

System Plan

Charting a course for the future

STATE PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS



WATER RECREATION



STATE FOREST RECREATION AREAS



STATE TRAILS



AUGUST 2015

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MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF PARKS AND TRAILS SYSTEM PLAN



The graphic features the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) logo in the top left corner. The main title, "Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan", is written in a large, bold, black serif font. Below the title, a subtitle in a smaller, italicized black serif font reads: "Will guide strategic decisions about where and how to invest for the next 10 years". At the bottom of the graphic, four categories are represented by icons and text: "State Parks" with a green tent and a black chair; "State Trails" with a wooden signpost and a black bicycle; "Forest Recreation Areas" with a green evergreen tree; and "Water Recreation" with a blue life vest.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Mission Statement

Our mission is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state’s natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.

Division of Parks and Trails Vision Statement

Our vision is to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Plan

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Trails must continue to demonstrate Better Government over the long term. This System Plan advances new approaches for managing DNR's state parks and state recreation areas, state trails, forest recreation areas, and water recreation system: 75 state park and recreation areas, 24 state trails, 62 state forest recreation areas, 1,500 public water accesses, 350 fishing piers, and 33 water trails.

Implementation of this plan will result in:

- Future investments focused on Minnesota's most important natural resources and highest quality recreation opportunities.
- Staff better able to determine where and how to invest time and resources, and where to pursue new opportunities.
- Transparency with the Legislature and other stakeholders about priorities.
- More effective collaboration with our partners.
- Measureable improvements that advance Better Government.

A Differentiated Approach

The plan recommends a differentiated approach to managing our system, rather than trying to be all things to all people. Investment groups were identified using criteria to address the question of what types of investments should be made and where they should be located.

Integrated Directions Across All Four Systems

Although this plan in part discusses these four elements of the division's responsibilities as separate systems, the division seeks to integrate its management where possible for consistency and efficiency. The System Plan provides direction for setting division priorities which helps identify key actions that can be taken across all division responsibilities.

Among the important areas of consideration for an integrated approach are protection (e.g. natural and cultural resources, infrastructure), innovation, outreach, flexibility/adaptability, thoughtful choices in good time and bad, and accessibility.

*For more detail on these areas see **Integrated Direction Across All Four Systems** starting on p. 8.*

State Parks and State Recreation Areas

The Division of Parks and Trails will organize and prioritize its work on the state park system into three investment groups: Destination Parks, Core Parks, and Rustic Parks.

Destination state parks and state recreation areas offer a destination-quality experience, with an array of outdoor recreation and lodging opportunities, park facilities, and naturalist-led interpretive offerings. They may have year-round camping (or other lodging) and staffing. Parks in this group have high use and attract visitors from across the state.

The Division will invest in Destination state parks and state recreation areas at a high level over the next 10 years to enhance campgrounds and group camps, visitor centers, lodging opportunities, and other amenities.

Core state parks and state recreation areas will offer a diversity of quality outdoor recreation experiences, from classic camping and hiking opportunities to adventurous climbing, mountain biking, OHV-riding, and kayaking opportunities, often in close proximity to population centers. This group has been further differentiated into Classic, Adventure, and Gateway parks and recreation areas. The emphasis for all of these parks will be on providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails with basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage.

In many ways, the Core group represents the typical visitor experience provided across much of the system to date.

Rustic state parks and state recreation areas will offer basic amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage. Rustic parks will provide more self-directed services such as self-guided interpretation and self-registration.

State Trails

The Division of Parks and Trails will organize and prioritize its work on state trails into two investment groups: Destination Trails and Core Trails.

Destination trails will offer a destination-quality experience, with considerable amenities. Trails in this group will have high use and attract users from across the state and Midwest region. The division will lead the development and management activities for these state trails. Destination trails will have greater investment in amenities. Acquisition and rehabilitation will be high priority. More frequent maintenance will occur. Marketing efforts will also be higher priority.

Core trails will be well maintained, with basic services that provide a safe and enjoyable experience for trail users. The division will have the lead role in developing and managing some of these trails, while partners (such as local communities or trail associations) will have a lead role for others. Partner-led state trails may serve more local use than trails in other investment groups.

*For more information about the process and criteria used to create the investment groups, see **State Parks and State Recreation Areas** starting on p. 10.*

For a list of the State Parks and State Recreation Areas in each investment group see p. 19.

Recommendations specific to State Parks and State Recreation Areas begin on p. 21.

*For more information about the process and criteria used to create the investment groups, see **State Trails** starting on p. 23.*

For a list of the State Trails in each investment group see p. 29-30.

Recommendations specific to State Trails begin on p. 34.

Amenities that go beyond minimal or basic services for these trails may be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising.

The experiences provided on existing core trails will continue to be maintained. Core trails reflect the way in which state trails traditionally have been developed. Partners often take the lead in identifying right-of-way for acquisition. They support funding for acquisition, development, and rehabilitation.

Forest Recreation Areas

The Division of Parks and Trails will organize and prioritize its work on the forest recreation area system into three investment groups: Enhanced, Core and Minimum Maintenance Forest Recreation Areas.

Enhanced forest recreation areas have the potential to be developed with needed recreation amenities to support trail users in state forests. For example, motorized trail users would like to have campgrounds with shower buildings, expanded parking, and access from campgrounds to the state forest trail system. Horseback riders also seek improved amenities.

Core forest recreation areas will continue to provide the kind of outdoor recreation experience and amenities that are currently present. Existing facilities would be rehabilitated and replaced as needed.

At **minimum maintenance forest recreation areas**, current facilities would remain, but with limited maintenance. Opportunities for alternative forms of management through partnerships or other agreements should be explored where possible.

Alternative management strategies were identified for the investment groups to reduce costs and increase revenues.

Water Recreation

The Division of Parks and Trails will provide high-quality public water access sites and water trails by focusing on taking care of the existing facilities. Investment criteria will help guide decisions related to acquisition, development, rehabilitation, maintenance and operations. The type of investment, along with its purpose, will determine how best to apply and evaluate the criteria.

Water Recreation Directions

- Focus primarily on taking care of and improving existing sites and facilities.
- Be more strategic in pursuing acquisitions for new sites or expansion of existing sites.

*For more information about the process and criteria used to create the investment groups, see **Forest Recreation Areas** starting on p. 35.*

For a list of the Forest Recreation Areas in each investment group see p. 36-38.

Recommendations specific to Forest Recreations Areas begin on p. 40.

*For more information about the process and criteria developed to guide investments see **Water Recreation** starting on p. 42.*

For more detail concerning Water Recreation directions and recommendations see p. 47-49.

- Move toward a public water access and water trail system that demonstrates best management practices.
- Move toward a decision-making process based on objective criteria, including both regional and statewide ranking of proposed projects.

Fishing Pier Program Directions

The overall goal of the fishing pier program is to improve fishing opportunities, especially to meet the needs of children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those without a boat (only about 40 percent of those with fishing licenses also have a boat). In many cases, fishing pier installations are due to partnerships between the state, local government units, non-profit groups, and community organizations.

- Increase investment into the fishing pier program within the Division of Parks and Trails.
- Increase resources allocated toward managing the fishing pier program.
- Find sustainable and sufficient funding for new pier development and for routine maintenance, renewal, and rehabilitation.

Next Steps/Implementation

The System Plan is not anticipated to be a static document. Additional discussions within the division and with partners and stakeholders will help further refine how the division uses the directions from the plan to shape its priorities and future actions.

The directions and recommendations set out in the System Plan will be implemented through budget and operational decisions, as well as other decision-making processes. The division will use the system plan as a lens as it creates its next biennial budget requests, capital bonding requests, and other funding initiatives. The investment group frameworks will also influence how the division allocates acquisition funding, rehabilitation and development projects, staffing commitments and other resources across the four work areas discussed in the system plan.

The system plan directions will drive other planning efforts including individual state park and state trail management plans, and continued planning for trails and use areas in state forests. Planning efforts that create system-wide objectives for specific activities, such as winter biking and horseback riding, are also under consideration as tools for integrating the system plan directions into the division's efforts.

*For more information see **Next Steps/Implementation** starting on p. 50.*

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the System Plan

The Parks and Trails System Plan builds on previous collaborative planning efforts, including the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and the *Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2012). It seeks to provide division direction to ensure:

1. Future investments focus on Minnesota's most important natural resources and highest-quality recreational opportunities.
2. The system provides a diverse array of opportunities to connect more people to the outdoors.
3. Limited General Fund support for parks and trails, which has not kept pace with rising costs and increased scope of responsibilities, is optimally distributed across the system.

Movement Toward a More Differentiated System: A Future Strategies Committee Recommendation

In 2012, the Minnesota legislature directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner to submit a report on long-term funding options to reduce reliance on the General Fund, criteria for ensuring future investments focus on Minnesota's most important natural resources and the highest quality recreational opportunities, and innovative ways to increase participation in outdoor recreation.

The DNR Commissioner established a State Parks and Trails Future Strategies Committee, co-chaired by two former state legislators, to address this directive. After a year of meeting to study the issues, the committee submitted its recommendations in a report titled, *Destination Minnesota: A New Direction for Minnesota State Parks and Trails*.

A key recommendation of the Future Strategies Committee was that the Parks and Trails Division should "move toward a more differentiated system that favors quality of facilities and opportunities over quantity or geographic distribution."

A differentiated system, by definition, means that not every outdoor recreation site or trail has the same kinds of amenities. That would be true even if the Division of Parks and Trails had an abundance of funding. Minnesota's outdoor recreation system should always have options for those who want a rustic, essentially unspoiled "natural" experience as well as for those who want hot showers, extensive interpretive programs, and paved trails. Families, experienced backpackers, cross-country skiers, off-highway vehicle riders, horse riders, and others should be able to find places to enjoy the outdoors in the way they choose, but no site will have every activity for every possible user.

The DNR has already been moving toward differentiation. For example:



The Future Strategies Committee recommended that the division "move toward a more differentiated system that favors quality of facilities and opportunities over quantity or geographic distribution."

The Cuyuna State Recreation Area mountain bike system is an excellent example of a quality development.

- Where and how cross-country ski trails are groomed varies, depending on use.
- Camping seasons are not the same at every site.
- Some maintenance tasks are performed more frequently on high use trails.
- Interpretive services range from self-guided trails to year-round naturalists.
- Some park offices are staffed; others have self-registration.
- Friends' groups and other partners take on part of the operations and maintenance responsibilities for some parks and recreation areas, water access sites and trails.

System Plan Process and Guiding Principles

Prompted by the Future Strategies Committee's work as well as the Governor's goals of efficiency and effectiveness in providing services, the division set out to develop a system plan to guide investment decisions for parks and trails over the next 10 years.

Work on the system plan began in the spring of 2013, with four workgroups (state parks and recreation areas, state trails, state forest recreation areas, and water recreation). Each workgroup developed criteria to assess outdoor recreation resources within their purview and then created investment groups to help guide decision making around future investment. Draft work products were presented to DNR staff and stakeholders in late 2013 and early 2014, and were revised based on input received. Further input was solicited on a draft of the system plan in late 2014.

The principles that guide the system plan are:

- Invest limited resources strategically.
- Protect and interpret natural and cultural resources.
- Inspire the next generation to become stewards of our state's natural and cultural resources.
- Promote tourism and local economic development.
- Contribute to Minnesota's quality of life.

Connecting People to the Outdoors

Another purpose of the plan is to identify how DNR can better connect people to the outdoors. The DNR has committed to connect people to the outdoors by developing and promoting outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all backgrounds. The DNR is focusing increased attention on families with children,



Inspire the next generation of outdoor recreation participants and stewards of our state's natural and cultural resources.

ethnically diverse cultures, women, youth, and young adults who have an interest in starting a new tradition of outdoor recreation.

The work groups considered how investments in staff and development might help get more people, particularly underserved populations, involved in outdoor recreation. They considered, for example, that:

- Some new immigrant groups and families prefer camping options that allow them to interact closely, rather than separated camping sites.
- Those who are not familiar with the outdoors may worry about everything from insects to weather to getting lost. Programming, signage, and facilities can provide information to ease these fears and increase safe enjoyment of the outdoors.
- Many people are attached to their electronic devices and may be more likely to get outdoors if those devices help them access information and activities.
- Staff may have to expand outreach to some groups to encourage them to take part in outdoor recreation and to give them the informational tools to do so. This may mean more programming outside of state parks.

The emphasis on connecting people to the outdoors has been a focus of the DNR for several years, and helped set priorities in the 25-Year Legacy Plan for Parks and Trails. It continues to be a major commitment, and it should guide priorities for funding all aspects of the outdoor recreation system.

Legacy Funding Won't Solve All Issues

Funding sources are not, for the most part, considered in this system plan, but concern about funding for parks and trails was an important part of the impetus for the creation of the plan. General Fund support for parks and trails has not kept pace with rising costs and increased scope of responsibilities over the past 15 years.

The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund provides roughly \$25 million each year for parks and trails (state and regional), but the Legacy Amendment states, “the money dedicated under this section must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute.” While Legacy is a great new opportunity, it cannot address all of the funding needs for the Division of Parks and Trails. An aging infrastructure, increased costs of doing business, and new acquisitions and developments create more pressure on the operations and maintenance budgets, which are already insufficient.

To address this situation, the DNR is working with the state’s Management Analysis Division consultants to develop ideas for revenue generation and cost containment.

INTEGRATED DIRECTION ACROSS ALL FOUR SYSTEMS

Parks and Trails Division staff need to manage all these four systems as one integrated system. At a field level, the Parks and Trails Division have various geographic management units that can help achieve this integrated system. The district level—which includes state parks and recreation areas, state trails, state forest recreation areas and water recreation sites—is a logical level for initial activities on integration. The System Plan provides direction for setting division priorities, but each district must develop district-specific priorities using the staff’s first-hand knowledge of the individual units within their district.

