

Parks and Recreation Division Report

June 2026

PROGRAMMING

AARP Tax-Aide

Two AARP Tax-Aide volunteers were stationed at Evergreen Senior Center throughout the spring season. They provided tax assistance to anyone, free of charge, with a focus on taxpayers who are over 50 and have low to moderate income. They served more than 200 people this year!

Youth Mountain Bike Club

April brought the start of an afterschool Mountain Bike Club at Lincoln Park Middle School, in partnership with the Duluth Community Schools Collaborative's afterschool program. Our group rode for five consecutive Tuesday afternoons, working our way up from introductory riding along the river on Waabizheshikana to a final week shuttle ride, in which students started at Twin Ponds and rode the Duluth Traverse back to the parking lot at their school!



Ultimate Frisbee League

Parks & Recreation's Ultimate Frisbee League wrapped up this spring at the Duluth Heritage Center. This six-week indoor league for adults had a total of 66 players sign up!



Intro to Fishing

We kicked off our 2026 season of fishing at the new Waterfront Plaza Park. Parks & Recreation met up with ten adults to fish on the harbor on May 14. This session started by going over the tackle, including the switch to lead-free fishing tackle, as well as basic fishing knots. The rest of the morning was spent fishing. Although no fish were caught, it was a beautiful morning to spend outdoors along the water. This program was featured on Fox 21 News.



City of Duluth Parks & Rec switches to lead-free tackle for fishing clubs

May 14, 2026 Updated May 14, 2026



People who sign up for the "Intro to Fishing" course will now only handle lead-free fishing tackle.

Vernal Pond Hike

Parks & Recreation has been partnering with the Duluth Foot Trails Alliance (DUFTA) for the past three years to lead Science Hikes, and the Vernal Pond Hike is a fan favorite each spring! Twenty-four folks showed up for a hike on May 14 along the Superior Hiking Trail off Vermillion Road. The group used bug nets to scoop up insects and other creatures found in the vernal ponds along the trail. We caught a couple of fairy shrimp along with some mosquito larvae!



Neighborhood Clean Up Day

Parks & Recreation hosted a Neighborhood Clean Up Day on Saturday, May 16, where residents were encouraged to bring their own trash bag to any local park, trail, or green space and help clear away debris. To show our appreciation, ten participants who filled out the survey were randomly selected to receive a \$10 discount coupon for a future Duluth Parks & Recreation program.

Birding 101

April and May marked the kickoff of our Birding 101 program! This incredibly popular series gave participants the chance to learn how to use their binoculars and begin identifying birds by both sight and sound. Sessions took place at Chambers Grove, where we enjoyed the migration of the American White Pelicans, and at Indian Point, where we watched warblers zipping through the trees.



OPERATIONS

PERMIT TYPE	January	February	March	April	May
Park, Building, & Gym Rentals	54	67	86	99	161
Commercial Operator Permits	1	1	2	0	7
Alcohol Consumption Permits	6	1	2	5	14
Total	61	69	90	104	182

Minnesota Association of Senior Services Conference

Parks & Recreation 55+ Programming staff attended the annual Minnesota Association of Senior Services (MASS) conference in April, held this year in Nisswa, Minnesota. MASS is a branch of the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA), and this conference provided an opportunity for staff to connect with other senior programming professionals from around the state.



National Outdoor Recreation Conference in Duluth

During the week of May 10, Duluth hosted the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals' annual conference – the National Outdoor Recreation Conference (NORC). With 458 conference attendees, 227 speakers across 136 education sessions, and 54 exhibitors, the DECC was an excellent location to host NORC. A tradition at NORC is to spend a full day mid-conference outdoors through workshops and field trips. Amongst the 10 field workshop options offered, a few of the Duluth-based opportunities included hiking the Superior Hiking Trail, mountain biking the Duluth Traverse, learning about coastal resiliency while biking along the Lakewalk (courtesy of the Parks & Rec bike fleet and instructors!), and touring along the St. Louis River to learn about the extensive Area of Concern clean-up efforts.

Special thanks to many staff in our Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Department who helped coordinate, support, and/or lead a number of these workshops as well as other activities and events to make the conference a true Duluth experience and showcase the best of our Duluth park system!



Photo credit: Alyssa Johnson, St. Louis River Alliance

PROJECT UPDATES

ATV Route Study

The City of Duluth is embarking on an ATV study to analyze potential routes to connect existing ATV trail systems in Carlton County with those in Southern St. Louis County and the rest of the Arrowhead region. Duluth does not currently allow ATV use within the city limits.

ATV-owning residents of far western Duluth and the surrounding area, represented today by the Duluth-based nonprofit Head of the Lakes ATV Club, have long advocated for the City to designate select routes for ATV use within Duluth. An ATV route study is needed to determine appropriate locations for trailheads and routes to connect far western Duluth to the outlying Minnesota regional ATV trail system while identifying and mitigating conflicts between different trail user groups and protecting the most valuable and vulnerable natural resources from potential damage.

