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Itasca
State Park



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MINNESOTA STATE PARK SYSTEM

The mission of the Division of Parks and Recreation is to provide a state park system that perpetuates Minnesota's scenic beauty and its natural and cultural resources, while being responsive to public needs and expectations, and providing a diversity of recreational opportunities.

The Division of Parks and Recreation manages 64 state parks across Minnesota. The state park system is vital to Minnesota's tourism, an industry that is becoming the backbone of many economies in greater Minnesota. Our most unique and valuable cultural and natural resources are found within state park boundaries. It is the Division of Parks & Recreation's responsibility to acquire, protect and interpret these unique resources.

Prior to the 1989 legislative session, funding constraints and increasing visitor use seriously eroded the Division of Parks and Recreation's ability to provide quality recreational experiences and services. Since then the Governor and state legislators have responded to the need for increased funding for the operations budget. However, financing the maintenance of existing facilities and new development in the face of increasing visitor use remains a problem. This will be addressed during the 1990 legislative session when a capital bonding bill is considered.

The state park system has the Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) largest physical plant with over 2,800 major facilities requiring major rehabilitation. The Division of Parks & Recreation has identified more than \$55 million in capital budget needs. These projects include land acquisition, resource management, major rehabilitation or replacement of existing facilities and a few new facilities. Legislative funding requests to meet this need will be spread throughout future bienniums.

A recent study conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society identifies 515 historic structures located in the state park system. These structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Most of these structures are of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Work Progress Administration (WPA) vintage. The CCC/WPA structures were constructed in the 1930's. These facilities are over 50 years old and many are in need of major rehabilitation which includes the electrical, sewage, and water systems associated with these buildings.

Many years of intensive use is also a consideration when looking at the current condition of campgrounds, picnic areas, group camps and trail systems. Lack of development and rehabilitation of these and other state park facilities will reduce park use. A reduction in state park use will adversely impact the economic development of adjacent communities and Minnesota's effort to improve tourism.

As capital development funds have become available we have completed the highest priority projects. As additional needs are identified, they are reviewed and placed on the statewide priority list for future completion.

In 1991, Itasca, Minnesota's oldest state park, will be 100 years old. For 100 years Minnesota has had a park system to be proud of. The present challenge is to manage the park resources and recreational development to ensure that Minnesotans will be proud of their state park system for another hundred years.

AN OVERVIEW OF ITASCA STATE PARK

Itasca State Park is located in north central Minnesota in the southeastern corner of Clearwater County with small portions extending into Hubbard and Becker counties. Chief access to the park from the south and east is by TH 71 and from the north by TH 200. The nearest centers of population are Park Rapids, 18 miles (mi) to the south and Bemidji 31 mi to the northeast.

The statutory boundary encloses 31,094 acres. Of these, 500 acres are in private ownership.

The glacially formed landscape of Itasca is typical of this part of Minnesota. In general it is rolling, hilly country with some relatively flat areas formed by the outwash of glacial debris.

Itasca is well known for its water resources. Bodies of water in the park occupy 2,325 acres. The largest of these is Lake Itasca at 1,180 acres. The Mississippi River begins as a small stream flowing from the northernmost part of Lake Itasca.

Another of Itasca's outstanding physical features is its many majestic stands of Norway, white, and jackpine. One of the most popular is Preacher's Grove, located one mile north of Douglas Lodge. This majestic stand of Norway pine is over 250 years old.

Because of its historic significance, Itasca has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, there are two sites within the park which are listed on the Minnesota State Register of Historic Sites - the Headwaters of the Mississippi River and the Wegmann Cabin. The Wegmann Cabin was once the home of Theodore Wegmann, an early settler and game warden in Itasca.

Itasca State Park offers a variety of activities for both day users and overnight visitors. Of interest to the tourist are rich scenic attractions at Preacher's Grove,

Peacepipe Vista, Aiton Heights Lookout Tower, Wilderness Drive, and the Mississippi Headwaters. The park also has a swimming beach on Lake Itasca and many miles of hiking and multiple use trails.

Itasca has a variety of overnight accommodations. Bearpaw and Pine Ridge campgrounds have a total of 237 campsites with modern toilet and shower facilities available. Douglas Lodge and Nicollet Court have 25 rooms available for overnight visitors. Those wishing more rustic housing can rent one of the park's cabins or take a room in the Clubhouse. There are 12 rental cabins in the Douglas Lodge area, six cabins equipped with kitchen facilities in Bearpaw Campground, and Squaw Lake Cabin, a two bedroom cabin located on the north end of Squaw Lake.

Itasca is also open for winter use, though on a more limited basis. Anyone willing to brave the chill of winter can camp in Pine Ridge Campground. Snowmobilers make frequent use of the park and those who enjoy ski touring will find the Itasca trails some of the finest in the area.