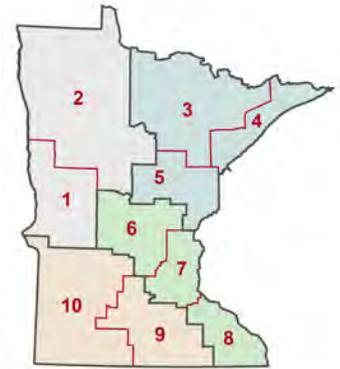
Important considerations for Parks and Trails staff include:

Protection

- Natural and cultural resource management will occur at all units including protection of significant natural and cultural resources, invasive species control, management of native plant communities such as controlled burning and restoration of native plant communities as prioritized by the resource management program.
- Increase focus on taking care of what we have (maintenance and rehabilitation). The focus of the system plan is largely on maintaining and improving outdoor recreation assets that are already a part of the system – taking care of what we have, rather than adding to the system. Acquisitions are important and will continue, but acquisitions will be evaluated more strategically, using the criteria set out in this plan.
- Model sustainability and conservation design. Water, sewer, utilities and other infrastructure should be designed in a sustainable manner and situated in such a way that they have the least impact on the parks’ natural and cultural resources. Development should embrace best management practices for shoreland management—avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts.

Innovation

- A focus on innovation around the strengths (niches) of the units to meet visitor demands is encouraged. Innovation that capitalizes on the units’ unique assets will be encouraged.
- Continue to strive to develop a range of high quality facilities and provide quality experiences across a broad spectrum of opportunities.
- Conduct research on recreation trends and use of existing units in order to meet the state’s outdoor recreation needs.
- Maintain and expand partnerships to build capacity for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, maintenance, interpretation and resource management.



Integration of outdoor recreation activities will be addressed at the district level of the organization as well as regional and state level.

Outreach

- Focus on connecting families with young children and groups under-represented among outdoor recreation participants. Outreach and new development across all systems should focus on inspiring new traditions in outdoor recreation among diverse audiences.

Flexibility/Adaptability

- The placement of a park, site, or trail in an investment group is not necessarily permanent. Changes in usage, sponsors, or needs may mean that a park, site, or trail should receive more or less investment than currently called for. Those parks, trails, and forest recreation areas now placed in groups receiving less investment are not less important than those receiving more investment; they simply serve a different role in the system.

Thoughtful Choices in Good Times and Bad

- The priorities apply no matter what the combination of funding sources and, for the most part, no matter how well funded state parks, trails, forest recreation areas, and water recreation facilities are. If more funds are available, more work can be done. But in any imaginable future, choices will always have to be made. The priorities and investment groups are intended to guide thoughtful choices in good times and bad.

Accessibility

- Facilities should be designed, developed, rehabilitated, and managed to meet the American with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines to encourage use by people with all abilities.

STATE PARKS AND STATE RECREATION AREAS

THE GOAL

The Division of Parks and Trails, in cooperation with its partners, will administer and manage a system of state parks and recreation areas with a wide range of visitor experiences, from relatively remote natural areas to units with lots of amenities and interpretive programs. Not every unit will provide all opportunities - each will fill a niche within a system of diverse recreation opportunities across the state.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the state park system includes 75 statutorily authorized units - 66 state parks and nine state recreation areas - as well as eight state waysides. Overall, these units encompass almost 275,000 acres.

The purpose of state parks as described in state statute is to preserve, perpetuate and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features now present in the park. "Park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use" (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd. 2c).

To be authorized as a state recreation area, a unit's resources must be able to sustain intensive recreational use by large numbers of people. "Physical development shall enhance and promote the use and enjoyment of the natural recreational resources of the area" (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd. 3c).

State waysides are generally too small to be state parks or state recreation areas, but possess unique, high-quality, or scenic natural and cultural resources. Some waysides are minimalist with little more than a parking area; others have sanitation facilities, picnic tables, and historic buildings. (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.013).

THE CHALLENGE

The primary challenge facing the state park system is adequate funding for basic operations and maintenance. Historically, the state's General Fund has been used to support state parks, but that support has remained flat over the last decade while the costs of operations – energy, fleet, employment expenses, and others – continue to increase. Because of this, the division has had to change the way it conducts core operational, administrative, and management practices.



The purpose of state parks is to preserve, perpetuate and interpret areas of the state that illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's unique natural resources, and to provide for the use, enjoyment and understanding of those resources without impairment for the future.

Operations and maintenance activities are critical to maintaining high levels of visitor satisfaction, and to attracting new visitors according to the 2012 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey.

“Cleanliness of grounds and facilities” was rated as the most important item for making a park visit enjoyable. If these expectations cannot be met, prospective visitors will likely choose other activities and destinations that better align with their needs, and opportunities to connect people and the outdoors through the state’s park system will be hampered.

Minnesota state park visitors also have a significant positive economic impact on communities throughout the state, contributing \$280 million in spending to local economies. This represents money spent at local businesses for items like gasoline and groceries, as well as for lodging and dining out. (The figure does not include money collected by for entrance fees, camping, or any other park fees.) Fewer state park visitors would mean smaller contributions to local communities.

At the same time, the passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008 has meant an influx of funds that the division has used to enhance interpretive programming, accelerate resource management activities, rehabilitate park and trail facilities, and make strategic acquisitions. However, these funds are intended to “supplement traditional sources of funding, and may not be used as a substitute.” Operating and maintaining existing – not just new and improved – facilities remains a challenge, despite the perception that the passage of the Legacy Amendment “solved” the funding problem.

INVESTMENT CRITERIA

In order to place state parks into the investment groups and develop priorities for future investments, the division developed criteria to assess the existing state park and state recreation area system. The division was particularly interested in how well parks and recreation areas meet their statutory purpose and how they help fulfill the department’s mission, the division’s vision, and objectives laid out in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan (2011) and the Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (2012). The prioritized criteria utilized in this assessment were:

- **Annual overnight visitation.** Outdoor recreation participation levels are important. The number of people currently staying overnight in state parks and state recreation areas is a direct reflection of that unit’s attractiveness to visitors. A five-year average (2007-2010, 2012) was used to evaluate visitation at all units offering overnight stays.
- **Annual revenue.** State parks and state recreation areas that bring in significant levels of revenue help the division fund the administration and management of those units. Fiscal year 2012 revenue figures were used for the analysis, as reported by state



“Cleanliness of grounds and facilities” was rated as the most important item for making a park visit enjoyable.



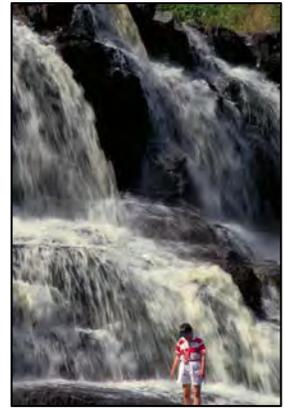
Recreation opportunities like camping were considered as part of the prioritized criteria analysis.

park and state recreation area management. This was the most recent timeframe for which data was available at the time of the plan's development.

- **Recreation opportunities and facilities provided.** Numerous and diverse recreation opportunities and facilities attract visitors who are looking for variety and a high level of amenities in their outdoor experience. The analysis of recreation opportunities and facilities included an evaluation of each unit's built infrastructure and amenities such as visitor and trail centers, picnic shelters, sanitation buildings, overnight lodging opportunities, trails, boat accesses, fishing piers, beaches, rental equipment, and connections to state trails and water trails.
- **Natural and cultural resource significance.** Natural and cultural resources attract visitors. Preserving and managing these resources (i.e., natural areas, waterfalls, historic sites, etc.) is a statutory obligation in state parks and a fundamental part of the division's work. The analysis of natural resources included an evaluation of each unit's biodiversity significance, native plant communities, native plant community conservation rank, rare natural features, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need (avian). The analysis of cultural resources included an evaluation of each unit's National Register Historic Landmarks, National Register Historic Districts and Sites, National Register-listed Buildings, National Register-listed Structures, National Register-listed Objects, and National Register-listed Sites.

The division also evaluated each unit on additional criteria:

- **Annual day-use visitation.** State parks and state recreation areas that are close to where people live or to popular tourist destinations are likely to attract visitors. According to the 2012 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey, day users make up 87 percent of state park visitors.
- **Average peak occupancy.** This figure adds insight to the annual overnight visitation figure. In some cases, a unit may have low to moderate overnight visitation but have a high percentage of campsites occupied. The occupancy figure indicates where there is a high demand for campsites during the "peak" season (i.e., May through August) and provides insight into where future campsite expansion may have strong return on investment.
- **Size.** Larger parks typically protect a greater diversity of natural, cultural and scenic resources, and may offer – or have the potential to offer – more opportunities for outdoor recreation. According to state statute, "no unit shall be authorized as a state park unless its proposed location ... is sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources which give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for



Gooseberry State Park

human enjoyment of these qualities.” Meyer (1991) says that “since the 1930s, (the Parks Division) had expressed a preference for parks of at least 500 acres.” The figure used in the analysis is the acreage in state ownership rather than the amount within the park’s statutory boundary.

- **Estimated tourism impact.** Park and recreation area visitors spend money and this spending fuels economic activity in the area of the park and recreation area, translating to jobs and income for Minnesotans. This figure aggregates the estimated tourism impact of annual day-use (\$26.86/person/day) and overnight visitors (\$23.72/person/day).

Using the prioritized criteria, the division assessed the 67 state parks and nine state recreation areas, and initially sorted them into the three main groups. Following input received from division staff throughout the state, the Core group was further differentiated into Adventure, Gateway, and Classic parks based on their outdoor recreation offerings, proximity to select population centers, and unique characteristics.

INVESTMENT GROUPS

The Division of Parks and Trails will organize and prioritize its work on the state park system into three investment groups: Destination Parks, Core Parks, and Rustic Parks (See state park and state recreation area investment groups on page 15).

Visitor experiences will vary from group to group, as will the division’s investments in acquisition and development, operations and maintenance, interpretive services, park amenities, partnerships, and marketing and promotion. This differentiated approach is common across park and recreation providers nationwide. According to the *Water and Land Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Users’ Handbook* (2011):

It is not practical to plan and manage each land and water resource so that it provides all opportunities for all visitors. Each resource should serve a particular recreational role or fill a niche within a larger system of diverse recreation opportunities. The conservation of recreation diversity across a larger spectrum will benefit the public and increase interagency efficiency.

The division will use the System Plan and guidance on differentiation to pursue the continued development, redevelopment, or rehabilitation of state parks in all groups to ensure that the basic suite of amenities – including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage – is in place and in good condition. The Division will also prioritize investments in the Destination and Core groups, with goal of upgrading campgrounds, group camps, and visitor centers; providing additional lodging opportunities; and rehabilitating facilities. Generally, investments will focus on the parks that provide experiences of statewide significance and facilities that serve the most visitors. They will also focus on



The Division partners with outdoor recreation retailers, the Conservation Corps of Minnesota, and others to provide skill building programs.

I can —
CAMP!

I can —
CLIMB!

I can —
PADDLE!

I can —
FISH!

attracting the next generation of park users. This includes innovative programs, facilities, and outreach.

The placement of units into investment groups is not necessarily permanent. The groupings represent the division’s best information and understanding of current conditions within the state park and state recreation area system today. The division will continue to assess and refine the investment groups over the 10-year scope of the system plan and beyond.

Destination State Parks and State Recreation Areas

These state parks and state recreation areas offer a destination-quality experience, with an array of outdoor recreation and lodging opportunities, park facilities, and naturalist-led interpretive offerings. They may have year-round camping (or other lodging) and staffing. Parks in this group have high use and attract visitors from across the state.

The Division will invest in Destination state parks and state recreation areas at a high level over the next 10 years to enhance campgrounds and group camps, visitor centers, lodging opportunities, and other amenities.

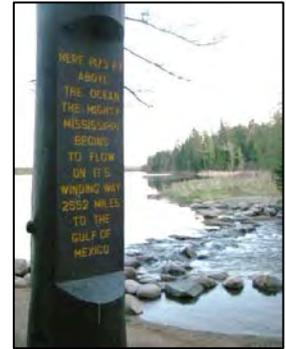
Destination Parks and Recreation Areas

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Bear Head Lake | Mille Lacs Kathio |
| Forestville/Mystery Cave | Sibley |
| Fort Snelling | Split Rock Lighthouse |
| Gooseberry Falls | St. Croix |
| Itasca | Tettegouche |
| Jay Cooke | Whitewater |
| Lake Carlos | Wild River |
| Lake Vermilion-Soudan | William O’Brien |
| Underground Mine | |

Core Parks and Recreation Areas

Parks in this group will offer a diversity of quality outdoor recreation experiences, from classic camping and hiking opportunities to adventurous climbing, mountain biking, OHV-riding, and kayaking opportunities, often in close proximity to population centers. This group has been further differentiated into Classic, Adventure, and Gateway parks and recreation areas. The emphasis for all of these parks will be on providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails with basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage.

In many ways, the Core group represents the typical visitor experience provided across much of the system to date: close-to-home, basic, high-quality facilities that visitors have come to know and expect. Classic Parks and Recreation Areas will continue to be just that, but Adventure and Gateway Parks and Recreation Areas will fill specific niches. Adventure Parks and Recreation Areas will offer opportunities for particular outdoor activities, like



Destination parks and recreation areas have high use and attract visitors from across the state.



