REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS EQUITY TOOL

User Guide
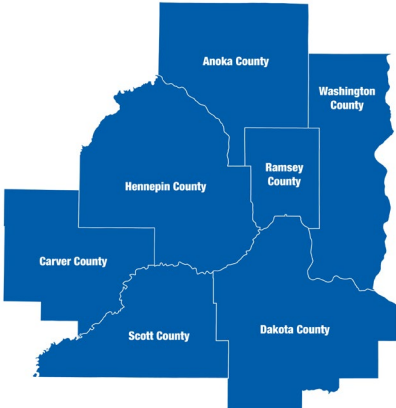
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

March 2021

The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

Introduction

[Thrive MSP 2040](#) directs the Council to collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park implementing agencies, and state partners to strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails. To that end, we developed the [Regional Parks and Trails Equity Tool](#), a web-based interactive created primarily for regional park agency planning, outreach, programming, research, and other agency staff (but available to anyone who wants detailed demographic data surrounding the existing and future regional park system).

What the Regional Parks and Trails Equity tool does
This interactive provides data—primarily census and Council data—on the characteristics of residents near parks and trails in the Twin Cities' regional system. It provides a snapshot of who lives there today, and the population changes forecasted to 2040.

What the Regional Parks and Trails Equity tool cannot do
Users can create valuable, data-driven analysis through this app. But our experience tells us that demographic data are most powerful when used as starting point. In other words, the census and Council data cannot substitute for engagement with prioritized stakeholders. The on-the-ground knowledge of agency staff and the community expertise of residents are also valued sources of information and enhance and refine the shared understanding of this data.

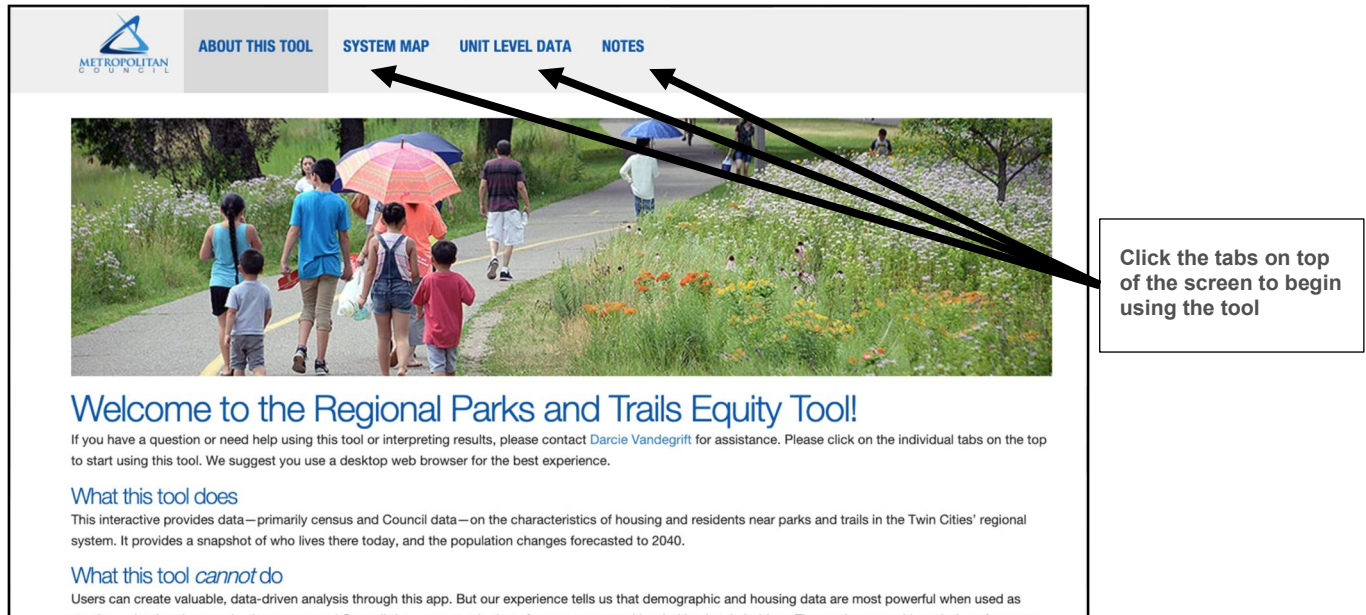## *How you can use the Regional Parks and Trails Equity tool*

- **Planning.** Understanding today's proximate demographics can help inform questions about needed amenities like multilingual signage. Visualizing forecasted changes in population can help plan for the future. Further, this tool can help complete the Council's Equity Analysis Requirement for park and trail master plans (Question 1 Project Data).

