-livability-introduction.html>

"nature"

<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=nature>.

AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/>

page 7

"downloadable flyer"

<https://paparksandforests.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Reasons-to-get-Outdoors-Seniors-3.pdf>

Parks Rx America

<https://parkrxamerica.org/>

"physical and mental health benefits"

<https://parkrxamerica.org/providers/human-benefits-of-nature.php>

Children & Nature Network

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/>

"research library with over one hundred articles specific to seniors"

<https://research.childrenandnature.org/research-library/?h=pn7UvnCl>

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Nature Heals Initiative

<https://arb.umn.edu/learn/health-wellbeing-programs/nature-heals-initiative>

“research articles showing scientific evidence”

<https://arb.umn.edu/nature-heals-initiative/healingpower>

page 9

Blue Zones

<https://info.bluezonesproject.com/approach>

“read more about what Albert Lea is doing”

<https://cityofalbertlea.org/bluezones/>

Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults

[https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25663/
social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-older-adults-opportunities-for-the](https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25663/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-older-adults-opportunities-for-the)

“social determinants of health”

[https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/
social-determinants-health-and-older-adults](https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults)

Healthy People 2030 and Older Adults

<https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/healthy-people-2030-and-older-adults>

“Economic stability”

<https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#economic>

“Neighborhood and built environment”

[https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/
social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#neighborhood](https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#neighborhood)

“Social and community context”

[https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/
social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#social](https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#social)

“Education access and quality”

[https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/
social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#education](https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#education)

“Health care access and quality”

[https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/
social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#health](https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-aging/social-determinants-health-and-older-adults#health)

“neighborhoods and the built environment”

[https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/
neighborhood-and-built-environment](https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/neighborhood-and-built-environment)

“social cohesion”

[https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/
social-cohesion](https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/social-cohesion)

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“Dakota and Anishinaabe land”

<https://nativegov.org/about/our-land-acknowledgement-statement/>

“DNR’s most recent park visitor study”

<https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/parks/2022-state-parks-visitor-study-summary.pdf>

“four biomes”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/index.html>

“Coniferous forest”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/coniferous.html>

“Deciduous forest”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/deciduous.html>

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“Prairie grassland”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/prairie.html>

“Tallgrass aspen parkland”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/tallgrass.html>

MN DNR website

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/index.html>

“therapeutic landscapes”

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29175701/>

“green and blue landscapes”

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829215000672>

Walk Like a Penguin: Older Minnesotans’ Experiences of (Non)Therapeutic White Space

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29276989/>

page 13

Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqk576p6d2D-GeRZFjaX6nzYC5kZvzp7hXq_G393Imi7CrQw/viewform

FrameWorks Institute’s Communications Toolkit

https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/aging_bp_quickstart.pdf

page 15

“biophilia hypothesis”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biophilia_hypothesis

page 17

“2023 Age-Friendly Minnesota Community Grants”

https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/AFMN-community-grant-awards-announcement_tcm1053-581284.pdf

page 18

The Loppet Foundation

<https://www.loppet.org/>

page 19

River Bend Nature Center

<https://rbnc.org/>

“full report here”

<https://rbnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Outdoor-Interests-Barriers-Report.pdf>

page 21

Volunteer Services of Carlton, Inc.

<https://vscci.com/>

Carlton Wellness Center

<https://carltonwellness.com/>

Let’s Go Fishing - Brainerd Lakes Chapter

<https://brainerd.lgfws.com/>

River Bend Nature Center

<https://rbnc.org/>

page 23

Urban Bird Collective

<https://urbanbirdcollective.org/>

page 24

Superior Hiking Trail Association

<https://superiorhiking.org>

page 24 continued

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission
<https://ardc.org/>

Vital Aging Network
<https://vital-aging-network.org/>

“confronting ageism”
<https://vital-aging-network.org/confronting-ageism/>

page 25

Nature-Based Therapeutics
<https://arb.umn.edu/learn/health-wellbeing-programs/about-nature-based-therapeutics>

University of Minnesota’s Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing
<https://csh.umn.edu/academics/focus-areas/nature-based-therapeutics>

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum
<https://arb.umn.edu/>

page 26

Ely Field Naturalists
<https://elyfieldnaturalists.wordpress.com/>

Women of the Woods
<https://www.pbs.org/video/women-of-the-woods-vtnluh/>

Cannon Valley Elder Collegium
<https://cvec.org/>

page 27

North Community Radio’s Phenology Program
<https://www.kaxe.org/podcast/phenology>

page 28

ParkScoreIndex®
<https://www.tpl.org/parkscore>

Ely Field Naturalists
<https://elyfieldnaturalists.wordpress.com/>

Google Group
<https://groups.google.com/g/elyfieldnaturalists?subject=?>

page 29

2040 System Plan
<https://www.threeriversparks.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2040%20Plan/2040%20System%20Plan%20-%20Web.pdf>

page 30

Minnesota Master Naturalist Program
<https://www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org/>

Birding Brainerd with the Plinskes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBSL977Dn8w>

page 31

Let’s Go Fishing
<https://lgfws.com/>

page 32

AARP’s age-friendly designation
<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/>

City of Cohasset
<https://www.cohasset-mn.com/parksrec>

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Cities Connecting Children to Nature

<https://www.nlc.org/initiative/cities-connecting-children-to-nature/>

Nature Smart Libraries

<https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/2021-07/Explore%20Outdoors%20Saint%20Paul%20Annual%20Report%20-%202020.pdf>

“telescope loan”

<https://librarytelescope.org/world/usa/minnesota>

“Hennepin County”

<https://www.hclib.org/about/locations/seed-libraries#:~:text=Patrons%20are%20welcome%20to%20browse,for%20someone%20else%20to%20enjoy>

“Dakota County”

<https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/libraries/Using/Seed>

page 33

Red Wing Area Seniors

<http://www.redwingareaseniors.org/>

Eden Prairie Senior Center

<https://www.edenprairie.org/amenities/senior-center>

page 34

Silverwood Park

<https://www.threeriversparks.org/location/silverwood-park>

Spark! Alliance

<https://www.sparkprograms.org/>

Nature Heals Initiative

<https://arb.umn.edu/learn/health-wellbeing-programs/nature-heals-initiative>

Dr. Jean Larson

<https://csh.umn.edu/bio/center-for-spirituality-and-he/jean-larson>

“research showing nature’s healing power”