Adventure Parks and Recreation Areas will offer opportunities such as rock climbing and mountain biking.

climbing or mountain biking. Gateway Parks and Recreation Areas – located within 30 miles of select metropolitan areas – will, over time, have the kind of facilities and programming that attracts and serves new outdoor recreation participants.

The purpose of the additional differentiation is to target efforts to connect people to the outdoors by developing and promoting outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all backgrounds, especially families with children, ethnically diverse cultures, women, youth and young adults. To accomplish this, the division will expand on successful recreation opportunity offerings through strategic development, marketing, and programming.

Providing “gateway” experiences for underserved populations means investing in programs and facilities that may not be part of today’s park and recreation system. For example:

- Some immigrant and multi-generational groups prefer camping options that allow them to interact closely, rather than separated camping sites.
- Inexperienced outdoor recreationists may worry about everything from insects to weather to getting lost. Programming, signage, and facilities can provide information to ease these concerns and increase safe enjoyment of the outdoors.
- Many people are attached to their electronic devices and may be more likely to get outdoors if those devices help them access information and activities.
- Programming may have to go to some groups to encourage them to take part in outdoor recreation and to give them the informational tools to do so. This may mean more programming outside of state parks and state recreation areas.

A statewide interpretive services plan will recommend specific approaches to better connect people to the outdoors in all types of state recreation units.

The division will invest in Core Parks at a moderate level over the next 10 years through new and improved outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities; targeted outreach, programming, and special events; and ensuring the basic suite of amenities is in good condition.



Gateway Parks and Recreation Areas will offer facilities and programs designed to attract underserved populations near population centers.

Core/Adventure Parks and Recreation Areas

Banning	Cuyuna Country	Iron Range OHV
Blue Mounds	Interstate	Temperance River

Core/Gateway Parks and Recreation Areas

Afton	Grand Portage	Minneopa
Buffalo River	Lake Bemidji	Myre-Big Island
Camden	Lake Maria	Nerstrand-Big Woods
Flandreau	Maplewood	Upper Sioux Agency
Frontenac		

Core/Classic Parks and Recreation Areas

Big Bog	Great River Bluffs	Red River
Big Stone Lake	Hayes Lake	Rice Lake
Cascade River	La Salle Lake	Sakatah Lake
Crow Wing	Lac Qui Parle	Savanna Portage
Father Hennepin	Lake Bronson	Scenic
Fort Ridgely	Lake Shetek	Split Rock Creek
Glacial Lakes	McCarthy Beach	Zippel Bay
Glendalough	Moose Lake	

Rustic Parks Recreation Areas

Parks and recreation areas in this group will offer basic amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage. Rustic parks will provide more self-directed services such as self-guided interpretation and self-registration. Many park visitors prefer these types of rustic opportunities because they offer a quiet, natural experience. These parks serve more local visitors than those found in other groups. Amenities beyond minimal or basic services will be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising. If appropriate, the division will also consider transferring these units to other DNR divisions or government entities for management.

Rustic Parks

Beaver Creek Valley	George H. Crosby	Lake Louise
Carley	Manitou	Minnesota Valley
Charles A.	Greenleaf Lake	Monson Lake
Lindbergh	Hill Annex Mine	Old Mill
Franz Jevne	John A. Latsch	St. Croix Islands
Garden Island	Judge C.R. Magney	Schoolcraft
	Kilen Woods	



Rustic Parks will provide more self-directed services such as self-guided interpretation and self-registration.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Natural and cultural resource preservation and management is a legislative mandate for the division, especially in state parks. High-quality natural and cultural resources are the foundation of the outdoor experiences for state park visitors and must be protected and managed system-wide.

Natural and cultural resources were used as a criterion for assessing state parks and state recreation areas. The criterion took into account the resource qualities present when ranking the units and placing them into the investment groups.

However, the division's resource management efforts were not used to differentiate the investment groups. Resource management efforts will be prioritized to achieve the greatest long-term impact possible on the preservation and enhancement of the resource base across the entire system, regardless to which investment group the units are assigned. Therefore resource management is not included as a category in the investment groups description on the following page.



High-quality natural and cultural resources are the foundation of the outdoor experiences for state park visitors

State Park and State Recreation Area Investment Groups

10-Year Division Investment –Resources and Funding			
	Rustic	Core	Destination
Acquisition	Acquisition focused on resource values.	Moderate priority to acquire in-holdings, adjacent lands.	High priority to acquire in-holdings, adjacent lands.
Development	Ensure basic suite of amenities* is in good condition.	Moderate priority to rehabilitate facilities, and provide additional lodging opportunities; ensure basic suite of amenities* is in good condition.	High priority to upgrade campgrounds, group camps, visitor centers, and trails; provide additional lodging opportunities; ensure basic suite of amenities* is in good condition.
Operations & maintenance	Moderate priority; seek partnerships for maintenance activities; park generally staffed by seasonal/shared staff; typically managed by another unit or area staff.	High priority to maintain quality park experience; park generally staffed by year-round employees; may manage satellite operations.	High priority to maintain quality park experience; park is staffed by year-round employees; often serves as an administrative hub.
Interpretive services	Messages presented primarily via signs and technology along self-guided trails, and occasional naturalist-led programming by shared regional/area staff.	Provide a mix of non-personal interpretation and naturalist-led programming and special events by on-site staff (where available) and shared regional/area staff.	Provide a mix of non-personal interpretation and naturalist-led programming and special events by on-site and sometimes shared regional/area staff.
Park amenities	Limited facilities and amenities (vault toilets for sanitation, orientation signage); predominately day use only or summer season camping; peaceful hiking, fishing, paddling, and picnicking.	Moderate level of amenities (visitor and/or trail center often present; predominately long-season or year-round camping; cabins in some units; some outdoor rec opportunities; running water and showers in some units, vaults in others; orientation signage, some interpretive signage).	High level of amenities (visitor and/or trail center, year-round camping, cabins & other lodging opportunities, many outdoor rec opportunities, running water sanitation, showers, orientation and interpretive signage).
Partnerships	Focused on maintenance agreements and fundraising.	Focused on acquisition and development opportunities and programming, special events, marketing.	Focused on acquisition and programming, special events, marketing.
Marketing & promotion	Market more toward local communities and visitors, and include convenience/ close- to-home messages.	Focus on attracting new users to adventurous recreation opportunities and through targeted outreach, programming, and special events; market more toward local communities and visitors, include convenience/close-to-home messages.	Focus on attracting new users to high amenity parks for their introductory experience, and on serving all visitors through new and enhanced facilities, and naturalist-led programming and special events.

Rustic – Likely to have low levels of overnight visitation and revenue; offer limited recreation opportunities and facilities; and possess comparatively less significant natural and/or cultural resources.

Core – Likely to have moderate levels of overnight visitation and revenue; offer a moderate diversity of recreation opportunities and facilities; and possess significant natural and/or cultural resources.

Destination –Likely to have high levels of overnight visitation and revenue; offer a broad diversity of recreation opportunities and facilities; and possess highly significant natural and/or cultural resources.

* Note: Basic suite of amenities includes picnic tables, fire rings, orientation signage, and waste removal.

State Park and State Recreation Area Investment Groups

Rustic Parks and Recreation Areas

Beaver Creek Valley
Carley
Charles A. Lindbergh
Franz Jevne
Garden Island
George H. Crosby Manitou
Greenleaf Lake
Hill Annex Mine
John A. Latsch
Judge C. R. Magney
Kilen Woods
Lake Louise
Minnesota Valley
Monson Lake
Old Mill
St. Croix Islands
Schoolcraft

Core Parks and Recreation Areas

Classic

Big Bog
Big Stone Lake
Cascade River
Crow Wing
Father Hennepin
Fort Ridgely
Glacial Lakes
Glendalough
Great River Bluffs
Hayes Lake
La Salle Lake
Lac qui Parle
Lake Bronson
Lake Shetek
McCarthy Beach
Moose Lake
Red River
Rice Lake
Sakatah Lake
Savanna Portage
Scenic
Split Rock Creek
Zippel Bay

Gateway

Afton
Buffalo River
Camden
Flandrau
Frontenac
Grand Portage
Lake Bemidji
Lake Maria
Minneopa
Maplewood
Myre-Big Island
Nerstrand-Big Woods
Upper Sioux Agency

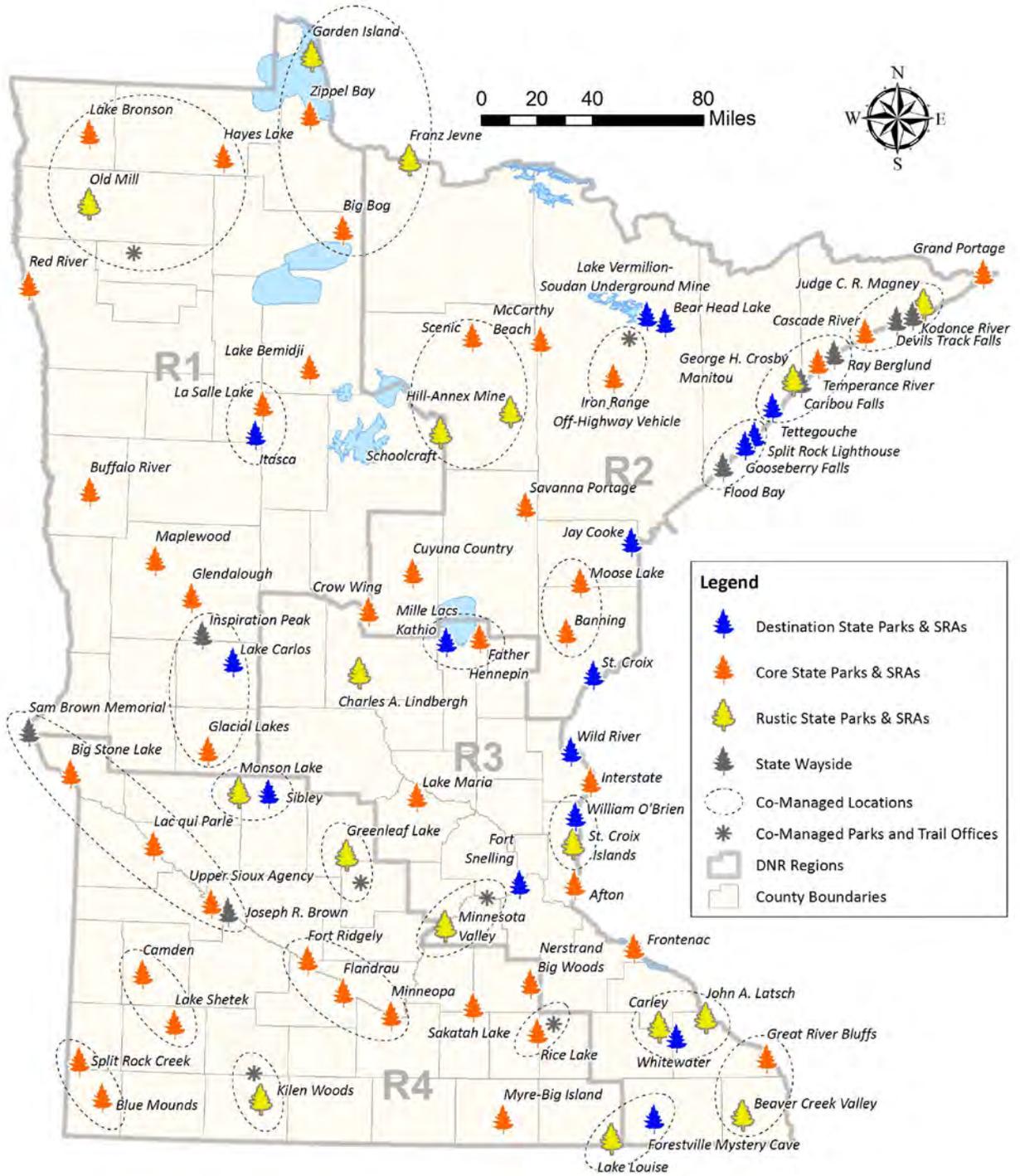
Adventure

Banning
Blue Mounds
Cuyuna Country
Interstate
Iron Range OHV
Temperance River

Destination Parks and Recreation Areas

Bear Head Lake
Forestville/Mystery Cave
Fort Snelling
Gooseberry Falls
Itasca
Jay Cooke
Lake Carlos
Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine
Mille Lacs Kathio
Sibley
Split Rock Lighthouse
St. Croix
Tettegouche
Whitewater
Wild River
William O' Brien

State Park and State Recreation Area Investment Groups



PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to its dedicated staff, the Division of Parks and Trails relies upon countless partners – including volunteers – to fulfill its vision. In many cases, if it were not for the assistance of one or more partners, some of the facilities and services that the division provides would not be available.

State park friends groups have been established for many of the units throughout the state, and are one of the most common and visible partner groups. These groups add value to the state park and state recreation area they serve through a variety of activities, including local promotion and marketing, coordination of special events, fundraising, and participation in select park resource management activities such as seed collection. Fundamentally, friends groups help foster connections between local communities and the parks and recreation areas and encourage the stewardship of these unique and special places.

Other partners with whom the division works include user and interest groups, conservation and recreation organizations, adjacent landowners, local units of government, the Legislature, Chambers of Commerce, resorts, non-profit organizations, outdoor industries and retailers, contractors, colleges and universities, American Indian tribes, local police and fire departments, other DNR divisions and bureaus, and other governmental agencies.