The City of Duluth was awarded a grant of \$200,000 from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources ATV Dedicated Account to complete this ATV Route Study with no local matching requirements. A Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking consulting firms to conduct the study was issued in May with proposals due June 3. We hope to have a firm selected by the end of the month and get the process started later this summer. We expect the study to take nearly a year to complete, as the consultants will need to perform route feasibility analysis and conduct background studies such as wetland delineation, soils investigations, surveying and environmental review.

Athletic Venues Initiative

In May, staff held several focus group meetings to reconnect with key user groups and community partners around future capital improvements at Duluth athletic facilities. At the focus group meetings, staff reviewed the presentation that was provided to Duluth City Council's Committee of the Whole in March, listened to feedback on the proposed funding approach, and discussed collaborative fundraising opportunities to expand the scope of future projects.

Chester Bowl – Thom Storm Chalet Reconstruction

A project kickoff event was held on April 20 at the existing Thom Storm Chalet to celebrate the upcoming chalet replacement project. The event featured Thom Storm himself and a ceremonial groundbreaking with the greatest "construction crew" around! BP Builders is expected to begin project work in early June, pending necessary permit approvals.



Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve – Accessible Trail Improvements

Construction of an accessible trail at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve is kicking off! A pre-construction meeting with Zenith Trail Contracting, City staff, and Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory staff is scheduled for early June. All are excited to see this important project moving forward in advance of the 2026 fall bird migration!

Keene Creek Bike Park

The Keene Creek Bike Park is located in Keene Creek Park near and partially underneath Interstate-35. COGGS has been developing the Bike Park and coordinating this volunteer-led project. The conceptual design guiding the project calls for a dirt jump plaza, pump track, and bicycle playground area with wooden features designed to increase rider handling skills and competency. The upcoming and ongoing work along West Superior Street will generate some clean fill that will be delivered on site and volunteers with COGGS will use the material over the coming months to support the Bike Park development. Visitors at Keene Creek can anticipate new dirt on site and dirt movement. The work is not expected to cause closures or interruptions to other areas of the park.

St. Louis River Area of Concern Celebration of Progress

Staff attended the annual Celebration of Progress on Tuesday, April 7 to share information on upcoming program opportunities and the various access improvement projects in the works for St. Louis River Access. The event is held by Area of Concern (AOC) partners at the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in collaboration with the St. Louis River Alliance and Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve. The event had a great turnout, and staff were excited to hear and share updates!

Lakewalk Transportation & Resiliency Improvements

In 2023, the City of Duluth was awarded two grants to support Lakewalk improvements: an \$8.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program and a \$2.05 million grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Technical Assistance Program. Improvements will stretch between the corner of the Lake at Endion Station Park to approximately 27th Avenue East. The project will include retreating the trail from the shoreline where possible, full reconstruction of the trail, shoreline restoration and enhancements, accessibility improvements, improved wayfinding and connections between downtown and the Lakewalk, and amenity replacements. Accessibility improvements will include reductions in grade, reroutes at two locations, and the creation of an alternate route/bypass trail adjacent to Leif Erikson Park along the railroad.

The project has been designed, reviewed and approved by state and federal agencies, and is anticipated to move forward with bidding in July. The phasing and timing is not yet known and will depend on the contractor selection. The heavy use of this portion of the Lakewalk will certainly make this project and associated detours more complex with disruptions to multimodal commuters, visitors, and residents that use and enjoy this stretch of the Lakewalk.

PARK MAINTENANCE UPDATES

Park Maintenance staff installed a new piece of playground equipment, the WhirlyQ, at Bayfront Playground.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Keene Creek Roadmap to Resilience

The Minnesota DNR is developing a plan to restore, enhance, and protect the Keene Creek Watershed. The project is in the information gathering stage and the project team is looking for public input! An open house was held on June 3, and the second will be held on June 11 from 4:30 to 7:30 pm at Hermantown Middle School, located at 4335 Hawk Circle Drive. There will also be a series of walks with the project team to learn about Keene Creek and share observations. A public survey and more information are available on the project website: keenecreekroadmap-gei.hub.arcgis.com.

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF KEENE CREEK

Working together with the Minnesota DNR to restore, enhance, and protect the watershed to make Keene Creek fishable and swimmable now and in the future

JOIN US FOR A WATERSHED WALK 4-5PM
JOIN US AT ONE OR ALL!

- June 18, Stebner Park (Hermantown)
- July 16, Hermantown Keene Creek Park
- August 20, Irving Park (Duluth)
- September 17, Irving Park (Duluth)

Learn about Keene Creek conditions from MN DNR experts
Share observations and your local knowledge

Considerations

- Easy one-hour nature walks
- No in-stream access required
- Accessible and family-friendly
- Dress for the weather
- Water and snacks provided

MORE INFORMATION
Can't attend or want more information? Visit our project Hub Site.

SCAN HERE or visit:
keenecreekroadmap-gei.hub.arcgis.com

GEI