<https://arb.umn.edu/nature-heals-initiative/healingpower>

page 35

Minneapolis Nature-Based Therapy

<https://naturebased.care/>

Charlson Meadows

<https://cmeadows.org/>

page 36

Windom Area Health

<https://windomareahealth.org/>

page 37

Northwoods Partners

<https://www.northwoodspartners.org/>

Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance

<https://yourjuniper.org/programs-classes/prevent-falls/tai-ji-quan-moving-for-better-balance-beginner/>

page 38

Healthy Older People (HOP)

<https://www.parksandtrails.org/event/whitewater-state-park-hop-program-2/>

Friends of Whitewater State Park

<https://www.parksandtrails.org/friends-groups/meet-friends/whitewater/>

page 39

University for Seniors

<https://university-seniors.d.umn.edu/>

Walk with a Doc

<https://walkwithadoc.org/wp-content/uploads/Conference-Flyer-WWAD-1.pdf>

page 40

Northland Foundation's AGE to age Program

<https://northlandfdn.org/kids-plus/intergenerational-programs.php>

AGE to age

<https://northlandfdn.org/news/publications/age2age-overview-2018.pdf>

page 41

Polk County Public Health

<https://www.co.polk.mn.us/191/Public-Health>

page 42

Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota

<https://www.parksandtrails.org/friends-groups/>

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends

<https://www.mnvalleyrefugefriends.org/>

Friends of Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge

<https://www.tamaracfriends.org/>

Voyageurs National Park

<https://www.nps.gov/voya/index.htm>

“summer residential volunteer opportunities”

<https://www.volunteer.gov/s/volunteer-opportunity/a093d000000zlmh/voyageurs-national-park-visitor-center-volunteer-summer-2024>

Friends Group Partner membership program

<https://www.parksandtrails.org/friends-groups/>

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“list of community science opportunities”

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/community-science.html>

Minnesota Frog and Toad Calling Survey

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/frog-toad-survey.html>

Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/mlmp_state.html

iNaturalist

<https://www.inaturalist.org/>

Amphibian and Reptile Survey of Minnesota

<https://www.mnherps.com/>

HerpMapper

<https://www.herpmapper.org/>

Bell Museum of Natural History

<https://www.bellmuseum.umn.edu/amphibians-reptiles/>

Minnesota Herpetological Society

<https://mnherpsoc.org/>

Minnesota eBird

<https://ebird.org/mn/home>

Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

<https://moumn.org/>

page 44

“his blog about this ecological restoration”

<https://ecorestoration.weebly.com/>

“cut, shuck, pluck, huck, plant, and repeat”

<https://ecorestoration.weebly.com/er-at-cedar-lake-point-beach-and-beyond-blog/archives/10-2023>

page 45

Great River Greening

<https://www.greatrivergreening.org/>

“volunteer opportunities can be found here”

<https://www.greatrivergreening.org/volunteer>

page 48

Legislative Task Force on Aging

<https://www.lcc.mn.gov/aging/>

Ann Bussey’s February 2023 testimony

<https://www.lcc.mn.gov/aging/09122023/AnnB-Testimony.pdf>

Reframe Aging Initiative

<https://www.mnlcoa.org/reframeaging>

Center for Healthy Aging and Innovation

<https://www.sph.umn.edu/research/centers/chai/about/>

MN Leadership Council on Aging

<https://www.mnlcoa.org/>

page 49

FrameWorks Institute

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/issues/aging/>

Gaining Momentum Toolkit

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkit/gaining-momentum/>

National Center for Reframing Aging

<https://www.reframingaging.org/>

“fifteen states and six cities”

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/resources/childrens-outdoor-bill-of-rights-bring-leaders-residents-together/#:~:text=A%20childrens%20outdoor%20bill%20of,in%20place%20or%20in%20development.>

Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBOR)

https://mn.gov/children-outdoors/assets/COBR%20State%20Actions%20Summary_FINAL_tcm1181-538867.pdf

“vision”

<https://mn.gov/children-outdoors/>

Governor’s Council for Age-Friendly Minnesota

<https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/about/>

Multisector Blueprint for Aging

<https://www.agefriendlymn.org/blueprint>

Minnesota State Plan on Aging

<https://mn.gov/board-on-aging/state-plan-on-aging/>

Older Americans Act

<https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act>

Juniper

<https://yourjuniper.org/>

MinnesotaHelp.info

<https://www.minnesotahelp.info/public/>

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Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

<https://comozooconservatory.org/>

Senior Strolls

<https://comozooconservatory.org/como/senior-strolls/>

Minnesota State Plan on Aging 2024–2027

https://mn.gov/board-on-aging/assets/FFY2024-2027-MN_State-Plan-On-Aging_tcm1141-571955.pdf

page 50

A Guide to Decolonize Language in Conservation

<https://www.survivalinternational.org/about/decolonizelanguage>

page 51

AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/aarp-walk-audit-tool-kit-download/>

Statewide Health Improvement Program

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ship/index.html>

Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator Guide

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/physicalactivity/docs/walkaudit.pdf>

River Bend Nature Center Trail Accessibility

<https://rbnc.org/accessibility>

page 53

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center

<https://www.washington.edu/doi/>

Center for Universal Design

<https://design.ncsu.edu/research/center-for-universal-design/>

“expands on”

https://www.washington.edu/doi/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Universal_Design_04_12_21.pdf

880 Cities

<https://www.880cities.org/>

page 54

Metro Mobility

<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Services/Metro-Mobility-Home.aspx>

Transit Link

<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Services/Transit-Link.aspx>

Metro Transit micro

<https://www.metrotransit.org/micro>

Center for Transportation Studies

<https://www.cts.umn.edu/>

Future of Mobility

<https://www.cts.umn.edu/research/featured/futureofmobility>

“click here for full details”