For parks and recreation areas in all investment groups, working with partners will continue to be essential, but the role partners play in each investment group may vary somewhat. Partners may play a more prominent role in raising funds for facility development or rehabilitation at Rustic or Core parks, for example. For Destination Parks, it might be more appropriate for partners to focus their energies on marketing, special events, and programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

System Management and Development

- Continue to preserve and manage the natural and cultural resources across the system.
- Use the investment group framework to guide decisions on investments across all activities and funding sources. Consider the investment category when prioritizing projects for capital bonding, Parks and Trails Legacy funds, or other funding, or when allocating resources for park operations and maintenance.
- Ensure the basic suite of park amenities (e.g., picnic tables, fire rings, orientation signage, etc.) is in good condition across the system.
- Upgrade campgrounds, group camps, visitor centers, and trails in select locations, with the highest priority on Destination Parks and Recreation



Use the investment group framework to guide investments in experiences for visitors of all abilities.

Areas. Provide additional lodging opportunities in select locations, with the highest priority on Destination Parks.

- Seek partnership opportunities appropriate to each investment group, including new maintenance and operation strategies for Rustic Parks and Recreation Areas.

Communication and Coordination

- Attract new visitors to high-amenity parks and adventurous recreation opportunities through targeted outreach, programming, and special events.
- Work with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission on state, regional, and local park system issues, including the impact of the investment group framework and division priorities on regional park priorities.

Evaluation

- Consider moving parks to new investment groups if circumstances change significantly over time (e.g., annual overnight visitation increases/decreases, annual revenue generated increases/decreases).

Additional Analysis

- Use the latest social science research and outdoor recreation trend information to determine which opportunities, facilities and experiences are most important to current and prospective visitors (e.g., hiking and mountain bike trails, swimming beaches, play areas, Wi-Fi), and enhance or provide them in select locations.
- Review and modify units' Outdoor Recreation Act classifications to more accurately reflect each unit's role in the state system based on its natural and cultural resources, recreation opportunities, and visitation.



Enhancing popular amenities like swimming beaches is important to state park and state recreation area visitors.

STATE TRAILS

THE GOAL

The Division of Parks and Trails, in cooperation with its partners, will create a differentiated trail system that offers a wide range of uses and experiences, and will focus and prioritize its efforts to provide basic trail experiences across the system and to create areas of enhanced experiences for some, but not all, trails.

BACKGROUND

As of 2014, the state trail system has 24 authorized state trails with more than 2,600 miles of trail. It's one of the finest state trail systems in the nation (Minnesota was voted Best Trails State by American Trails in 2010) with most state trails having been created on former railroad routes.

The purpose for state trails is set out in state statute:

A state trail shall be established to provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the outdoor recreation system or the national trail system, provides access to or passage through other areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreational qualities or reestablishes or permits travel along a historically prominent travel route or which provides commuter transportation. (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86a.05 subd. 4a).

Since the statutory authorization of the first state trails in 1971, the system has grown significantly, with greater demand for new trails and links between existing trails.

THE CHALLENGE

Approximately 1,270 miles of the state's authorized trails have been developed and are open for public use. More than half of the state trail system remains to be acquired and developed. As new state trails and new extensions to existing trails continue to be authorized, the gap between the miles of authorized state trail and the miles of developed state trail is growing.

The state trail system faces significant maintenance and rehabilitation needs. As the state trail system ages and expands, the cost of "taking care of what we have"—maintenance for resurfacing, culvert repairs, bridge repairs, etc.—continues to grow. Many bridges in the system are railroad spans that were converted for trail use and are nearing the end of their lifespan.

Continued development of the system is complicated by the nature of many of the trail corridors remaining to be built. Many of the earlier state trails were rails-to-trails projects: former railroad corridors converted to trails. Non-rail trails are more complex, costly, and time-consuming to acquire and develop: an alignment must be created working with many landowners; there are no existing rail beds or bridges to aid in development, etc.



Gateway State Trail

INVESTMENT CRITERIA

The division developed criteria to assess the “fit and function” of the authorized state trails: how well a trail currently meets or, when developed, would meet the statutory definition for a state trail, including its statewide significance. Because the system is only partially complete, the analysis considered the existing conditions as well as the potential conditions of state trails when fully developed. The criteria used were:

- **Natural, cultural, and scenic landscapes.** The trail provides access to or traverses areas with identified high natural resource quality, such as state parks, scientific and natural areas, wildlife management areas, areas with native plant communities or restoration sites, state-designated historic sites or cultural landscapes, or landscapes with scenic quality beyond what typically can be experienced in the area.
- **Broad-based visitation.** The trail serves a significant number of users and attracts visitors from throughout the state, beyond the immediate local area or region.
- **Multiple use/multiple-season use.** The trail provides for a variety of trail uses and/or year-round use.
- **Recreational connections.** The trail connects to other regional, state, or nationally designated recreation sites, including units of the outdoor recreation system such as state parks, other state trails, historic sites, grant-in-aid snowmobile routes, national parks, national recreation trails, regional parks, or similar private facilities.
- **Community connections.** The trail serves more than one community and creates connections that allow travel between several communities and to significant population and tourism centers.
- **Critical trail network connection.** The trail forms an important link in the broader network of trails (state, regional, and local).
- **Quality experiences.** The trail facility and associated public and private amenities offer a quality experience meeting user expectations for a state-managed unit.
- **Partnerships.** There are groups or communities that help with advocacy, communications, and marketing of the trail and that help create a welcoming environment for trail users.

Using these criteria, the division assessed trail segments within the 24 authorized state trails and trail systems. Some segments are entire authorized state trails; others are a segment of a state trail or a combination of several state trails. For example along the Minnesota River State Trail, visitor experiences and trail characteristics vary, and its trail segments will likely be developed in phases.

The investment group a trail segment was placed into is not necessarily permanent. The analysis represents the division’s best information and



Eight criteria were used to assess the “fit and function” of the authorized state trail system.

understanding of current conditions and the potential for each trail segment. Over time, with continued development of the trails or changing local conditions, some trails may be re-categorized. The division will continue to assess and refine the investment groups as development of the state trail system moves forward.

INVESTMENT GROUPS

The DNR’s Division of Parks and Trails will organize and prioritize its work on the state trail system into two groups: destination trails and core trails.

The differences between the two are based on:

- The amount and type of investment the division makes in trails.
- How the division works with partners on developing and managing the trails.
- How the division communicates about trail experiences and amenities with trail users.

The division will pursue the continued development of state trails in both groups, identifying priorities and making funding decisions based on the investment criteria and principles set out here. This framework provides a structure for identifying and communicating priorities among all the units in the state trail system as an alternative to divesting or de-authorizing some units from system (See State Trails Investment Groups, p. 25). Some state trails are long enough, with varying characteristics, to merit being divided into different segments.

Destination Trails

With interpretive offerings and significant amenities at trailheads and in nearby communities, Destination Trails will offer a destination-quality experience, with considerable amenities. Trails in this group will have high use and attract users from across the state and Midwest region. The division will lead the development and management activities for these state trails.

Destination Trails will have greater investment in amenities. Acquisition and rehabilitation will be high priority. More frequent maintenance will occur. Marketing efforts will also be higher priority.

Destination Trails

Blufflands-Root River	Minnesota Valley-Fort Snelling to
Blufflands-Harmony-Preston	LeSueur
Blufflands-Preston to Forestville State Park	Paul Bunyan
Gitchi-Gami	Superior Vista
Heartland-Heartland	Willard Munger-Gateway (including
Heartland-Heartland Spur (connection to Itasca State Park)	Brown’s Creek)



Destination Trails will offer a destination-quality experience, with considerable amenities.

Core Trails

These trails will be well maintained, with basic services that provide a safe and enjoyable experience for trail users. The division will have the lead role in developing and managing some of these trails, while partners (such as local communities or trail associations) will have a lead role for others. Partner-led state trails may serve more local use than trails in other investment groups. Amenities that go beyond minimal or basic services for these trails may be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising.

The experiences provided on existing core trails will continue to be maintained. Core trails reflect the way in which state trails traditionally have been developed. Partners often take the lead in identifying right-of-way for acquisition. They support funding for acquisition, development, and rehabilitation.

Core Trails: Division-Led

Arrowhead-International Falls to Ely	Glacial Lakes-Willmar to Paynesville (including Sibley State Park link)
Arrowhead-C.J. Ramstad/Northshore	Heartland-Heartland Extension (Park Rapids to Moorhead)
Arrowhead-Taconite	Luce Line
Arrowhead-Matthew Lourey	Mill Towns
Blazing Star	Minnesota River-Franklin to LeSueur
Blufflands-Whitewater/Chester Woods	Sakatah Singing Hills
Camp Ripley-Veterans	Stagecoach
Casey Jones	Willard Munger-Hinckley to Duluth (including Alex Leaveu)
Central Lakes	Willard Munger-Oberstar Trail (Taylors Falls to Hinckley)
Cuyuna Lakes	
Douglas-Goodhue Pioneer	
Douglas-Rochester to Pine Island	

Core Trails: Partner-Led

Arrowhead-Grand Marais to Ely (Tomahawk)	Des Moines River Valley
Blufflands-other Blufflands segments (Additional trails may be established that extend the Blufflands Trail system to include La Crescent, Hokah, Caledonia, and Spring Grove in Houston County; Preston, Harmony, Fountain, Wykoff, Spring Valley, Mabel, Canton, and Ostrander in Fillmore County; Rochester, Dover, Eyota, Stewartville, Byron, and Chester Woods County Park in Olmsted County; and Winona, Minnesota City, Rollingstone, Altura, Lewiston, Utica, St. Charles, and Elba in Winona County)	Glacial Lakes-Paynesville to St. Cloud
	Glacial Lakes-Sibley State Park to Lake Carlos State Park
	Great River Ridge
	Minnesota River-Big Stone to Franklin
	Minnesota River-Chief Sleepy Eye
	Shooting Star
	Prairie Wildflower
	Willard Munger-Proctor Connection



Core trails will be well maintained with basic services that provide a quality experience for trail users.

Partner-led state trails may serve more local use than other state trails. Amenities that go beyond basic services for these trails may be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising.

OTHER TRAILS MANAGED BY THE DIVISION

The Division of Parks and Trails manages other trails and trail systems beyond the state trails included in the system plan analysis. The other trails serve primarily motorized trail activities, including snowmobiling and OHV riding. Five trails – Alborn –Pengilly Trail, Blue Ox Trail, Cloquet-Saginaw Trail, Dakota Rail Trail and Gandy Dancer Trail – were acquired initially, and primarily for snowmobile use and as long distance connections between grant-in-aid trail systems. The division also manages in cooperation with local clubs and communities other motorized trail use areas and an extensive grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system. These trails and trail systems provide important recreational opportunities and long distance connections between trails. However, because the division does not anticipate significant differentiation for these trail uses or facilities, these trails were not included in the system plan or placed into the investment groups.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

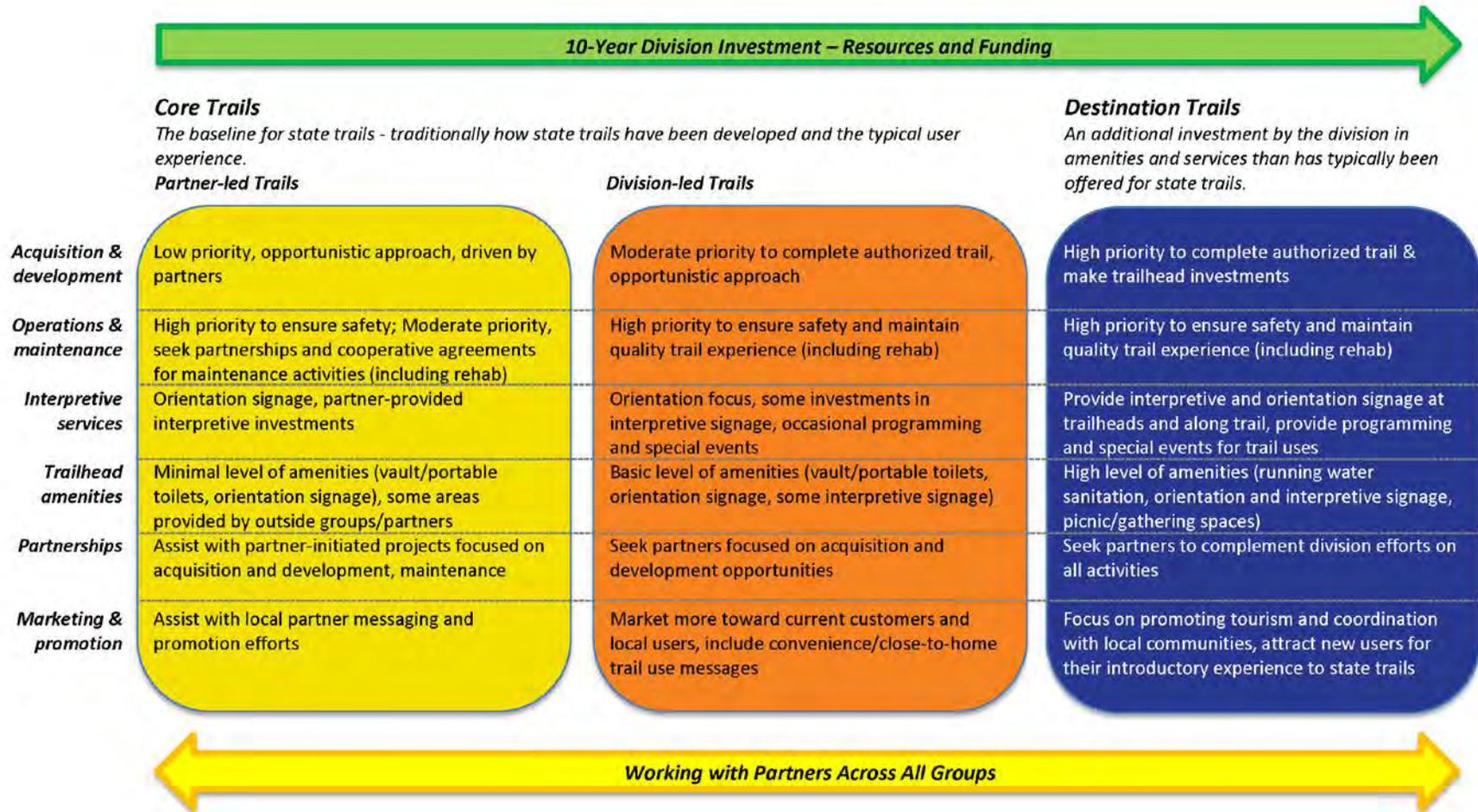
Managing natural and cultural resources is an important task for the division. Resource management efforts or opportunities were not used to differentiate the investment groups for state trails, and so is not included as a category in the investment groups description on the following page.