- **Outreach and Engagement.** Learning more about who lives near parks and trails can guide strategies for community partnerships, communications efforts, and equity investments such as translation or transportation.

- **Programming.** Learning more about who lives near parks and trails can deepen your understanding of bilingual, multigenerational, and other programming innovations that might be of interest to who lives close by.

- **Research**. Use the data to better understand demographic gaps in potential versus actual visitors. We can use the data to ask questions about the inclusivity of current research practices relative to surrounding demographics. The data can be downloaded for additional analyses but are subject to change with regular data releases (see "notes" tab).

The following section provides guidance on how to use the interface.

User Interface

"About this Tool" tab

On the home page, find a general overview about what this tool does, and ways in which you might find this tool useful. To begin using the tool, notice the tabs on the top of the screen. This document goes through each tab in detail.

"System Map" tab

This tab provides a general overview of population characteristics across the Twin Cities region, along with mapping the locations of regional parks and trails. The map takes a couple seconds to load, so please be patient.

There are several data sources available to be mapped. Click on the question mark for more information. Once the data source has been chosen, select the specific variable of interest from the drop-down menu. Once the data has loaded, click on any area of the map for more information.
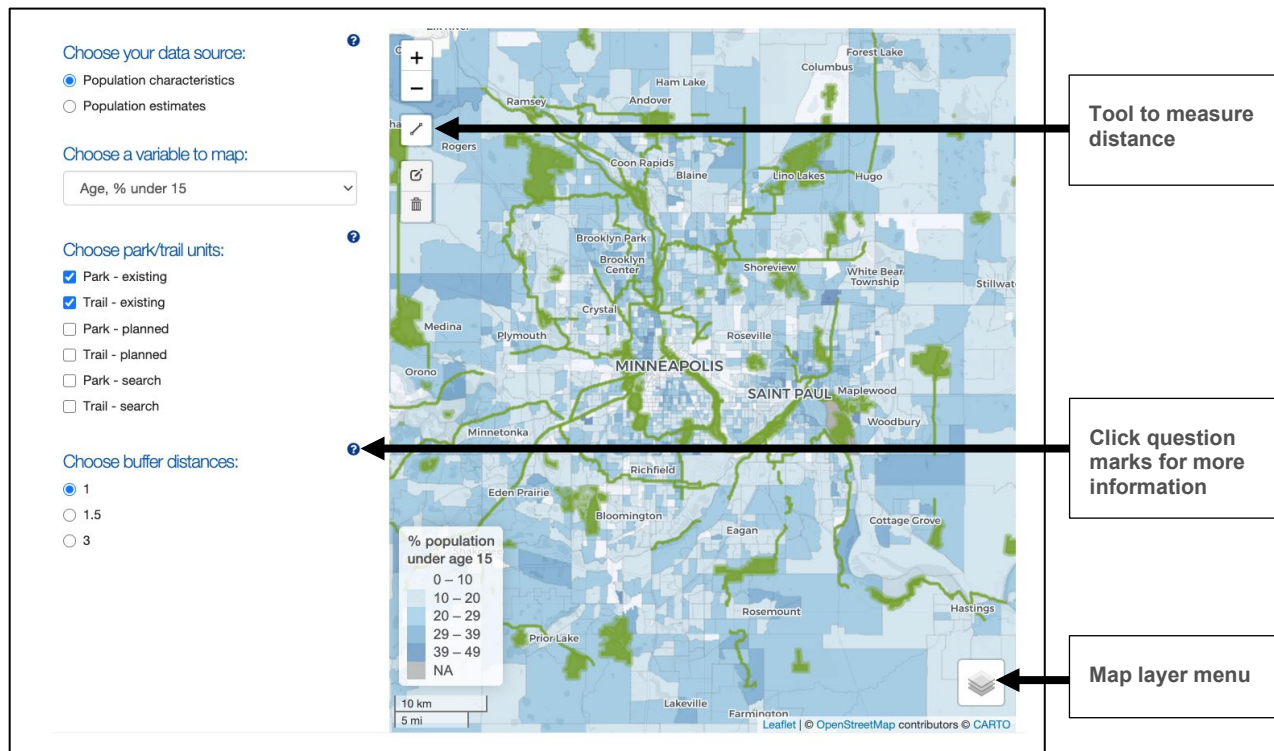
Note that parks and trail units can be added by the unit status. Click on the question mark for more information about the terminology being used.