<https://www.cts.umn.edu/research/featured/futureofmobility/qian>

Older Adult Fitness: Access and Participation in Rural Minnesota

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/ruralhealth/rhac/docs/2018wellness.pdf>

page 56

Photo credit: Minnesota DNR website

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/track-chairs.html

Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute

<https://account.allinahealth.org/servicelines/815>

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- Northland Adaptive Recreation
<https://www.facebook.com/NorthlandAdaptiveRecreation/>
- Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
<https://www.optionsoutdoors.org/>
- All-Terrain Track Chairs
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/track-chairs.html
- adaptive beach chair
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/track-chairs.html
- Scott County
<https://www.scottcountymn.gov/772/Parks-Trails>

page 57

- “free state park pass program”
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/minnesota-state-parks-library-program.html
- “a list of participating libraries”
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/minnesota-state-parks-library-program.html
- Center for Outdoor Adventure
<https://recwell.umn.edu/recreational-activities/equipment/outdoor-gear-rentals>
- “Older Minnesotans Love Winter. How Can We Help Them Stay Safe?”
<https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/older-minnesotans-love-winter-how-can-we-help-them-stay-safe>
- Carlton Wellness Center
<https://carltonwellness.com/>
- Wild River State Park
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00254#homepage

page 58

- Community Partners
<https://communitypartnersth.org/>
- City of Cohasset
<https://www.cohasset-mn.com/parksrec>
- WinterCity
https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/wintercity-strategy
- Winter Design Guidelines
https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PDF/WinterCityDesignGuidelines_draft.pdf

page 59

- Multisector Blueprint for Aging
<https://www.agefriendlymn.org/blueprint>
- Placemaking for an Aging Population: Guidelines for Senior-Friendly Parks
https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/04/Seniors-and-Parks-8-28-Print_reduced.pdf
- Pocket parks
<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/pocket-parks.pdf>
- Placemaking for an Aging Population: Guidelines for Senior-Friendly Parks
https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/04/Seniors-and-Parks-8-28-Print_reduced.pdf
- Intergenerational Play Spaces
<https://www.aarpinternational.org/file%20library/build%20equity/aarp-intergenerationalplay-casestudy-final.pdf>

page 60

- Minnesota Veterans Home - Hastings
https://mn.gov/mdva/assets/VeteransHomeBrochureTriFold_tcm1066-196458.pdf

page 61

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE)

<https://coresourceexchange.org/>

“six adult learning principles”

<https://coresourceexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Six-Principles-of-Adult-Learning.pdf>

North Community Radio (KAXE/KBXE)’s Phenology Program

<https://www.kaxe.org/podcast/phenology>

“Access the Phenology resources here”

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mvuXd4z-5brAUCrkM_Jua2dTPQLWKigS

page 63

Finish Strong Funders Network for Aging Services

<https://www.mnlcoa.org/finish-strong>

No Child Left Inside

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/no-child-grants/index.html>

page 64

“regional chapters”

<https://www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org/chapter/>

Senior Companion Services

<https://www.lssmn.org/services/older-adults/companion-services/senior-companion>

Friends & Co

<https://friendsco.org/visiting-companions/>

page 65

Minnesota Landscape Analysis Partnership

<https://minnesotae.org/landscapeanalysis/>

Minnesota Association for Environmental Education

<https://minnesotae.org/>

Minnesota Children and Nature Connection

<https://sites.google.com/view/mncnc/home>

Wilderness Inquiry

<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/>

APPENDIX A

Key Informant Interviews

AARP-MN *Jay Haapala, Meghan Redmond, Jim Scheibel*

Center for Spirituality/Minnesota Landscape Arboretum *Jeannie Larson, Sarah Kottke Palm*

Central MN Council on Aging *Eleanor Burkett*

Charlson Meadows *Holly Kreft*

City of Minnetonka/Senior Services *Kate Egert*

Como Park & Zoo *Bekah Hanes*

Dreams of Wild Health *Courtney Tschida, Hope Flannagan*

Ely Field Naturalists *Bill Tefft*

Fort Snelling State Park *Kao Thao*

Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs *Dean Nisha Botchwey*

Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) *Jim Plummer*

KAXE North Community Radio *John Latimer, Charlie Mitchell*

Let's Go Fishing *Darci Mohr*

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota *Melissa Grimmer, Carolyn Scherer*

Minnesota Department of Health Arthritis Program/Minnesota Arthritis Alliance *Erin McHenry Wolf
and Alliance members*

Minneapolis Nature-Based Therapy *Annie Bunio*

Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) *Local AAA directors*

Minnesota Master Naturalist Program *Amy Rager, Andrea Lorek Strauss*

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) *Arielle Courtney*

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge *Kara Zwickey, Christopher Dunham*

Nature-Based Therapeutics *Cindy Berlovitz*

Northland Foundation *Zane Bail*

Northwoods Partners *Lisa Porthan*

Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnerships *Randolph Briley*

Parks and Trails Council of MN *Andrew Oftedahl*

Polk County Public Health *Kirsten Sandager Fagerlund*

SE Park Rx *Abdi Muse and other coalition members*

Silverwood Park/Three Rivers Parks *Alyssa Baguss, David Donovan*

Three Rivers Parks *Maggie Heurung*

UMD/Memory Keepers Medical Discovery Team *Kirsten Cruikshank*

Urban Bird Collective *Monica Bryand*

Whitewater State Park/Healthy Older People *Sara Holger, Sharon Columbus*

Wilderness Inquiry *Anne Strootman*

Women Hike Duluth *Sandi Larson*

Individuals

Ann Bussey (Side Lake)

Steve Kotvis (Minneapolis)

Ron and Leeanne Plinske (Brainerd)

Breanna Wheeler (Northfield)

APPENDIX B

Organizations Responding to Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota Survey (2023–2024)

