

Share the trails

By Penny Steele

With more than 150 miles of regional trails, 45 percent of Three Rivers Park District's annual visits are made on the trails. That means 4.5 million visits are made to these trails in and around suburban Hennepin County each year. With so many visitors, it's important that everyone respects their fellow trail users and understands the "rules of the road" to ensure a safe trail experience for all.

All of our trails are multi-use, meaning that there are multiple ways to get out and enjoy them. Bicyclists make up over 70 percent of visits to the regional trail system, but the trails are also used for walking, running, in-line skating, roller skiing and more. Walkers, runners and other slower moving users should keep to the right side of the trail, and bicyclists should call out "on the left" or ring a bike bell when approaching a pedestrian.

In recent years, our regional trail system has seen a doubling in the number of people using the trails for recreation and transportation. We are proud to say that given the large number of bicycles on the regional trails, very few accidents occur. If everyone keeps the following safety measures in mind and remembers to **Share the Trail**, using the regional trails can be an enjoyable experience for everyone.



Sharing the Trail is a simple concept. The system works best when everyone respects one another's use of the trail. It's similar to how vehicles of all types are able to operate on our roadways at the same time, because drivers follow the same general rules, such as driving on the right side of the road, staying within speed limits and obeying traffic signs. The rules of the trail are similar — staying to the right, being courteous, and stopping at stop signs.

Passing - Just like driving a car on a roadway, only pass when it is safe to do so, meaning sometimes a bicyclist must slow down behind a walker, wait until oncoming traffic is clear, and then pass.

Follow the rules of the road — Many accidents can be avoided by riding a bike that fits you, that is well maintained, and — most importantly — by following the rules of traffic. Ride your bike on the right side of the trail, call out when passing, give hand signals when turning and obey traffic signs and signals. Operate your bike at a safe speed and respect other users on the trail.

Wear bright-colored clothing — This is especially important when riding in the early morning and late evening hours. There are over 350 locations on Three Rivers’ regional trail system where the trail crosses a roadway. It is important that drivers of vehicles can see you as you approach a trail crossing. There are also many low-cost options for bicycle lighting that make riders even more visible. Remember, state law requires the use of a headlight when biking at night.

Be present — How can a walker listening to music through earbuds hear a bicyclist approaching from behind? Texting while biking is dangerous to the biker as well as to the other trail users. When biking with a friend or in large groups, ride single file when other users are approaching. Be aware of your surroundings so that everyone can be predictable in their actions.

Wear a helmet — According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, wearing a helmet can reduce your chances of head injury in a bicycle crash by 50 percent, and the odds of face or neck injury by 33 percent.

Three Rivers has “share the trail” and other safety reminders spread throughout our trail system. For more tips on safety and rules for the trails, check out the Minnesota Bicycling Handbook published by the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota: <http://www.bikemn.org/education/minnesota-bicycling-handbook>. With more than a dozen Three Rivers’ regional trails to choose from, it’s easy to find one that travels where you’d like to explore. To find one, visit this link: threeriversparks.org/locations.

About Penny Steele, Commissioner District 1

Penny Steele is Three Rivers Park District Commissioner representing District 1. District 1 includes Corcoran, Greenfield, Hanover, Independence, Long Lake, Loretto, Maple Plain, Medicine Lake, Medina, Minnetrista, Minnetonka Beach, Mound, New Hope, Orono (Precincts 1, 3 and 4), Plymouth, Rockford, Rogers, Spring Park, St. Bonifacius and Wayzata.

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About Three Rivers Park District

Three Rivers Park District is a nature-based park system that manages park reserves, regional parks, regional trails and special-use facilities in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Three Rivers Park District’s mission is to promote environmental stewardship through recreation and education in a natural resources-based park system. The Park District owns and operates more than 27,000 acres and serves nearly 11 million visitors a year.