

GMPT Emergency Response Forum AI Summary – September 11, 2025

Quick recap

The meeting began with introductions from various park and trails professionals across Minnesota, including county administrators and city representatives. The discussion then focused on emergency response planning for parks and trails, covering topics like staff training, equipment needs, and communication protocols. The conversation ended with sharing of experiences and best practices for managing various emergency situations, including flood risks, search and rescue operations, and park closures, while emphasizing the importance of proper planning and coordination with other agencies.

Summary

Minnesota Parks and Trails Introductions

The meeting began with Karlin Ziegler, the Olmsted County Parks and Trails Director, introducing herself and explaining her roles on the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Board and the Regional Parks and Trails Commission. She then introduced other participants, including Sarah Weed, the Parks Operations Coordinator for Stearns County, and various city administrators, park planners, and trail authority representatives from different regions in Minnesota. The meeting focused on introductions and listening to attendees' interests and roles related to parks and trails.

Parks Emergency Planning Discussion

Karlin Ziegler, the Olmsted County parks and trails director with 18 years of experience, discussed the various emergency scenarios parks and trails staff might encounter, including medical, fire, environmental, water hazards, and animal-related incidents. She emphasized the importance of planning for all possible emergencies and encouraged brainstorming with staff to anticipate different scenarios. Karlin highlighted the unique challenges faced by parks departments due to the unpredictable nature of outdoor environments.

Emergency Response Training and Preparedness

Karlin discussed the importance of staff training in emergency situations, emphasizing the need for CPR, first aid, and other life-saving skills. They highlighted the importance of having a designated point person in charge during emergencies and encouraged agencies to invite emergency response personnel to their parks for training and familiarization. Karlin also stressed the importance of having the necessary equipment and communication methods in place for emergency responses, as well as ensuring that emergency responders have access to park buildings and facilities.

Emergency Response Challenges in Oxford Park

Karlin discussed the challenges of emergency response in Oxford Park due to its terrain and access points. They explained that the park is divided by a river with only pedestrian bridges, making it difficult for emergency vehicles to reach incidents in the woods. In a recent incident involving injured students, they had to carry a patient on a stretcher for half a mile over uneven terrain, highlighting the need for specialized equipment or alternative evacuation methods. To address these issues, they have created helipad sites in various areas of the park to facilitate air evacuation in severe emergencies.

Park Emergency Response Planning

Karlin discussed the challenges of responding to emergencies in parks, highlighting the difficulties in locating lost hikers and the importance of first responders knowing the park's layout. They emphasized the need for a list of emergency contacts and a continuity of operations plan to address various scenarios, including weather-related events. Karlin also stressed the importance of collaboration with other agencies and staff training to ensure a coordinated response to emergencies.

Flood Risk Management Strategies

Karlin shared experiences of managing flood risks in parks, highlighting the need to build infrastructure out of floodplains and create alternative access routes during emergencies. They described a recent flooding incident where campers had to be evacuated, emphasizing the importance of having a plan in place. Karlin advised park managers to stay calm during emergencies, refer to existing plans, and coordinate with the right people to respond effectively.

Emergency Response Planning for Parks

The meeting focused on emergency response planning and management for parks and trails. Karlin provided guidance on utilizing volunteers, local farmers, and public works for cleanup efforts, emphasizing the importance of safety measures and proper documentation for potential FEMA reimbursement. Sarah Weed shared Stearns County's experience with park drownings and their new policy of closing entire parks in such incidents. The discussion also covered the use of grid maps for search and rescue operations, the importance of volunteer liability forms, and the distribution of tick identification resources. Karlin encouraged attendees to plan for emergencies, maintain contact lists, and reach out for further assistance if needed.

Next Steps

- All park staff to develop emergency response plans for their parks and trails, including communication protocols and chain of command.
- All park staff to ensure staff are trained in CPR, first aid, and other emergency response skills relevant to their parks.
- All park staff to invite local emergency response personnel to visit their parks to familiarize them with the terrain and potential emergency scenarios.
- All park staff to create and maintain a list of emergency contacts accessible to all staff members.
- All park staff to consider implementing Knox boxes for emergency access to park buildings.
- All park staff to develop plans for weather emergencies, including flood response and evacuation procedures.
- All park staff to track time, resources, and expenses during emergency responses for potential FEMA reimbursement.
- Sarah Weed to share the tick report form with Karlin for distribution to interested participants
- All park staff to create grid maps of their parks to assist with emergency response coordination
- All park staff to develop volunteer liability forms for emergency cleanup situations