Alexandria Public Schools Community Education	Let's Go Fishing Detroit Lakes	Prairie Community Services Arlington
Bethany on the Lake	Let's Go Fishing East Central	Prairie Five Community Action, Inc.
BikeMN	Let's Go Fishing Headwaters	Project Sweetie Pie
Breanna Wheeler. Independent Consultant	Let's Go Fishing Itasca	Red Wing Area Seniors
Broadwell Senior Living	Let's Go Fishing Alexandria	Scandia-Marine Lions Club
Cannon Valley Elder Collegium	Let's Go Fishing Eden Prairie	Shepard of the Lake Lutheran Church Women, Wellness, and Nature Group
Capable Partners, Inc.	Let's Go Fishing Paynesville	Sholom Home West
Carlton Wellness Center	Let's Go Fishing Scott County	Silverwood Park Three Rivers Park District
Cavanagh Senior Living	Let's Go Fishing St. Croix Valley	Skylight Gardens Assistant Living
CCH WinterGreen Independent Living	Let's Go Fishing Willmar Lakes	Southeast Seniors
Charlson Meadows	Mahnomen MSOCS	STEP, Inc.
City of Chisholm	MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc.	Sugar Brook Villa
City of Cohasset	Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association	Sugarloaf: The North Shore Stewardship Association
Community Partners	MCPA Adult Day Center	SummerWood of Plymouth
Como Park Zoo and Conservatory Crest	Minneapolis Nature-Based Therapy	Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge
Croixdale Senior Living	Minnesota Landscape Arboretum	Tettegouche State Park MN DNR
Cycling Without Age Fergus Falls	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	The Greens (over 55 HOA)
Driftless Naturalist, LLC	MN DNR Blue Mounds State Park	Trinity Lutheran Ruth Circle
Duluth YMCA	MN Master Naturalist Brainerd Lakes Chapter	Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
Ecumen Point Pleasant Heights	Moorhead Rehabilitation and Health Care Center	UMD University for Seniors
Eden Prairie Senior Center	MRCI	United Community Action Partnership, Inc.
Engage	MSS - Eagan	University of MN Extension Minnesota Master Naturalist Program
FamilyMeans	New Horizons	Virginia Public Library
Father Hennepin State Park	North American Bear Center	Volunteer Services of Carlton County, Inc.
Finding Meaning Outdoors	Northern Community Radio	Voyageurs National Park
Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary	Northfield Pedalers	Walker Methodist Care Suites
Friends of Sax-Zim Bog	Northwoods Partners	Walker Methodist Senior Care
Golden Horizons of Sandstone	Nufound Wellness	Whitewater State Park
Grand Village	Oak Hill Assisted Living	Wild River State Park
Great River Greening	Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living	Windom Area Health
Hastings Domiciliary Veterans Home	Orchard Path	Women Hike Duluth
Ingleside Assisted Living	Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo	
Itasca Friendship Club	Paynesville Health Care	
Kaposia, Inc.	Polk County Public Health	
Let's Go Fishing Brainerd Lakes		

APPENDIX C

Key Informant Interview and Survey Questions

1. Introductions (who are you/organization, how do you connect with older adults in your work?)
2. Is there a website link for your program and/or organization?
3. What programming/activities/efforts with older adults is happening, if any?
4. Do any of these have a name? Are there written materials about the work?
5. How did your organization get started doing this work?
6. How do you recruit older adults? Who are your community partners? Do you visit older adults in their homes? (if relevant)
7. Do you have demographics, usage, and/or other data about older adults?
8. Do you view older adults as key customers, or an audience you seek to engage?
9. What needs do you see older adults having?
10. What interests do you see older adults having?
11. What benefits do you see older adults enjoying as a result of the work? Do you track information, outcomes, or results of the work?
12. Is social engagement/reducing isolation for older adults a focus of any of this work? If so, describe.
13. What barriers/challenges do you see to serving older adults?
14. What opportunities do you see to better engage older adults in your program? What innovations? What stands in the way of doing these things?
15. Is there a certain point where older adults “age out” of or stop participating in your program? Why do you think that is?
16. Does any of your work target, market to, or support caregivers of older adults? If so, describe (include opportunities and barriers).
17. How are diversity, equity, inclusion, ability, and other access issues and opportunities addressed in the work?
18. Is any of the work intergenerational or multigenerational? If so, describe.
19. Are you aware of program, policy, research, funding, and advocacy opportunities related to this work? If so, describe.
20. What type of marketing do you do, if any, to older adults?
21. Do you know of others within your networks or elsewhere doing work I should learn more about?
22. Is there a collective way to email or interact with your networks? (e.g., monthly newsletter, quarterly call, annual conference, etc.)?
23. Do you have photos (with permissions secured, and that would be credited if used in the report) you can share?
24. Are there any other related resources, people, or organizations I should connect with or be aware of?
25. What haven't we discussed that you would like to mention?

[Building Organizational Capacity for Nature Opportunities for Older Adults in Minnesota survey questions](#)

APPENDIX D

Summary of 2023 Older Adults Survey

Age-Friendly Loppet Foundation | Minneapolis, Minnesota

[The Loppet Foundation](#), which works to connect people to the outdoors through experiences that build community, is planning to expand outreach to and programming for older adults, with a focus on North Minneapolis and communities surrounding Theodore Wirth Park where it is located. As part of this Age-Friendly Loppet Foundation work, supported through an [Age-Friendly Minnesota community grant](#), a survey of older adults (55+ years of age) was distributed broadly, especially to older adult residents of North Minneapolis.



[View the survey](#) (respondents = 84)

Surveys were gathered primarily through community partnerships and in-person events between September and December 2023, including Loppet Foundation/YMCA Senior Socials at the Trailhead, Open Streets Broadway, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC)'s Senior Fall Luncheon, a Harold Mezile North Community YMCA ForeverWell luncheon, and at visits to Residents Councils of Northside senior housing and through University of Minnesota/UROC outreach to North Minneapolis older adults. A few surveys were also submitted online.