Official recognition of Itasca came on April 20, 1891 when Governor William Merriam signed the bill making it Minnesota's first state park. Minnesota will be celebrating Itasca's 100th anniversary in 1991. It was not without difficulty that Itasca became a state park. Much opposition came from lumbermen who were not interested in the idea of preserving the large tracts of virgin pine for recreation and the enjoyment of future generations. In fact, many acres of park land were stripped of pine (and various hardwoods). It was only through the efforts of Jacob Brower, the first park commissioner, and others who aided him, that much more park timber did not fall before the lumberman's axe. Without Brower's diligent efforts, the beauty of Itasca as we know it might only be a fading memory.

EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of Itasca State Park.

Acres of land - 31,094

Campsites

Semi-modern - 237

Backpack - 4

Group Camps - 4

Trailer Dump Station

Campsites with electricity - 1000

Miles of Trails

Self-guided interpretive - 3.5

Hiking - 33.0

Bicycle - 6.5

Cross Country Ski - 31.0

Snowmobile - 31.0

Beaches - 2

Boat Rental

Bicycle Rental

Miles of Road

Asphalt - 29.4

Gravel - 4.4

Number of Picnic Tables - 195

Accesses - 5

Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft.- 84

Under 100 sq.ft.- 42

Miles of Posted Boundary - 32

Interpretive Centers - 0

Park Utilities

Sanitation Buildings - 11

Sewage Lagoon

Number of Sewage Lift Stations - 6

Number of Septic Tanks - 4

Number of Wells - 13

Number of Individual Water Distribution

Systems - 9

Miles of State Owned Power Lines - 2.8

PROBLEMS FACING ITASCA STATE PARK

There are numerous public recreational facilities in Itasca State Park to maintain. Many are in need of replacement or major rehabilitation. Most were constructed in the 1930's, and are now in need of major rehabilitation. Many new facilities are needed to meet growing recreational demands.

The park's natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management to perpetuate Itasca State Park's resources. Probably most important is the restoration of big pine areas along with a balance of vegetation types that typifies pre-European settlement times. There are many significant historic and prehistoric sites within the park that must be preserved and interpreted for park visitors.

Some of the buildings in the park are on the National Register of Historic Places and many more have been nominated. These buildings are a very important part of the state park history and must be preserved. Other facilities including the campgrounds and picnic areas are heavily used and in need of major rehabilitation.

The current vegetation of the park includes old pine stands that should be managed to ensure natural pine stands in the future. The many miles of trail also need work to prevent erosion and to provide quality experiences for hikers and cross country skiers.

Important improvements have been completed at Itasca State Park in recent years. However, the goals identified in the ten year old management plan have not been achieved.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN ITASCA STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Complete renovation of the sewer system in the Douglas Lodge, Forest Inn and rental cabin area.
2. Replacement of Douglas Lodge kitchen with an addition that now includes a coffee shop and meeting rooms.
3. Paving of Wilderness Drive.
4. Construction of a paved trail from the Douglas Lodge area to the headwaters. This now ties into Wilderness Drive to create a 17 mile circle bicycle route.
5. Plans are currently being prepared for the rehabilitation of Bearpaw campground. This will include tree planting, improved drainage, and improved vehicular and pedestrian traffic flows.

ITASCA STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Resource Management - \$250,000

This will include the preparation of a long range pine restoration plan and it's implementation. Park and regional staff are working closely with the Park Advisory Board, University of Minnesota and other interested parties on this restoration work. Also included will be cultural resource investigation and inventory.

MAJOR REHABILITATION

General CCC Building and Structure Restoration - \$300,000

Rehabilitation of 49 CCC era log and stone buildings and 30 stone and log structures and objects such as bridges, wells and water fountains.

Remodel Douglas Lodge - \$150,000

This project includes the restoration of the dining room, lobby and upstairs guest rooms of the old part of Douglas Lodge.

Erosion Control - \$100,000

To include erosion control on trails, day use areas and lakeshore. This will include the construction of trail steps and erosion control devices on some of the more than 30 miles of hiking trails. Much work is also needed in areas near Lake Itasca where foot traffic has caused severe erosion of the Lakeshore.

Rehabilitation of Pine Ridge Campground - \$300,000

This project will include planting trees, improving drainage, rehabilitating roads and restoring campsites. Also included is the addition of 30 campsites to replace the campsites and associated sanitation facilities lost when Bearpaw campground is rehabilitated.

Pave Picnic Area Parking Lot - \$150,000

Project includes grading and paving existing picnic area parking lot.

Replace Water Lines - \$100,000

Replace existing water lines throughout the park. Many of these lines were installed during WPA/CCC era.