Resource management effort priorities are based more on landscape and opportunity than on investment group. The division will conduct basic resource management activities along all trails, including invasive species control and cultural resource protection. Larger-scale efforts, such as restoring areas of native plant communities along a trail corridor, will be driven less by investment category than by opportunity. For example, native plant community restoration work will be done where it is possible and provides the greatest value for the investment: areas of wider trail right-of-way and/or locations where the trail corridor is adjacent to other areas managed for resource preservation (e.g., state parks, SNAs, WMAs, regional or local parks). The division will also take advantage of synergistic opportunities where natural or cultural resource restoration efforts along high-use destination trails will provide more outdoor learning opportunities for trail users.



Invasive species, such as garlic mustard, will be managed on all trail segments regardless of investment category.

State Trail Investment Groups



State Trail Investment Groups

Core State Trails

Partner-led:

Arrowhead System

- Arrowhead State Trail (Tomahawk Trail)

Blufflands System

- Other Blufflands System segments connecting La Crescent, Hokah, Caledonia, and Spring Grove in Houston County; Preston, Harmony, Fountain, Wykoff, Spring Valley, Mabel, Canton, and Ostrander in Fillmore County; Rochester, Dover, Eyota, Stewartville, Byron, and Chester Woods County Park in Olmsted County; and Winona, Minnesota City, Rollingstone, Altura, Lewiston, Utica, St. Charles, and Elba in Winona County.

Des Moines River Valley State Trail

Glacial Lakes State Trail – Paynesville-St. Cloud segment

Glacial Lakes State Trail – Sibley State Park-Lake Carlos State Park segment

Great River Ridge State Trail

Minnesota River State Trail – Big Stone-Franklin segment

Minnesota River State Trail – Chief Sleepy Eye segment

Shooting Star State Trail

Prairie Wildflower State Trail

Willard Munger System

- Willard Munger State Trail (Proctor-Duluth-Hermantown segment)

Division-led:

Arrowhead System

- Arrowhead State Trail (International Falls-Ely segment)
- C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail
- Matthew Lourey State Trail
- Taconite State Trail

Blazing Star State Trail

Blufflands System

- Chester Woods-Whitewater State Park segment

Camp Ripley-Veterans State Trail

Casey Jones State Trail

Central Lakes State Trail

Cuyuna Lakes State Trail

Douglas System

- Douglas State Trail
- Goodhue Pioneer State Trail

Glacial Lakes State Trail – Willmar-New London-Sibley State Park-Paynesville segment

Heartland State Trail – Heartland Extension segment (Park Rapids-Moorhead)

Luce Line State Trail

Mill Towns State Trail

Minnesota River State Trail – Franklin-LeSueur segment

Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail

Stagecoach State Trail

Willard Munger System

- Oberstar Trail (Taylors Falls-Hinckley segment)
- Willard Munger State Trail (Hinckley-Duluth segment) & Alex Leaveu State Trail

Destination State Trails

Blufflands System

- Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail
- Preston-Forestville State Park segment
- Root River State Trail

Gitchi-Gami State Trail

Heartland State Trail

Heartland State Trail – Heartland Spur segment (Park Rapids-Itasca State Park)

Minnesota Valley State Trail

Paul Bunyan State Trail

Superior Vista State Trail

Willard Munger System

- Gateway State Trail and Brown’s Creek State Trail

State Trail Investment Groups



INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

Investment principles were developed to help guide investment decisions: how the division will determine priorities for acquisitions, among development projects, and for operations and maintenance spending. These investment principles are meant to reflect the division's overall priorities for state trails. None of these principles are absolutes. Division staff will use professional judgment when applying the principles and identifying priorities for funding.

Even with the application of the investment principles, the division still will need to maintain some flexibility, especially when considering how to react to emerging trends or unique opportunities. The division will document the compelling rationale when acting on an opportunity that is outside of the direction set by the investment principles.

The principles for making investment decisions are:

- **Destination > Core: Division-led > Core: Partner-led.** In general, the division's highest priority will be for projects and activities on Destination Trails. Within the Core Trails, those led by the division will be a higher priority than those led by partners.
- **Some funding to each investment category each cycle/source.** The division will strive to include some projects or funding toward trails within all investment groups for each funding source and cycle, including capital bonding requests, Legacy funding requests, and operations and maintenance allocations.
- **Building on existing trails > starting new trails.** The division will prioritize maintaining, rehabilitating, and developing existing state trails to capitalize on past investments and ongoing partnerships with local communities/groups. Existing trails are those authorized state trails that are partially or wholly developed and open for use. In general, acquisition activities also will follow this principle, but sometimes will be more opportunity-driven.
- **Making connections.** The division will focus efforts on developing trail segments that connect state trails to sites that will encourage trail use and provide amenities for trail users, including state parks, other state trails, regional parks and trails, other public or private recreational opportunities, and local communities.
- **Creating recreation opportunities statewide.** The division will strive to include some projects or funding for trails across the investment groups to provide recreational opportunities throughout the state, within the Investment Group framework and resulting priorities.

Investment principles guide future development and management decisions.



Root River State Trail

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are important to the successful development and management of state trails in all Investment Groups, but partners will serve different roles for each kind of trail, as well as for each trail project. The division will build partnerships that support its priorities and that help implement the framework for investment. The division will need to work with partners to implement this new framework and clearly define division-partner roles moving forward.

Partnerships for Core Trails

These trails provide a basic, high-quality trail experience. The division's work with partners will focus on providing the necessities: acquisition, development, and maintenance of the trail corridor. Providing amenities, or a level of service beyond the trail itself, will be a lower priority for the division on these trails.

- **For trails led by partners:** The division will assist on projects initiated by partners, focused on acquisition and development of the trail, and will seek to establish trail-maintenance agreements with partners. Trails in this group are lower in priority for the division, in comparison to other state trails in the system, and will need leadership from local communities and partners. Some of these trails already have partners involved; some do not. However, the presence or absence of current partners was not a factor in placing the trails in this group.
- **For trails led by the division:** The division will have a lead role in acquisition, development, and maintenance activities for these state trails. The division will seek out partners focused on acquisition and development activities to help augment its efforts.

Partnerships for Destination Trails

These state trails will provide a destination-quality experience, including interpretive offerings and significant amenities. The division will seek partners to help complement and enhance its efforts on all types of activities: acquisition and development, interpretive services, trailhead amenities, marketing and promotion.

Partnerships are important in all investment groups; what work partners do varies between investment groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

System Development

- Use the investment framework and principles to guide decision-making on investments across all activities and funding sources. The division will consider the investment groups and principles when prioritizing projects for capital bonding, Parks and Trails Legacy funds, or other funding, or when allocating resources for trail operations and maintenance.
- Further prioritize individual segments of authorized state trails. The division will identify priority segments within authorized state trails to provide additional direction for staff when developing project proposals and working with partners.

Communication and Coordination

- Use the investment framework to communicate expected experiences and division priorities with partners and other entities. The descriptions of the investment groups can help division staff describe the intended outcome for developing a trail when working with partners, making clear where each unit fits with division priorities and the potential roles for partners.
- Use the investment criteria developed during the system planning process to assess potential trails. The criteria used to assess the “fit and function” of authorized state trails also can be used to assess newly identified trail opportunities to help gauge whether a proposed trail is more appropriate as a state trail or as a regional or local trail.
- Work with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission and Metropolitan Council on state and regional/local trail issues. Important topics on which to communicate with the Commission and Council include: the impact of the investment group framework and division priorities on regional trail priorities, and the consideration of potential trails for “fit” with state or regional/local trail systems.

Evaluation

- Evaluate the placement of state trails within the investment groups. The division will reassess the placement of individual state trails if circumstances change in terms of trail use patterns, trail segment development, or access to other recreational opportunities.
- Evaluate the functionality of the investment principles. The division will review how well these principles are working to guide funding decisions and project prioritization.



Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail

FOREST RECREATION AREAS

THE GOAL

The State Forest Recreation Area System offers a gateway to the natural resource and recreation opportunities available in state forests, including access to trail systems, hunting, berry-picking, lakes and rivers, and rustic and remote camping. The Division of Parks and Trails, in cooperation with its partners, will focus and prioritize its efforts to maintain the existing infrastructure and experience at the vast majority of the current sites. It also will develop additional amenities at select sites to meet the statewide needs and demands of user groups, especially those of motorized trail users and horseback riders.

BACKGROUND

Originally developed and managed by the DNR Division of Forestry, state forest campgrounds and day-use areas provide recreation opportunities within state forests. Camping opportunities available in state forests include campgrounds, individual campsites, group campsites, horse campsites, and dispersed camping. Unlike many state parks, state forest campgrounds do not have resident managers, organized nature programs, or modern facilities such as showers and flush toilets. They are rustic in nature, with fire rings, picnic tables, and vault toilets.

Within the 58 state forests in Minnesota, 43 campgrounds offer designated campsites. There are twelve campgrounds that serve horseback riders.

There are 29 day use areas within the state forests, some of which are associated with state forest campgrounds. Picnic tables, drinking water, garbage cans, and toilets are common features of these areas. Many of the day-use areas are located on lakes or rivers and provide boating access, swimming, and other forms of water recreation.

Connection to Phase II Forest Process

In 2008, the DNR completed a forest-by-forest review of Minnesota State Forests to determine their appropriate classification with regard to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Road and trail access was also evaluated for a variety of both motorized and non-motorized recreational activities. In 2012, the DNR started a review of all state forest trail systems to identify measures to improve trail sustainability and enhance user experiences for both motorized and non-motorized uses (Phase II process). The trail system changes will not include changing forest-wide limited, managed, or closed motorized classifications.

The System Plan does not address trails in state forests, but there is a strong connection between the Phase II process and the System Plan. Existing state forest recreation areas provide opportunities to upgrade campgrounds to better serve OHV users. Also trail connections to these campgrounds need to be identified and this could occur during the Phase II process.



Development of amenities and support facilities that serve motorized trail users is recommended.



There are 43 state forest campgrounds that offer designated campsites, and 29 state forest day use areas.

State Forest Recreation Areas and the School Trust Fund

Approximately half of the state forest recreation areas are located on school trust fund land. The purpose of trust fund land is to generate revenue for the school trust. In the case of state forest recreation areas on trust lands, revenue generated by camping fees goes to the trust. This poses a challenge for the division in terms of investing in new developments on trust fund sites. Under current understandings, if the division developed new facilities resulting in increased use and increased revenue, the trust would realize the benefit of the new development, not the division. Also, the division funds the maintenance of the forest recreation areas and is not able to use revenue from camping to help with maintenance costs. The division will work with the school trust and explore models of campground management for a win-win outcome for both.

THE CHALLENGE

The State Forest Recreation Area system faces significant rehabilitation and maintenance needs. Forest Recreation Areas currently are maintained by the Division of Parks and Trails, most often by state park staff. Often, staff travel long distances to provide maintenance. The established base budget doesn't include enough to pay all the costs of operating and maintaining forest recreation areas, so their upkeep is subsidized by the budget for state parks. Because there is no staff on site at forest recreation areas, maintenance, enforcement, and collection of fees are challenges.

Many state forest recreation areas are located on School Trust Fund land; the goal of the Permanent School Trust is to secure long-term economic return to the trust.

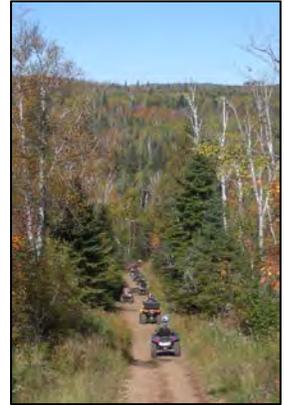
INVESTMENT GROUPS

Enhanced Forest Recreation Areas

These areas have the potential to be developed with needed recreation amenities to support trail users in state forests. For example, motorized trail users would like to have campgrounds with shower buildings, expanded parking, and access from campgrounds to the state forest trail system. Horseback riders also seek improved amenities.

Table 1: Enhanced Forest Recreation Areas

Enhanced State Forest Recreation Area	State Forest	Designated Campsites	Horse Campsites	Day Use Area
Eckbeck	Finland	X		X
Finland	Finland	X		X
Gafvert	Nemadji	X		X
Huntersville Forest				
Landing	Huntersville	X		
Wake-em-up Bay	Kabetogama	X		X
Woodenfrog	Kabetogama	X		X



This plan recommends providing access from campgrounds to the state forest trail system.



State forests host twelve horse campgrounds.

Enhanced State Forest Recreation Area	State Forest	Designated Campsites	Horse Campsites	Day Use Area
Zumbro Bottoms Central	Richard J. Dorer			
	Memorial Hardwood		X	
Zumbro Bottoms West	Richard J. Dorer			
	Memorial Hardwood		X	

Core Forest Recreation Areas

These areas would continue to provide the kind of outdoor recreation experience and amenities that are currently present. Existing facilities would be rehabilitated and replaced as needed. Facilities at campgrounds include fire rings, tables, vault toilets, garbage cans, and drinking water. At these areas, current facilities would remain, but with limited maintenance. Opportunities for alternative forms of management through partnerships or other agreements should be explored where possible.