KEY FINDINGS

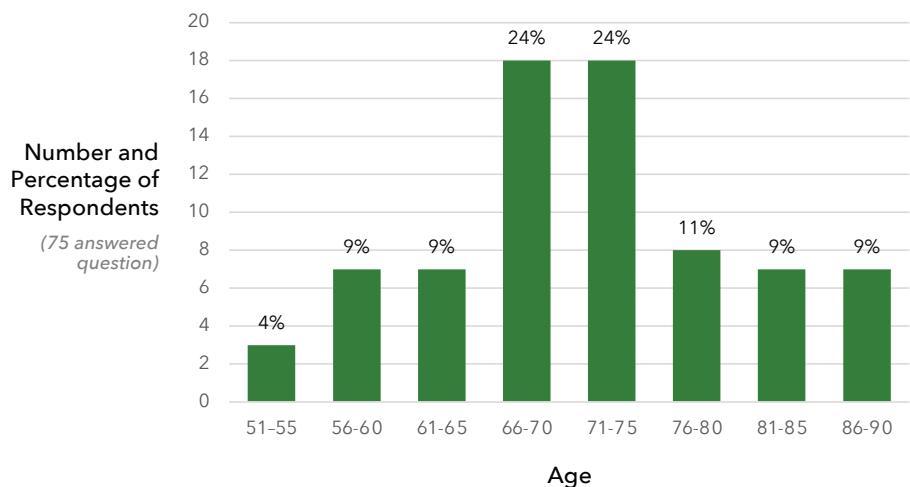
Geography

The survey reached its target market of North Minneapolis and communities adjacent to Theodore Wirth Park. Zip codes of respondents included the following:

- 55411 (58%)
- 55412 (8%)
- 55405 (14%)
- 55422 (5%)
- 55407 (3%)
- 55413, 55419, 55426, 55427, 55428, 55429, 55430, 55432, and 55445 (1.2% each)

Age

Most survey respondents were between 59 and 88 years old:



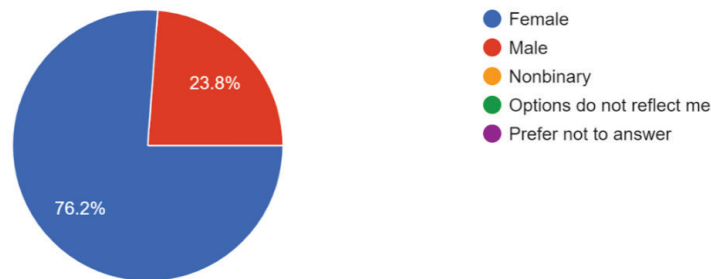
KEY FINDINGS (continued)

Gender Identity

More women (76%) than men (24%) completed the survey:

How do you currently describe your gender identity?

84 responses



Race/Ethnic Diversity

The survey reached diverse voices from North Minneapolis:

Black or African American (71%)

White (27%)

American Indian or Alaska Native (5%)

Person with a disability (1%)

(Note: responders were allowed to check multiple races)

Favorite Things To Do Outside

Older adults have many outdoor interests, including: Walking/Hiking (39), Gardening/Yard work (17), Biking (14), Appreciating nature (9), Fishing/Boating (8), Swimming (6), Reading (5), Nordic skiing (4), Social activities (e.g., grandkids, friends, family)/Classes (4), Bonfires (3), and Tennis (2). Other activities mentioned on the survey include: be, sleep, stay warm and safe, nothing, play, and sit.

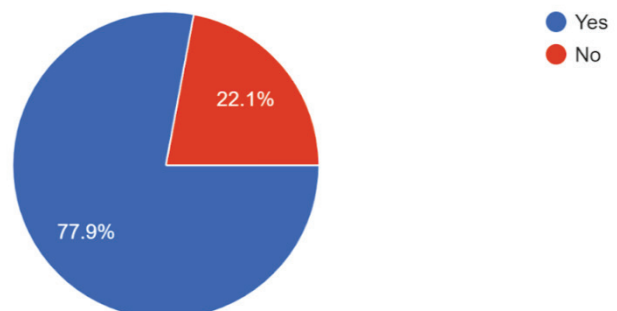
Time Spent Outside

Most survey respondents were interested in increasing their time outside. When asked why, responses included needing more exercise, that doing so makes them feel better, and that it's a good way to be with others. Some mentioned health problems and winter as things that pose a challenge.

Motivations varied and were quite individual. One respondent said: "I want the fresh air, sun, exercise, vitamin D, nature, sun sets, sun rise, wildlife, exploring our waters etc." While another said: "Winter hurts my bones. Summer burns my skin."

Are you interested in increasing the time you spend outdoors?

77 responses



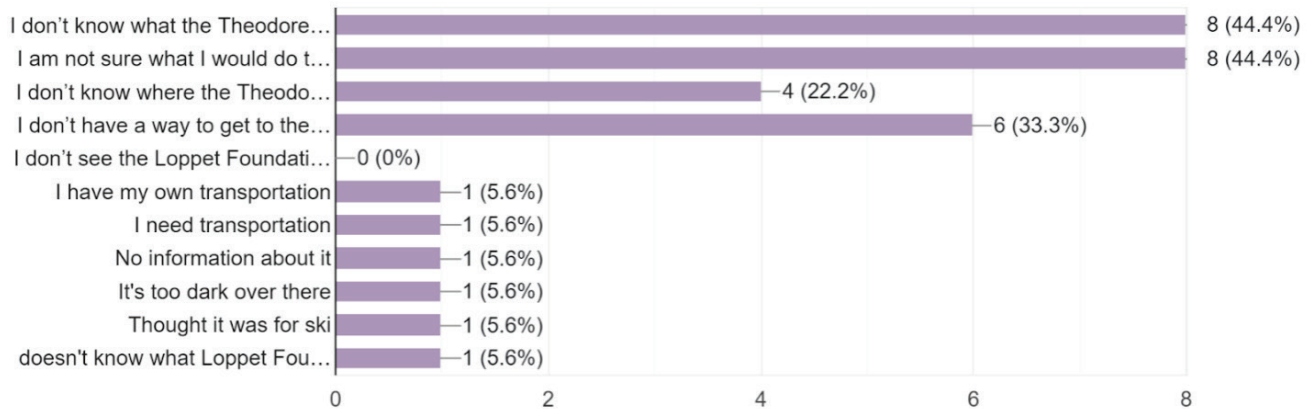
KEY FINDINGS (continued)

Awareness of and Satisfaction with Theodore Wirth Park

Seventy-two percent (72%) of survey respondents were aware of Theodore Wirth Park where the Loppet Foundation and its Trailhead are located, while 28% responded that they had never visited the park.