Zoom-in on the map to see additional data layers including active transit stops, public water access, and park entry points. Access the map layer menu to toggle these layers on or off. From the map layer menu, there is also the option to turn on layers showing agency boundaries, lakes and rivers, as well as buffers around each park and trail.

The buffer distance can be changed by selecting a distance from the left-hand side of the screen. This layer is not turned on automatically but can be turned on or off at any time by accessing the map layer menu.

Distance between points can also be measured within the system map tab. Click on the tool to measure distance, then click on a starting point. Hover over the end point to see the distance displayed in feet.

Click once to add a corner point and change the direction of the line. Double click to end the line.

"Unit level data" tab

For each of the population characteristics, this tab shows a single, summarized value for each park and trail. These summary values combine census data along with the buffer geometries shown on the "system map" tab. In essence, census block groups or tracts which have a greater overlap with a given park or trail's buffer area as well as areas that have higher populations more strongly influence the final, summarized value for each park or trail. More information is in the "notes" tab.

Add agencies, change the population variable, change the buffer distance, and filter by unit type or status from the left-hand menu. Within the figure, click on any icon for more information and a written interpretation of the data point.

Right-click on the figure to save the image. Or download the complete dataset to make your own figures.

- Click on any point to create a text-based interpretation.
- Tabular data filtered by agency may also be downloaded.

⬇ Download tabular data

Click to download the entire dataset

Select inputs:

Population characteristic

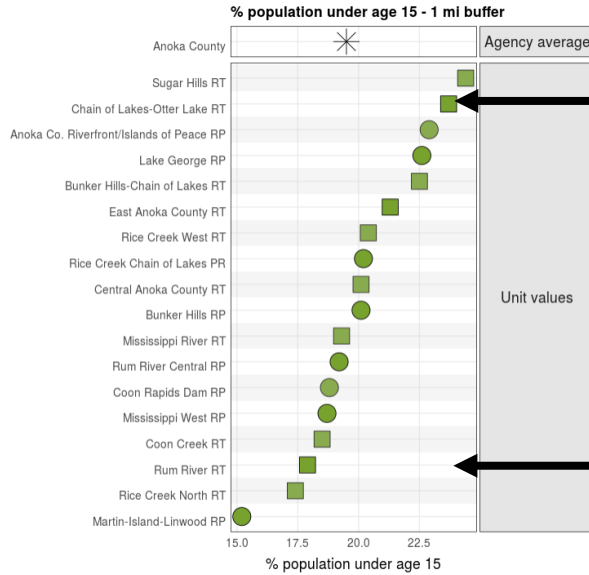Age, % under 15

Agenc(y/ies)

Anoka County

Buffer distance (mi)

- ● 1
- ○ 1.5
- ○ 3

Unit Type
- ☑ Park
- ☑ Trail

Unit Status
- ☑ Existing
- ☐ Planned
- ☐ Search

Click an icon

% population under age 15 - 1 mi buffer

Anoka County | Agency average

Sugar Hills RT
Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake RT
Anoka Co. Riverfront/Islands of Peace RP
Lake George RP
Bunker Hills-Chain of Lakes RT
East Anoka County RT
Rice Creek West RT
Rice Creek Chain of Lakes PR
Central Anoka County RT
Bunker Hills RP
Mississippi River RT
Rum River Central RP
Coon Rapids Dam RP
Mississippi West RP
Coon Creek RT
Rum River RT
Rice Creek North RT
Martin-Island-Linwood RP

Unit values

15.0   17.5   20.0   22.5

% population under age 15

Unit type
✳ Agency average
○ Park
☐ Trail

Unit status
● Existing
○ NA

Metropolitan Council, 12 Jan. 2020

Click points for a text interpretation

Right-click to save the figure