Table 2: Core Forest Recreation Areas

Core State Forest Recreation Area	State Forest	Designated Campsites	Horse Campsites	Day Use Area
Ann Lake	Sand Dunes	X	X	X
Ash River	Kabetogama	X		
Bear Lake	George Washington	X		X
Bemis Hill	Beltrami Island	X	X	X
Birch Lake	Birch Lake	X		X
Bob Dunn	Sand Dunes		X	
Boulder	St. Croix	X		X
Button Box Lake	George Washington	X		X
Clint Converse	Land O' Lakes	X		X
Dago Lake	General CC Andrews			X
Devilfish Lake	Grand Portage	X		
Faunce	Beltrami Island	X		
Esther Lake	Grand Portage	X		
Greer Lake	Crow Wing	X		
Gulch Lake	Paul Bunyan	X		X
Hay Creek	Richard J. Dorer			
Hay Lake	Memorial Hardwood			X
Hay Lake	Savanna	X		X
Hinsdale Island	Kabetogama	X		X
Hungryman Lake	Two Inlets	X		X
Indian Lake	Cloquet Valley	X		
Kruger	Richard J. Dorer			
Kruger	Memorial Hardwood	X		X
Larson Lake	George Washington	X		
Lost Lake	George Washington	X		
McCormick Lake	General CC Andrews			X
McFarland Lake	Grand Portage	X		
Mantrap Lake	Paul Bunyan	X		X

Core State Forest Recreation Area	State Forest	Designated Campsites	Horse Campsites	Day Use Area
Moose Lake	Bowstring	X		
Owen Lake	George Washington	X		X
Pelican Beach	Crow Wing			X
Remote Lake	Savanna			X
Rock Lake	Pillsbury	X		
Shafer	Pillsbury			X
Shell City	Huntersville		X	
Shell City Landing	Huntersville	X		
	Richard J. Dorer			
Snake Creek	Memorial Hardwood	X		
Snake River	Chengwatana	X		
Stony Brook	George Washington		X	
Sullivan Lake	Finland	X		
Tamarack River	St. Croix		X	
Thistledeew Lake	George Washington	X		X
Togo	George Washington		X	
	Richard J. Dorer			
Trout Valley	Memorial Hardwood			X
Twin Lakes	Pat Bayle	X		
	Richard J. Dorer			
Vinegar Ridge	Memorial Hardwood	X		
Walter E. Stark	Pillsbury		X	
Willow River	General CC Andrews	X		

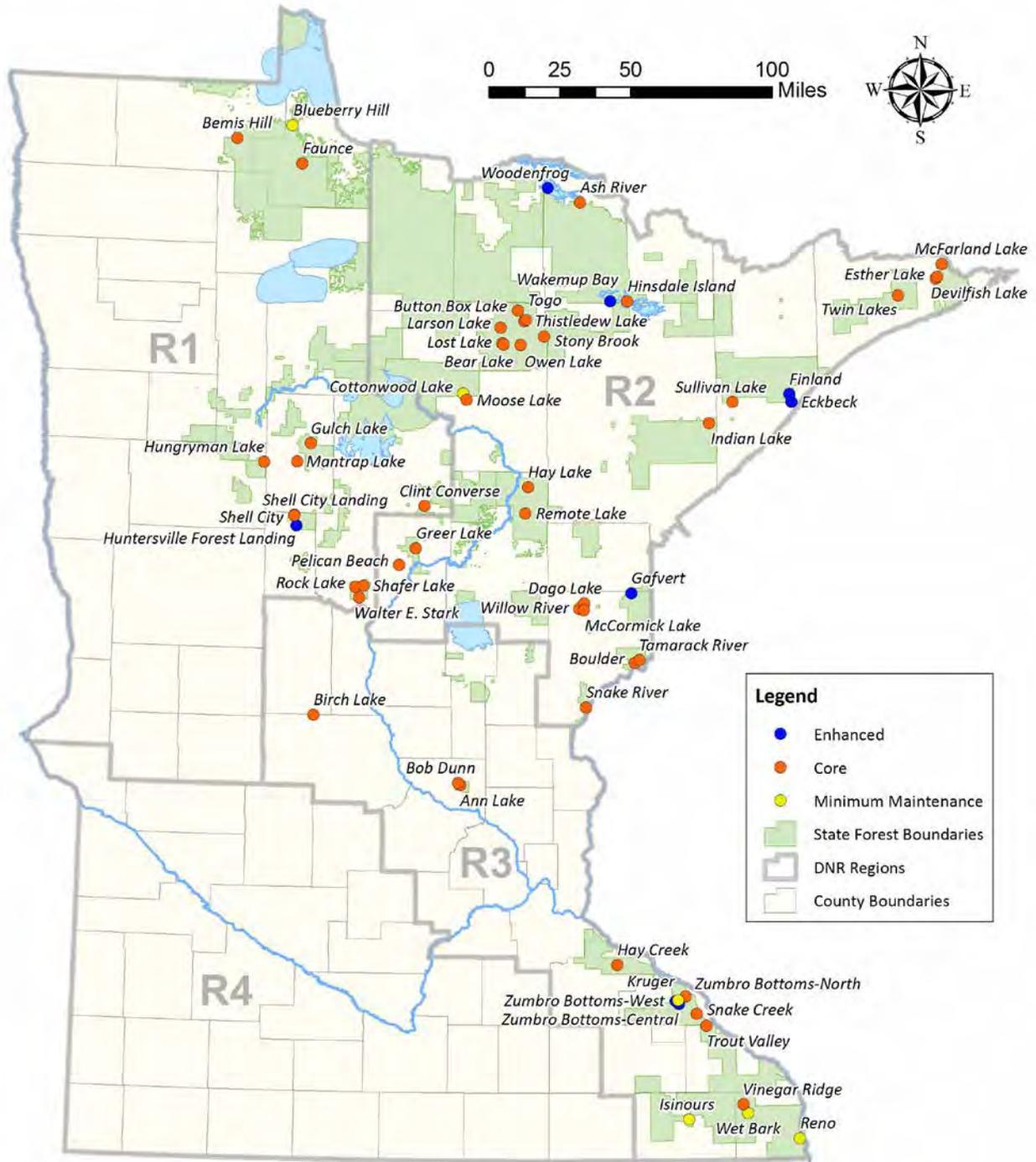
Minimum Maintenance Forest Recreation Areas

At these areas, current facilities would remain, but with limited maintenance. Opportunities for alternative forms of management through partnerships or other agreements should be explored where possible.

Table 3: Minimum Maintenance Forest Recreation Areas

Minimum Maintenance State Forest Recreation Area	State Forest	Designated Campsites	Horse Campsites	Day Use Area
Blueberry Hill	Beltrami Island	X		
Chester Lake	Grand Portage			X
Cottonwood Lake	Bowstring	X		
	Richard J. Dorer			
Isinours	Memorial Hardwood	X		X
	Richard J. Dorer			
Reno	Memorial Hardwood		X	
	Richard J. Dorer			
Wet Bark	Memorial Hardwood	X		
	Richard J. Dorer			
Zumbro Bottoms North	Memorial Hardwood		X	

Forest Recreation Area Investment Groups



INVESTMENT CRITERIA

The criteria for assessing priorities for investment and development in State Forest Recreation Areas are:

- Overnight visitation (three-year average)
- Revenue (two-year average, using FY 2010 and CY 2012)
- Swimming beach use
- Day use
- Significant water access
- Other significant features (historical, cultural, existing infrastructure)
- Entry point to a trail system:
 - Horse trails
 - Motorized trails

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships can help with cost-containment and efficiencies. For example: Blueberry Hill FRA could be designated as “day-use only” and connected to a local ATV GIA Trail. The club could become responsible for the maintenance of vault toilets. There is potential to partner with the county for Larson Lake. Finding volunteers to help with Chester Lake, Devilfish Lake, Esther Lake, McFarland Lake and Twin Lakes in Cook County would reduce the travel time from Judge C.R. Magney State Park, yielding savings in staff time and fleet costs.

Partnership recommendations are included below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Revenue Generation

- Collect fees at some Forest Recreation Areas that currently don’t collect fees. Several Forest Recreation Areas were identified as areas where fee collection could be added: Faunce, Bemis Hill, Pelican Beach day-use area, Snake Creek, and Trout Valley.
- Include some busy sites on the state reservation system, e.g., Eckbeck and Finland.
- Increase fees at some Forest Recreation Areas.
- Explore the use of electronic payment options and kiosks at highly used sites.

Maintenance Cost Containment and Efficiencies

- Invest in campground host sites as an incentive for campground hosts to stay longer. Campground hosts serve a vital role in monitoring activity and providing customer service at Forest Recreation Areas. Developing



Seven criteria were used to assess priorities for investment and development in Forest Recreation Areas including whether or not the area serves as an entry point to a horse trail system.

a site with some amenities, such as electricity, would entice more people to volunteer as hosts and encourage them to stay longer.

- Contract with other divisions for the maintenance of some Forest Recreation Areas. DNR area offices are closer to some of the recreation areas than the state parks that currently maintain them. For example, the Nimrod Forestry office is closer to Shell City and Huntersville Forest Recreation Areas than Itasca State Park. This strategy would save staff time and fleet costs.
- Continue to use Greenview when possible. Greenview is a program that provides employment to seniors at a reasonable cost to the state. Greenview is a cost-effective way to maintain sites, but turnover is an issue.
- Contract with a private vendor or local unit of government for the maintenance of some Forest Recreation Areas. For example, maintenance of Indian Lake and Sullivan Lake Forest Recreation Areas could be contracted out, if the current Greenview option is no longer available.
- Use shared positions with other divisions as a strategy to provide maintenance and manage costs. The divisions of Forestry and Parks and Trails already share a position in Region 2.
- Use partners such as ATV clubs and sports groups. Partnerships can help with cost-containment and efficiencies.

Outreach

- Improve website to make it easier for users to find forest campground information. Better coordination is needed between the Division of Forestry's web pages and those of the Parks and Trails is needed.

Coordination with Phase II Forest Trail Designation Process

- Integrate into the Phase II process the consideration for development of support facilities at Forest Recreation Areas.

Investment

- Invest in some campgrounds to better meet the needs of users. For example, some Forest Recreation Areas serve motorized or horse users. Providing restroom facilities, parking, and linkages to trail systems would improve the experiences of these users.
- Manage sites to protect natural and cultural resources. Use best management practices to control the spread of terrestrial and invasive species.

Interpretation

- Interpret the significant natural and cultural resources in Forest Recreation Areas.



A variety of alternative management strategies are identified as ways to more effectively and efficiently manage Forest Recreation Areas.

WATER RECREATION

THE GOAL

The goal of the water recreation system is to provide and maintain access to public waters for recreation, while protecting and enhancing natural resources through facility design, program management, and education.

The Division of Parks and Trails will provide high-quality public water access sites and water trails by focusing on taking care of the existing facilities (including maintenance, rehabilitation, renewal, and safe operation). Acquisition of new water recreation sites and facilities will continue. However, due to the size and condition of our system, the division needs to shift more time, energy, and funding toward operations and maintenance of existing facilities. Priority projects for the water recreation system will be where there is greatest need and demand, and where facilities (boat accesses, carry-in accesses, fishing piers, campsites, rest areas, and portages) will serve the most users.

BACKGROUND

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources provides and maintains a statewide system of public water access (PWA) facilities (also known as boat launches), state water trails, small craft harbors and marinas, fishing piers, and shore fishing sites that give the public many opportunities to access and enjoy the state's lakes and rivers.

In 2014, the statewide system consists of 2,889 public water accesses. A total of 1,658 are owned by the state of Minnesota and operated by the DNR (1,502 by the Division of Parks and Trails), including 10 facilities offering a variety of opportunities from full-service marinas to protected water access sites to Lake Superior. The remaining 1,231 public accesses are owned and/or operated by county, city, township and federal agencies, many of which were developed in cooperation with DNR.

The division currently manages 4,528 miles of state water trails for canoeing, kayaking, boating, and camping on 32 rivers statewide and along the North Shore of Lake Superior. The state water trails system was the first in the nation and is also the largest in the nation.

The fishing pier program consists of 368 fishing piers, platforms, or shore fishing sites statewide. In many cases, fishing pier installations are accomplished through partnerships between the state, local government units, non-profit groups, and community organizations. Cooperative agreements allow the state to buy and install a pier (on public land), while the local unit of government develops the accessible parking and pathway, and handles all of the routine maintenance for 20 years (or the life of the pier).

These facilities serve the general public in multiple ways with primary users who include anglers and boat owners. Minnesota is a national leader in the sale of fishing licenses per capita and watercraft registrations per capita. In 2012, more

We will provide a high-quality water recreation system by focusing on taking care of existing facilities and being more strategic with project priorities.



Minnesota River State Water Trail



Two Harbors public water access.

than 1.1 million fishing licenses were sold (including resident and non-resident). In 2013, more than 809,000 watercraft were registered in Minnesota.

THE CHALLENGE

Many of the water access and fishing pier facilities are approaching the end of their expected life spans, which can range from 20 to 40 years for public water accesses and averages about 20 years for fishing piers. The combination of aging infrastructure and user trends toward larger boats and vehicles has created a greater need to focus on maintaining and improving existing sites. In addition increasing environmental issues and awareness has led to development of best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater runoff, shoreland restoration, and invasive species. Findings from the Minnesota DNR boating studies conducted since 1984 support this trend.