If you answered NO to the question: Have you ever visited Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis where the Loppet Foundation and its Trailhead are located? Tell us why (check all that apply):

18 responses

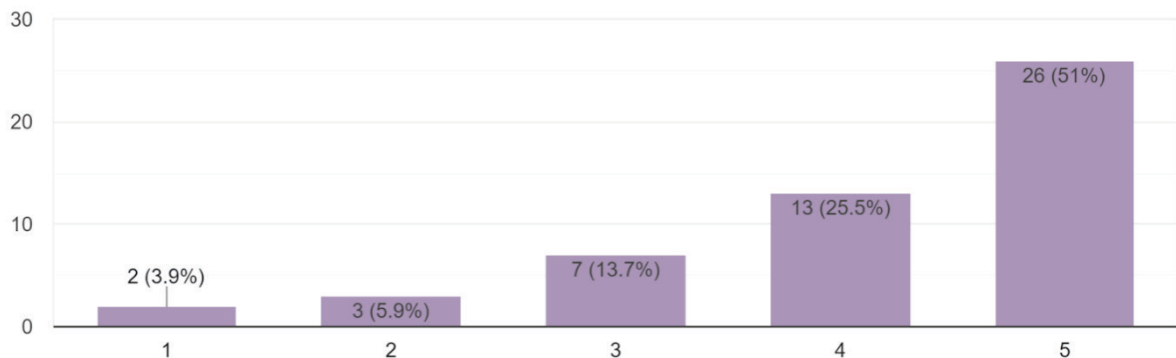


For those who HAVE NOT visited, awareness, uncertainty about what they would do there, and transportation are the most frequently cited responses.

For those who HAVE visited Theodore Wirth Park, overall satisfaction levels (1-5) are as follows:

If you answered YES to the question: Have you ever visited Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis, where the Loppet Foundation and its Trailhead are ...ying was your experience was on a scale of 1 – 5?

51 responses



KEY FINDINGS (continued)

Activities Pursued

For those who HAVE visited Theodore Wirth/Trailhead, the things they have done most are as follows:

- Walked/Hiked – 61% (37)
- Visited the restaurant – 50% (30)
- Attended an event or class – 47% (28)
- Biked – 33% (20)
- Cross-country skied – 20% (12)
- Golf - 12% (7)
- Archery - 5% (3)

Favorite Memories

A few people shared memories/stories via the survey about Theodore Wirth Park: sledding when they brought their own children to the park; golfing (“I hit a bogey!”); taking their grandchildren there swimming; and enjoying the natural setting (“I saw a wolf while skiing” and “I especially like Eloise Butler Flower Garden”).

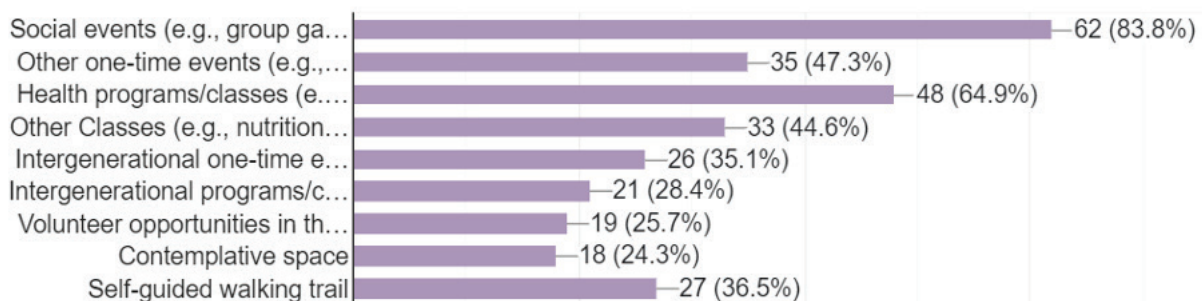
One respondent remembered when her young husband took her on a drive all the way down the parkway from the lakes to Theodore Wirth Park. As she said: “It was the first time I understood that the parkway was the connection between South Minneapolis and North Minneapolis.: Another woman mentioned that she and her late husband would walk the park at least 3 times a week and that it was their “bonding time” together.

Future Offerings

Survey respondents shared the types of future offerings from the Loppet Foundation they would like to see:

Which of the following offerings would most interest you at the Trailhead or within Theodore Wirth Park?

74 responses



KEY FINDINGS (continued)

In addition to the items listed above, other responses were karaoke, foraging classes, bodybuilding, yoga, and outdoor concerts were suggested. Respondents suggested making events free, providing transportation, getting the word out broadly (especially through community partners and churches), and while targeting older adults, invite all. Several respondents also emphasized continuing to make the Trailhead and park a welcoming space for the surrounding North Minneapolis community.

Staying Connected

Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents indicated they would like to sign up for the Loppet Foundation's newsletter. When asked about preferred methods for communication, respondents answered email (60%), mail (45%), text messages (26%), and Facebook (11%) as their most preferred methods (*Note: Respondents were able to select multiple methods.*)

For more information about the Age-Friendly Loppet Foundation work, please contact DeAnna Perkins, Adventures Director, perkins@loppet.org

APPENDIX E

Summary of 2023 Outdoor Interests and Barriers Survey of Older Adults

River Bend Nature Center | Faribault, Minnesota



River Bend

NATURE CENTER

River Bend Nature Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit nature center located in Faribault, worked with Project Consultant, Breanna Wheeler, to conduct a survey targeting people with challenges to independence and with fewer social connections. ([Read the full report here.](#)) They reached 203 respondents in August and September 2023 who shared outdoor activities of interest and barriers to participating in them. They specifically targeted people with limits to independence and social connection though there was a range of people who answered the survey on both of these elements, and partnered with the following organizations:

- Buckham West Senior Center
- Three Rivers Community Action Center | Meals on Wheels
- Healthfinders Collaborative
- Somali Community Resettlement Services
- Rice County Public Health—Home Care and Long Term Care—elderly and disability waiver clients
- Three Links Apartments
- Mill City Senior Living
- New Perspectives Senior Living
- Faribault Deaf Club

DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of respondents were female (68%) and 32% were male. One respondent identified as transgender male. The survey respondents had a good diversity of ages participating with 31% under age 65, 34% of respondents reporting their age as age 65–79, and 35% of respondents reporting their age at 80 or better.