Restore Historical Sawmill - \$30,000

Project would include the restoration of an existing sawmill in the park. This facility would be used for interpretive programming and education.

Restore Clubhouse - \$150,000

Project to include the interior and exterior restoration of the log clubhouse located near Douglas Lodge. This would involve handicapped accessibility, log restoration, fire protection and interior remodeling.

Remodel Nicollet Court and Dormitory - \$450,000

Complete remodel of Nicollet Court lodging and dormitory housing for Douglas Lodge workers. To

include handicapped accessibility, utility rehabilitation and log restoration.

Rehabilitate and Bury Electrical Services - \$50,000

Complete rehabilitation and burial of existing electrical service.

Road Rehabilitation - \$150,000

Project to include grading, gravel base, culvert replacement, bridge repair and asphalt patching on the road system throughout the park.

Remodel Beach Building - \$100,000

Rehabilitate the existing beach sanitation and change building including handicapped accessibility, new fixtures and wall and floor finishes.

Remodel Park Office - \$100,000

Remodel existing park administrative office including additional space, handicapped accessibility and outside roof and siding.

Complete Bike Trail System - \$50,000

Complete the bike trail segment from Douglas Lodge area to Mary Lake including trail and necessary bridge and culverts.

Remodel Cabins - \$100,000

Project to include handicapped accessibility, new plumbing and electrical fixtures, roofing and site work.

Beach Rehabilitation - \$75,000

Project to include addition of sand to beach, erosion repair, tree planting and other site improvements.

Hiking Trail Improvement - \$100,000

Improvements to existing hiking, ski, snowmobile and bike trails throughout the park. Project to include erosion control, trail surfacing, widening trails where necessary and construction of steps and railings where needed.

Remodel Museum - \$75,000

Remodel the existing museum located in the picnic area. Remodel to include new interpretive displays and area for craft sales.

Amphitheater - \$50,000

Construct a new outdoor amphitheater to facilitate outdoor interpretive programming.

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Visitor Center - \$3,800,000

A major new visitor center is needed to serve the over 700,000 people per year that visit the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Current interpretive facilities are grossly inadequate to tell the story of the discovery of this valuable Minnesota resource.

Picnic Shelters - \$250,000

This project includes the construction of a major picnic shelter/restroom facility in the picnic area. Also included is the construction of several smaller shelters spread throughout the picnic and headwaters areas.

North Entrance Contact Station - \$150,000

Construct a new contact/orientation station at the north entrance. Facility to include public restrooms and orientation displays.

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS \$7,030,000

LAND ACQUISITION

There are about 20,000 acres of private land within the boundaries of Minnesota State Parks. Acquisition of these lands is an ongoing process that occurs as parcels become available for purchase and funds are available. Prices of land vary greatly depending on location, amenities and improvements. Present acquisition costs are averaging about a \$1,000 per acre across the state. It would therefore cost about \$20,000,000 to acquire all the private land within state parks at present values.

The park map shows the location of private holdings within the park. These properties should be purchased before private development increases within the park's statutory boundary.

The following issues highlight problems faced with private property within state parks.

PARK POTENTIAL

- * Private lands within state parks are being sought out by developers.
- * Land uses such as gravel extraction adversely impact state parks and adjoining public lands.
- * Subdivision for residential use will cause such lands to be too expensive to acquire in the future.
- * Some private lands reduce public use of existing park facilities and lands.

These issues associated with privately owned lands within state parks threaten existing public investment and reduce potential for public use.

PRIVATE LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN ITASCA STATE PARK

Parcel #	Acres
4	186.00
29	240.00
37	22.00
38	9.26
39	2.96
41	40.00
TOTAL	500.22

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on this State Park? These projects along with the acquisition of private lands within the park will assure the preservation of these unique resources and facilities for future generations.

Some improvements will not only increase park use but will greatly increase the quality of the visitors experience. Many of the rehabilitation projects will increase staff efficiency and cut the costs of maintaining facilities.

Major rehabilitation of facilities constructed during the CCC/WPA era is critical. To lose these structures would be to lose an important part of our state park history. The addition of new facilities is also critical to protect resources as well as meet user demands.

The acquisition of private lands within the park will assure that private and commercial development do not distract from the natural beauty of Itasca State Park.

SUMMARY

Currently, statewide capital needs for development and acquisition are **\$55,000,000**. The mission of the Minneosta State Park System can be achieved by funding support to meet this need over the next several bienniums.

Itasca State Park acquisition costs
will be determined by appraisals.

Itasca State Park development needs - **\$7,030,000**.

**Help us celebrate the 100th anniversary of the
Minnesota State Park System in 1991!**