The combination of aging infrastructure and user trends toward larger boats and vehicles has created a greater need to focus on maintaining and improving existing sites.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Natural resources conservation is part of the DNR's primary mission. It is the Division of Parks and Trails' responsibility to protect existing natural features, and water quality by applying sustainable design and best management practices (e.g., providing adequate buffers and AIS cleaning areas). DNR facilities should be examples for others to follow. Successful access sites and facilities will strike a balance between managing for natural and cultural resources and user needs.



A fishing pier on Schwarzrock Pit Lake, is a partnership project between DNR and the City of Springfield.

Whether designs are for a new site or for improvements at an existing site, natural and cultural resource management is critical to ensuring that facilities are excellent examples of shoreland and stormwater management practices.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are an important and critical component of the water recreation system. Of the 2,889 public water accesses around the state, approximately 57 percent (1,658) are owned by the state of Minnesota and administered by the DNR, and the remaining 43 percent (1,231) are owned or operated by other units of government (counties, cities, townships, and federal agencies). Fishing pier installations are largely the result of partnerships as well.



Implementation of best management practices for aquatic invasive species includes boat clean and drain areas.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS)

The presence or lack of AIS will be considered with all proposed projects. Project proposals on waters infested with AIS may have different considerations and priorities than un-infested waters. Project considerations include implementation of AIS best management practices, preventive measures for the spread of AIS, and whether or not there currently is public or private access to (infested or un-infested) water. Additional consideration should be given to un-infested waters that are located near or proximate to infested waters.

INVESTMENT CRITERIA

Investment criteria will help guide decisions related to acquisition, development, rehabilitation, maintenance and operations. The type of investment, along with its purpose, will determine how best to apply and evaluate the criteria.

Acquisition types (water access, campsite, or rest area), as well as whether the acquisition is for the purpose of a new site, expansion of an existing site (for addressing safety, BMPs, and improved parking), or, the conversion of an existing site from private to public use, needs to be taken into consideration.

Development projects typically include construction of new facilities as designed in order to meet recreational demand, accomplish a goal, provide a service, or to fulfill a need at an existing facility.

Facility rehabilitation and renewal goes beyond the normal repairs and minor improvements that are taken care of through regular or routine maintenance. When facilities are first constructed, they include best management practices and follow appropriate regulations at the time of their construction. However, over the years, those practices and designs have evolved and changed, as has the size of vehicles and boating equipment. Some older facilities may need substantial changes, while others may need only minor updates to improve their functionality and effectiveness.

Maintenance projects are activities that are generally tasks supporting the protection and care of the land, channel, buildings or other facilities. Maintenance is typically on-going, and may be considered routine activities or include minor improvements or repairs.

The criteria should be applied consistently within each category of investment, but each may be applied or weighted differently, based on the investment category. In other words, the criteria may be applied differently for proposed acquisition of a new site compared to how they would be applied to a proposed rehabilitation of an existing site. Criteria should be flexible to adapt to investment categories (acquisition, development, rehabilitation or maintenance), emerging issues, or focus areas (i.e., ADA, stormwater, AIS).

Proposed projects that address all or nearly all criteria should rise to the top of the statewide priorities list. Projects that address some of the criteria should be considered moderate priorities, and those that address few to none of the criteria should be considered low priorities.

- **Safety.** Ensuring that access sites and facilities are safe for all users is the highest priority, especially when it renders existing sites unusable or non-functional. Other safety considerations with high priority include providing multiple access sites on lakes with potential for significant wave action, or to disperse concentrated use.
- **Current level of use or unmet demands of the lake, river, or water trail.** The level of use or unmet demand (high, moderate, or low) is a key

Water recreation investment criteria should be flexible to adapt to investment categories, emerging issues, or focus areas.



Kayaks on the shoreline of Lake Superior.



Liberty Beach, Mille Lacs Lake

indicator of the needs and demands for a particular body of water. In general, high-use and high-demand waters are considered a greater priority over low-use and low-demand waters. Typically, these are the locations that serve the most users and are most visible to the boating public. High-use, high-demand waters may require additional maintenance or improvement resources to keep them safe and operational. Additional access, parking, or other amenities may be needed to better accommodate the level of use. The high-use, high-demand waters may also have a greater need for updated best management practices.

- **Proximity to population centers.** Lakes, water trails, or rivers located in or within 30 miles of a population center are considered a high priority. Population centers are defined as cities or towns with a population of 8,000 or more (based on U.S. Census data). A 30-mile distance from population centers is used to determine proximity for “close to home” experiences (see Appendix 1 – Close to Home Recreational Demand).
- **Unique opportunities.** Some locations are considered high priority because of limited recreational opportunities within a reasonable distance. These may be places with limited water recreation resources and lower populations, where a public water access is significant in providing recreational opportunity.
- **Partnerships.** Nearly half of the public water access sites in the state are administered or operated by a local unit of government. Projects where the partnership leverages additional funding or ongoing maintenance are a higher priority than those without additional resources.
- **Lake or river characteristics.** Access on larger lakes (more than 150 acres) is generally a higher priority than for those that are less than 150 acres. However, certain smaller lakes may still have a need for access to meet local needs. For water trails, accesses should be ideally spaced roughly 10 miles apart, with campsites in between at similar intervals. Rest areas should be interspersed between accesses when campsites are not available. Additional facilities may be appropriate in areas of concentrated use. On Lake Superior, facilities should be spaced about five miles apart for the water trail and roughly 30 miles apart for safe harbors, to allow multiple landing opportunities in the event of severe weather or major wind and waves.

Some of the characteristics to consider when determining project priorities include:

- Water body size (acreage of surface water)
- Water quality suitable for recreational activities
- Depth (adequate for recreation purposes)
- Water level fluctuations
- Availability of diverse recreational opportunities
- Distance from other facilities (water trails/rivers or large lakes)
- Health of fisheries



Campsite on the St. Croix River State Water Trail.



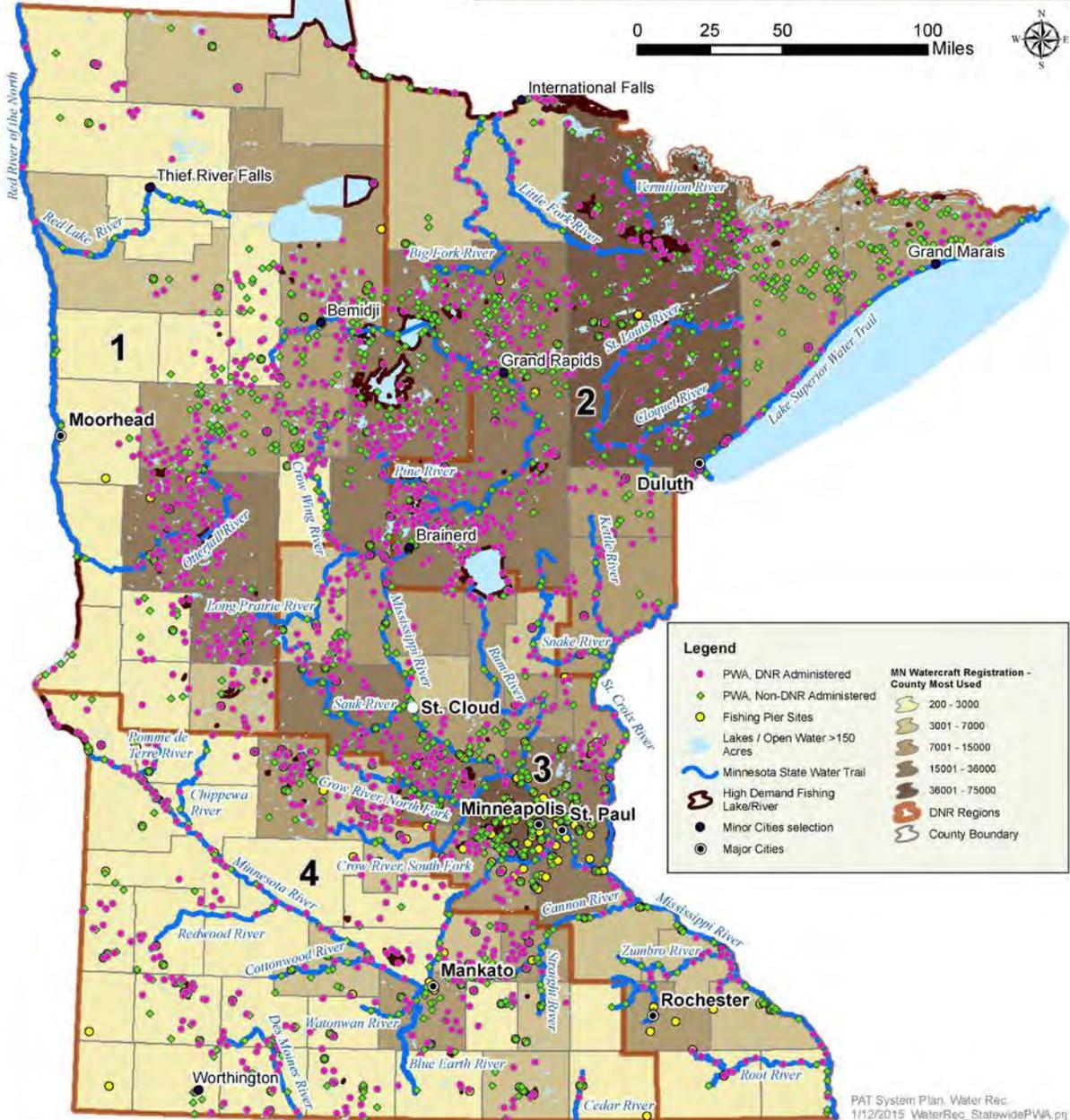
Silver Bay Safe Harbor and Marina, completed in 1999, provides 68 seasonal and 40 transient slips, in cooperation with the City of Silver Bay.

Minnesota Public Water Accesses and Water Trails with Watercraft Registrations, County Most Used

DNR Administered Public Water Access Sites = 1,658
 Non-DNR Administered Public Water Access Sites = 1,231
 Total Public Water Accesses = 2,889 (not including private accesses)

State Water Trails = 4,528 miles on 32 rivers and along the North Shore of Lake Superior

Fishing Piers, Platforms and Shore Fishing Sites = 368



*Minnesota DNR, 2013 Watercraft Registrations, by County Most Used, as reported upon purchase.

DIRECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

General guidance and directions about where to focus future investments are included in this plan, but specific funding sources and budget-related analysis is not included in the scope of the system plan. These should be considered upon implementation of the recommendations.

Water Recreation System Directions

- Focus primarily on taking care of and improving existing sites and facilities. The Division of Parks and Trails is committed to providing high- quality public water access sites and water trails by focusing on taking care of the existing facilities (including maintenance, rehabilitation, renewal, and safe operation).
- Be more strategic in pursuing acquisitions for new sites or expansion of existing sites. The division needs to remain flexible and nimble in order to capitalize on acquisition opportunities that meet the established criteria.
- Move toward a public water access and water trail system that demonstrates best management practices. Acquisition, development, and rehabilitation projects will demonstrate best management practices, including:
 - Stormwater runoff, including shoreland management and erosion control.
 - Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act.
 - Following recreational boating facilities design standards.
 - Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species.
 - Controlling terrestrial invasive species and managing for native species.
 - Collecting and assessing cultural and natural resources to appropriately develop and manage sites.
- Move toward a decision-making process based on objective criteria, including both regional and statewide ranking of proposed projects. The system plan criteria for determining regional and statewide priorities will be used to select projects. Criteria will be flexible to adapt to investment types (acquisition, development, rehabilitation or maintenance), emerging issues, or focus areas (e.g., stormwater, AIS). Differentiation of the system, including a unit-by-unit or site-by-site assessment, was not included in the scope of the system plan; the criteria will be used to rank existing facilities and proposed projects for investment.

Fishing Pier Program Directions

The overall goal of the fishing pier program is to improve fishing opportunities, especially to meet the needs of children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those without a boat (only about 40 percent of those with fishing licenses also have a boat). Fishing piers help people connect with the outdoors by



Water access rehabilitation needs include demonstrating best management practices for stormwater runoff. This site uses a slot drain for water conveyance to an infiltration basin, preventing runoff from directly draining into the lake.



St. Croix River - a State Water Trail and federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

creating opportunities for outdoor recreation. In many cases, fishing pier installations are due to partnerships between the state, local government units, non-profit groups, and community organizations. Cooperative agreements allow the state to buy and install a pier on land owned by county or city while the local unit of government develops the accessible parking and pathway, and handles all of the routine maintenance for 20 years (or the life of the pier).

- Increase investment into the fishing pier program within the Division of Parks and Trails. The program helps address Goal 2 of Conservation that Works, DNR’s Priority Four-year Strategies.
- Increase resources allocated toward managing the fishing pier program.
- Find sustainable and sufficient funding for new pier development and for routine maintenance, renewal, and rehabilitation.

Communication and Coordination Recommendations

- Develop a project tracking process for providing project status updates. The format should allow for staff to find out where any particular project is in the acquisition or development process, from project selection through final development.
- Continue to foster a spirit of cooperation that encourages local partnerships to provide and manage public water recreation facilities. Increase communication and coordination efforts within the DNR and encourage inter-agency and inter-governmental coordination and cooperation on related projects and interests to maximize opportunities and resources for mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Establish a water recreation funding focus group to meet regularly to discuss current issues facing the water recreation system. The group could serve as a forum for those seeking to be more informed and knowledgeable about the water recreation budget or potential projects and opportunities. The group could help the division create a more adaptive water recreation system.