The survey respondents represented a varied racial and ethnic diversity which reflects the general makeup of the community. 70% of respondents reported as white, 22% as Hispanic/Latino, 6% as Black or African-American, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% Multiracial.

There was a variety of educational levels represented by respondents. 37% reported having a high school diploma or GED, 23% reported having an associate or vocational degree, 16% reported some schooling, 14% a bachelor's degree, and 10% a graduate degree.

A variety of household income levels were reflected by respondents. 43% reported incomes of \$10,000–\$39,999; 23% reported incomes of \$40,000–\$69,999; 18% reported incomes of under \$10,000, 9% reported incomes of \$70,000–\$99,999, and 7% reported incomes of \$100,000+.

KEY FINDINGS

Using results, key questions for planners, program coordinators, and decision makers to ask are:

- How can individuals' interests in dispersed independent nature/outdoor connection activities be supported and encouraged?
- How can access be simplified and barriers be reduced/removed to enable people to do what they would most like to do for nature/outdoor connections?

There is a large opportunity to increase availability of and access to nature / outdoor connections for people experiencing challenges to independence and reduced social connections. Some key findings include:

The highest levels of interest were expressed in unstructured, easy access, close to home, spur-of-the-moment activities that could be done when the person wanted.

- 92% expressed interest in driving / looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
- 91% expressed interest in just being outside
- 86% expressed interest in being outside for social interaction
- 76% expressed interest in visiting a neighborhood outdoor space
- 70% expressed interest in doing outdoor hobbies
- 68% expressed interest in going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
- 65% expressed interest in getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
- 49% expressed interest in participating in a program or class to learn something, develop skills
- 27% expressed interest in participating or volunteering with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
- 26% expressed interest in an outdoor spiritual practice

The majority of respondents (74%) indicated that the best way to reach them regarding opportunities is through printed publications.

Barriers to participating with outdoor activities of interest include:

- 69% I don't know if there is a bathroom
- 62% I lack energy
- 59% The surfaces are uneven / I'm afraid of falling
- 59% One or more of my senses is impaired (vision, hearing, balance, etc.)
- 57% I don't know if there is a place to sit if I get tired
- 53% I have pain that limits me
- 52% I don't have the information, I don't know what's available
- 52% The destination is not near me
- 52% My physical mobility is limited, my freedom to move around depends on help from others
- 45% Things like doors, thresholds, and stairs make it hard for me to get outside
- 44% I don't have money to participate
- 40% I do not / no longer drive

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

A variety of places to participate in nature/outdoor connections were indicated (% of people indicating interest in each place)

- 51% Nature Center
- 50% My own backyard or shared space
- 48% Other parks or places to walk / sit outside
- 45% State parks or other state lands/waters
- 45% Homes of friends, family, or neighbors
- 44% Senior center / community center
- 43% Community events
- 39% Community education
- 35% Coffee shop / restaurant / local business
- 33% Faith community
- 33% On my own / unstructured
- 30% Library
- 21% At my health care provider / clinic
- 18% Area agency on aging programs
- 14% Online programs

The most common write in comments/requests respondents had for increasing their nature/outdoor connections include:

- Surfaces, fall related, seating (32 mentions)
- Need for bathrooms, water (27 mentions)
- Accessibility/inclusion (27 mentions)
- Transportation (20 mentions)

The majority of comments under the “surfaces, fall related, seating” heading included: need more benches/a place to sit with shade every so often, more seating to stop and rest, benches and chairs for frail elders, paved surfaces, walking trails, path development, concrete or blacktop for smooth surfaces, easy to walk, level surface, good terrain for walking.

The majority of comments under the “need for bathrooms, water” heading included: want to know that bathrooms are close by if needed, extra-large bathrooms, more bathrooms, with water access to clean, proper elder-accessible bathrooms, and port-a-potties being closer together.

There was a grouping of comments under the “accessibility/inclusion” heading that included: close-by activities, activities in local neighborhoods so more accessible, where I don’t have to drive, I can’t go far.

The majority of comments under the “transportation” heading included: transportation, offer transportation, be able to go without expense and having to schedule it, all ages, more stops.

For questions or a copy of the full report, contact Brad Bourn, Executive Director, River Bend Nature Center at 507-332-7151 or bourn@rbnc.org.

APPENDIX F

Summary of 2024 Age-Friendly Community Survey, Superior Hiking Trail

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission | Duluth, MN



OVERVIEW

In partnership with the Superior Hiking Trail Association and supported by an Age-Friendly Minnesota community grant, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission is developing an age-friendly accessibility index to enhance ease of access to the Superior Hiking Trail for people 60+ in our community. The Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) holds a special place in the hearts of outdoor enthusiasts, and we believe that everyone, regardless of age or ability, should have the opportunity to enjoy its natural beauty and serenity. Our goal is to ensure that people of all ages receive information to make informed decisions on where and how to enjoy the trail to its fullest.

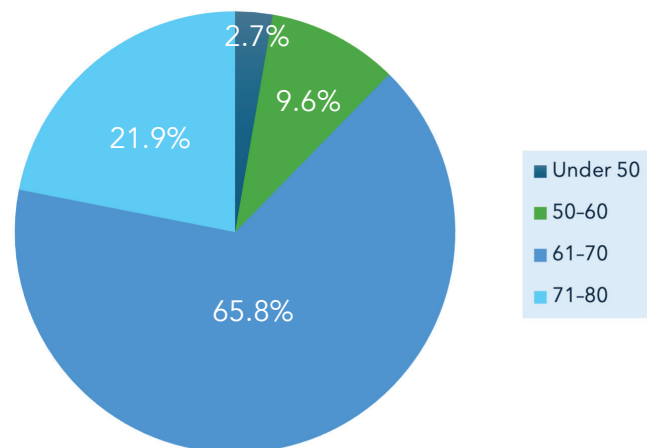
Survey responses were gathered through various online forums, including Facebook group-sharing and emails from different groups and organizations starting on January 3, 2024, and closing on February 9, 2024. In this span of time, 74 people of varying age and trail experience shared their recommendations and tips.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of respondents (65.8%) were between the ages of 61 and 70, confirming that our target demographic was reached.

A large number (62.2%) classified their level of hiking as intermediate.

Respondents came primarily from Duluth and the areas surrounding Minnesota’s North Shore.

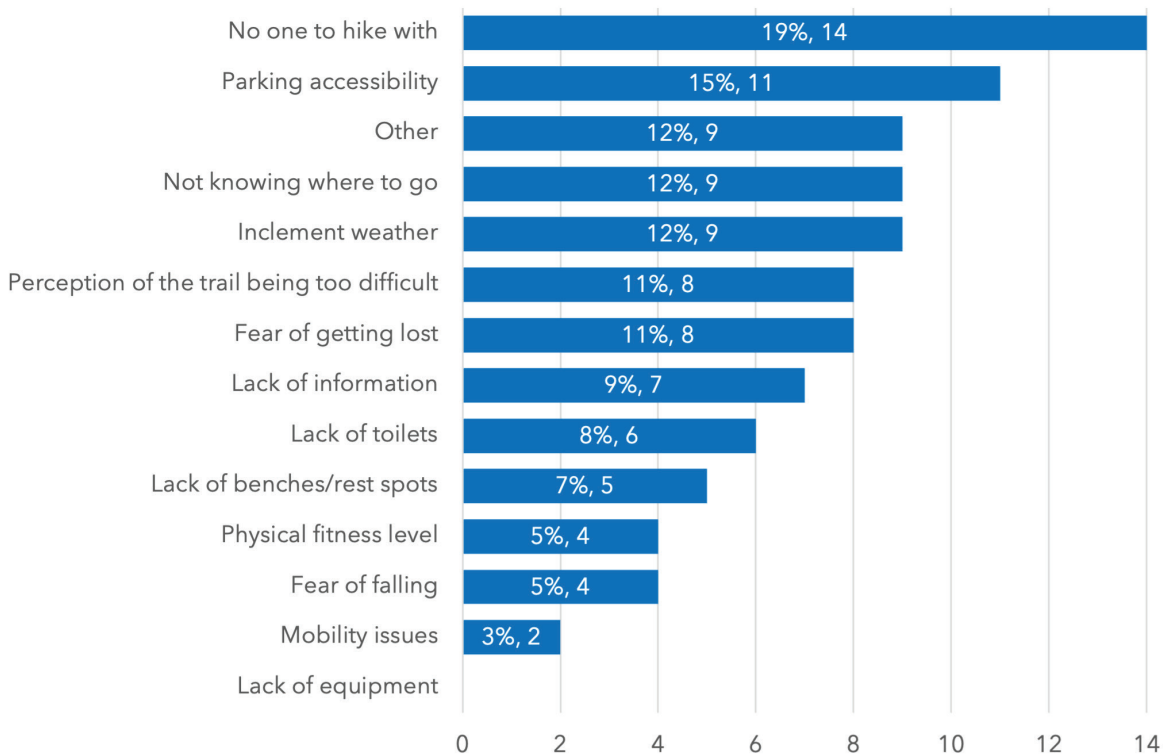


Respondent age

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL

To evaluate the barriers that exist for people attempting to access the trail, a multiple choice question was included.* As seen on the graph, the barrier most frequently selected was not wanting to go alone (14). The next highest was parking accessibility, followed closely by not knowing where to hike, inclement weather, perception of the trail being too difficult, and fear of getting lost. These responses underscore how daunting the trail can seem for those who don't utilize it regularly, and this information will help fuel the recommendations.

*Note that the "other" category was left in inadvertently.



OTHER INFORMATION GATHERED

The remaining survey questions were open-ended.

- **What factors go into selecting a segment to hike?:** Many respondents talked about looking at trail difficulty (6), distance (7) and parking accessibility (16).
- **Lack of information/which things people wished they could find:** Most people said that they didn't see a real lack of information, although some mentioned that they would like more information in real time (i.e., maps, campsites, shuttle information) possibly in a mapping application such as FarOut.
- **How do you prepare for a hike?:** Most mentioned taking daily walks to stay in shape. Recommendations were also made to practice by going for walks wearing a backpack. Other common recommendations were to wear good hiking shoes and use poles.

- **Recommendations/resources to make Superior Hiking Trail more accessible:** Consistent with the most frequently mentioned barrier being not wanting to hike alone, most of the accessibility suggestions concerned organizing guided/group hikes to get people connected and out on the trails in a social setting. Other notable comments included building a bench or other place to rest every so often, and making people aware of shorter sections of the trail that are accessible for less conditioned hikers.
- **Safety considerations:** Lots of people said hiking poles/sticks were “a must,” but another safety concern was communication. Letting others know where/when you’re going and making sure you have a cell phone with you at all times were frequently noted. (A lot of good advice was given. If safety is an area of particular interest, review the appendix for full details.)
- **Advice for encouragement:** Many respondents said that going on a group hike would be a wonderful way to get acclimated to the trail. Another piece of advice was to “just go.” It was suggested to start small and work up in terms of both mileage and difficulty.
- **Stories from the Superior Hiking Trail:** People were happy to share their hiking stories, and, in those, some lessons as well. A couple of respondents advocated stopping and enjoying the surroundings and not moving too fast. One respondent (who called themselves “Tripsalot”) warned that going too fast while trying to absorb everything can lead to falling down—and perhaps a good story as well, but noted they were “not trying to make a habit out of that :).”

For questions or a copy of the full report, including the appendix, contact Carson Polomis, GIS Specialist, Arrowhead Regional Development Commission at 218-529-7553 or cpolomis@ardc.org.

APPENDIX G

Share Your Information and Feedback



We welcome your thoughts and/or additions to this field scan. Our intention was that it would act as a catalyst for future work in this area, so we look forward to hearing your reflections and ideas.

If you or your organization would like to . . .

- provide feedback to the field scan (including broken links!),
 - contribute your work, experience, or ideas, and/or
 - receive updates about this work,
- . . . please complete this [shared form](https://rb.gy/9pbvp0) (<https://rb.gy/9pbvp0>).

Or feel free to send an email: joellehoeft@gmail.com.