Evaluation Recommendations

- Develop a statewide process for project prioritization and selection that uses the criteria from the system plan. The process should include regional ranking of project priorities based on the system plan criteria. The criterion may be considered (or weighted) differently based on the type of investment. Use consistent language when describing, proposing, or explaining projects.
- Create a systematic approach to prioritizing projects that includes flexibility to adapt to unforeseen issues as projects are in progress. It is important to remain flexible and nimble with respect to projects involving acquisitions. Having additional projects available or at various stages of readiness are important to fill in behind projects that are delayed.



Fishing piers provide opportunities to meet the needs of children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those without a boat.



Parking during fishing opener on the Rainy River.



Fishing opener on the Rainy River.

- Use a consistent process or tool for collecting and maintaining site-specific information or data. This should be completed at the area level where staff is knowledgeable about site-specific needs and local demands.
 - Evaluate facility needs for best management practices, including site conditions, major maintenance or repairs, rehabilitation, or renewal.
 - Evaluate operational efficiencies already in place and identify where additional opportunities may be available.
 - Continue to consider and evaluate potential projects in high-use, high-demand areas, or areas where current opportunities for water recreation are lacking.

NEXT STEPS/IMPLEMENTATION

DNR staff and stakeholders have had opportunities to become engaged in developing and reviewing the System Plan. As a next step, the discussions will need to evolve and address how the division of Parks and Trails is going to implement this plan. These discussions will occur at various levels of the organization (division, region, district, area and unit), and step the plan down to a greater level of detail. The discussions will also focus on the division's entire integrated system that includes state parks, recreation areas and waysides; state trails; forest recreation areas; and water recreation.

For example, the division leadership should use this plan to help guide priorities and FY16-17 biennial budget development. Regions, districts, and areas should use the plan to consider integrated system priorities for acquisition and development; operations and maintenance; rehabilitation, etc. Units should use the plan to help prioritize requests, and further describe and advance their own niche in the system.

In sum, the plan should serve as a lens through which decisions are made in multiple levels of the organization. For example:

- Division priorities and budget development
- Acquisition and development; operations and maintenance; rehabilitation
- Staffing commitments
- Partnerships
- Innovations

FURTHER PLAN REFINEMENT

Some areas of the plan need further consideration and refinement. For example, the Parks and Trails Division will need to review feedback about existing units and potentially recommend changes in classifications that better fit the function of the unit (state recreation area to state park for example). In addition, waysides were not addressed in the System Plan. These units will need to be analyzed and integrated into the System Plan. It will also be important to further consider how the System Plan informs other planning processes, such as unit plans and the Phase II forest trail designation process.

SYSTEM-WIDE ASSESSMENTS FOR QUALITY EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The division receives multiple requests for development of opportunities across the system. Rather than address these requests and opportunities unit by unit, a system analysis needs to be done to determine the best location(s) to develop quality opportunities of statewide significance. An analysis of where to provide additional mountain biking opportunities and horseback

riding opportunities would be current issues to address first. Other innovations such as providing unique or new opportunities within the system may include consideration of winter biking or off-leash dog areas.

COMMUNICATIONS

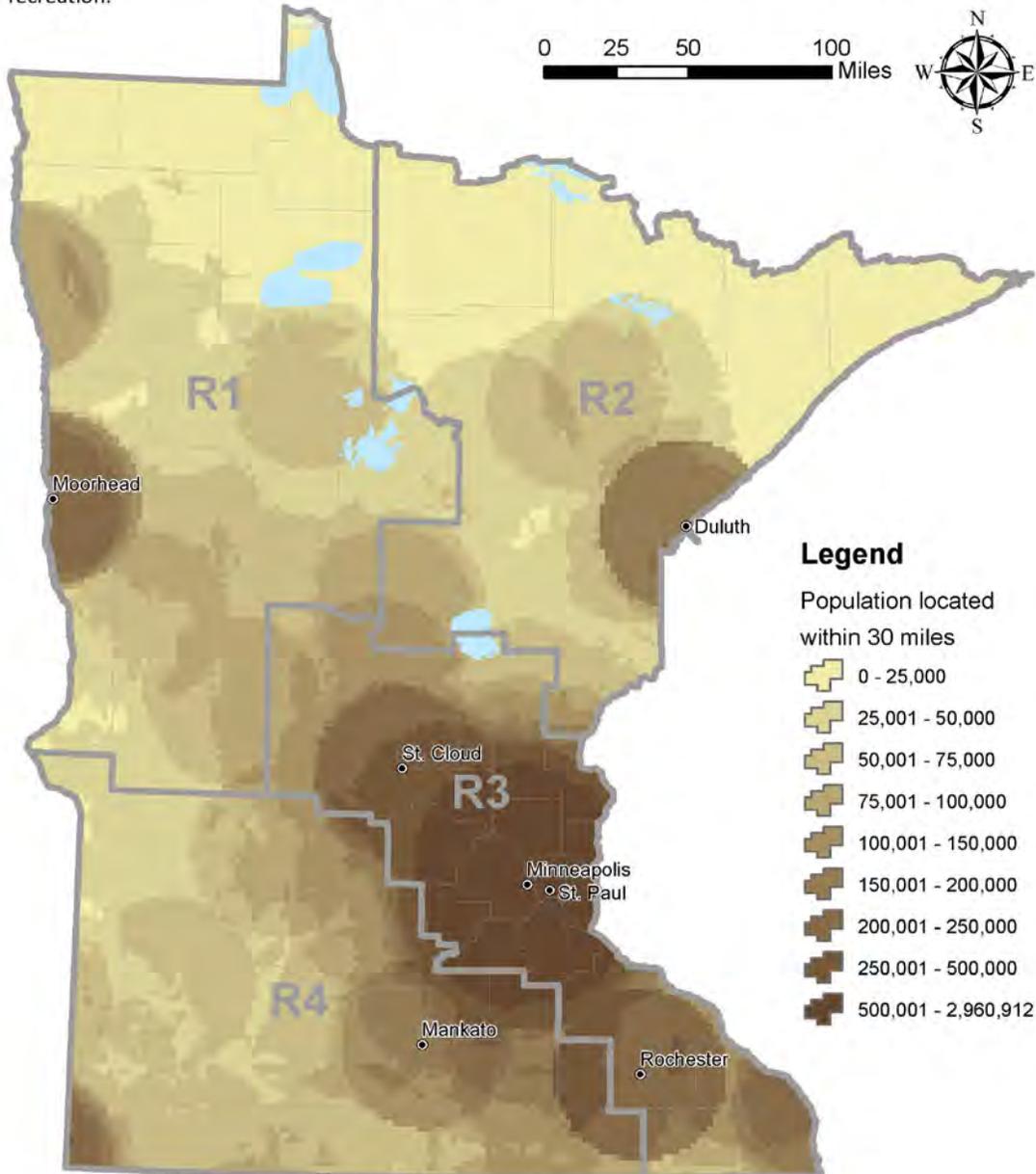
Communication tools are needed to equip managers to discuss the System Plan with staff and the public. One venue that will be utilized are region and district meetings that are held several times a year throughout the state. In addition, outreach strategies for communicating with stakeholders will be developed. Parks and Trails division staff will continue to develop communication approaches for the System Plan.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Close to Home Recreation Demand

Minnesota's outdoor recreation system provides important close to home opportunities in addition to serving tourist users. Recent park and trail studies indicate that a greater proportion of users are day users from home or on a trip away from home. This map depicts the amount of people who live within 30 miles of any given location in Minnesota. Darker shaded areas represent locations near more highly populated regions. Facilities in these areas have a greater opportunity to serve day users seeking close to home recreation.



Appendix 2

Water Recreation Terminology – Key Words and Definitions

This list was utilized by the PAT System Plan Water Recreation Workgroup during the development of criteria, directions and recommendations.

Key Word	Definition
Acquisition	Obtaining interest in land through fee title, lease or easement. Acquisitions may be for new sites, for expansion (additional land) of existing sites, or for acquiring an existing private access to convert it for public use.
Boat Launch <i>(AKA: Boat Ramp; Launch Ramp or Lane)</i>	A portion of a public water access designed to accommodate launching and retrieving of a watercraft from a trailer (SOBA) [also accommodates non-motorized watercraft/carry-in]
Boater Wayside <i>AKA: Rest Area</i>	An identified rest area on land that is accessible by boat or watercraft, and authorized as an outdoor recreation unit in ORA. Established for public use by boaters, accessible by person traveling by boat, canoe, or kayak (or other watercraft). Facilities for sanitation, picnicking, overnight mooring, camping, fishing, and swimming may also be provided (not required). Master plans are not required.
Carry-in Access	A public water access designed or provided for launching small boats (canoes and kayaks) that are usually transported on top of or in a vehicle. (SOBA)
Channel Maintenance	Lake and River – work needed above or below the ordinary high water mark to allow for safe public navigation of watercraft in waterway. Typically, channel maintenance is removal of debris that is impacting navigation in the water.
Commercial Vessel	Watercraft used for the transportation of passengers or property for monetary profit. <i>(The operator is required to have a USCG license or a Minnesota Boat Master License from the Dept. of Labor and Industry depending on the number of passengers and; for federally designated waters.)</i>
Development	Construction of a new facility as designed in order to meet recreational demand, accomplish a goal, provide a service or fulfill a need.
Dock	A structure extending from shore land over water, on or near the boat ramp for the purpose of expediting launching and retrieval of watercraft. Docks may be floating, fixed, or moveable and do not have railings which would impede ingress and egress of people and equipment. Marine docks are used to safely moor watercraft.
Dredging	Type of work performed to remove sediment or bottom debris (or obstacles) collected in a waterway or channel. <i>("Dredging" means excavating harbor sediment or bottom materials, including mobilizing or operating equipment for excavating and transporting dredged material and placing dredged material in a disposal facility. (Minnesota Statutes (MS) 457A.01, subd. 5))</i>
Expansion	To increase in size, extent or scope. To add or increase the area of an existing site or facility.
Facility	Something designed, built, installed, etc., to provide an easier performance of an action and accomplish a goal (i.e. boat launch, dock, campsite, etc.)

Key Word	Definition
Fishing Pier	A facility extending from shore land over water primarily for purposes of fishing. Fishing piers may be a floating or permanent (fixed) structure intended for fishing (may include piers, breakwaters, and usually has railings). (SOBA)
Maintenance	Maintenance activities are defined generally as those tasks supporting the protection and care of the land, channel, buildings and other facilities. This includes: resource management; facility and infrastructure maintenance; and other tasks related to the care of the equipment; utilities; and natural and cultural resources of these units. Maintenance runs the spectrum from custodial maintenance (e.g. regular cleaning, trash removal, upkeep) to capital maintenance (e.g. boat ramp repair and replacement, parking lot grading or shaping)
Motorboat(ing)	Watercraft propelled in any manner by machinery, including temporarily detachable motors. (MS 86B.005)
Operations	Operations activities are defined generally as those tasks supporting the public's experiences and enjoyment of parks and trails. This includes visitor services; administrative tasks related to these visitor services including customer services, communications, reservations, marketing; and interpretive services.
Paddle Sports/Paddling	Activities related to propelling watercraft through the use of a paddle or paddles (i.e. canoe, kayak, inflatable raft, row boat, stand-up paddleboard, or other non-motorized floating watercraft).
Portage	A passageway two rods in width extending from one public or navigable water to another, or from public, navigable water to a public highway. (MS 160.02, subd. 23) However, many portages are narrow trails.
Public Access or Public Water Access (PWA), or "Water Access"	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) "Public access" means an access that is publicly owned and accessible to the public without charge. (MS 97A.015, subd. 40) 2) Access of any kind to public waters. Public Land connected to public waters, which gives the public riparian rights and could be developed for specific purposes, such as launching a boat, or left natural and undeveloped. <p>Water access sites are lumped together as "public access to water." (MS 86A.05)</p>
Public Waters	"Public waters" means waters defined in MS 103G.005, subdivision 15 .
Recreational Boating	The practice of rowing, sailing, cruising (motor-boating), or paddling as a form of recreation, travel and enjoyment.
Regional Population Center	For purposes of this system plan, a city or town with a population of 8,000 or more. (Based on U.S. Census data.)
Rehabilitation	To bring back a site or facility to a former, original, or normal condition (or functional operation) within its existing footprint; to restore to good condition. The facility is not reconfigured to a new design, but its life has been substantially extended and meets current codes and best management practices.
Redevelopment or Renewal	To improve an existing facility to provide safe and functional operation. This may include a new design or construction to improve functionality and purpose along with meeting current codes and best management practices.
Riparian Rights	Where the public is a riparian landowner, such as a public road abutting the water or at a public access, the public has riparian rights. Riparian rights include the right to wharf out to a navigable depth; to take water for domestic and agricultural purposes; to take ice; to fish, boat, hunt, swim; to such other uses as water bodies are normally put. The riparian owner has the right to make use of the lake over its entire surface.

Key Word	Definition
Tourism/Tourist Destination	City, town or specific area or location that accrues significant revenues from visitors/travelers.
Water Recreation	Used by MNDNR within the Division of Parks and Trails to describe programs based on or near the water, including water trails, public water accesses, fishing piers, wild and scenic rivers, and adopt-a-river. This definition is not based on the use of the water recreation account.
Water Recreation Account	A financial account established to fund public water access, boating facilities, small craft harbors, and boat and water safety.
Water Trail	Water Trails are mapped and managed recreational routes on waterways that have a series of public access points, campsites and rest areas for canoeists, kayakers and other boaters. Minnesota’s State Water Trails system is legislatively authorized in MS 85.32 .
Winter Access	A means of entering or approaching public waters during the winter, or when ice has formed. (i.e. point of entry onto the water-body/ice for ice fishing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, or other forms of recreation during the winter. May include vehicle access.)