

Improving Accessibility to State Parks, Recreation Areas, and Wildlife Management Areas

AT A GLANCE

2022 Request Amount:	\$20,000
Priority Ranking:	5
Project Summary:	\$20 million to improve accessibility at William O'Brien and Fort Snelling state parks and at two high-visitation wildlife management areas. Project components include renovations of bathrooms, showers, campsites, trails, and day-use facilities and development of new accessible amenities to serve visitors with a variety of physical abilities.

Project Description

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) requests \$20 million to more comprehensively improve the accessibility of state-managed lands and facilities to Minnesotans of all abilities, thereby advancing the strategic priorities of connecting people to the outdoors and expanding diversity, equity and inclusion. The funding will enable the DNR to complete accessibility improvements to high-use facilities at William O'Brien State Park that were partially funded in 2020, and to apply the lessons learned from that project to Fort Snelling State Park and two high-visitation wildlife management areas (WMAs), Carlos Avery and Whitewater. When complete, the project will include accessibility renovations of bathrooms, parking areas, showers, campsites, trails and a variety of day-use and interpretive facilities, as well as new amenities to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse user base with a variety of physical abilities and skills.

At William O'Brien State Park, the DNR will complete the work partially funded with 2020 bonding to enhance accessibility of the following facilities and amenities:

- Interpretive center
- Savanna campground: shower building, campsites, vault toilets, camper cabins
- Riverside group camp: campsites, vault toilets
- Trails and trail amenities
- Picnic shelters
- Athletic field
- Wayfinding and signage
- Key parking and access routes throughout the park

At Fort Snelling State Park, the DNR will enhance accessibility of the following:

- Ranger station: restrooms, service counter, exterior plaza, parking and self-registration station

- Beach and day use area: parking, access routes, building access, beach and picnic area
- Picnic Island: causeway, parking, public water access, perimeter trail, youth camp, picnic areas and shelters, restroom buildings
- Visitor Center: minor interior improvements
- Confluence (“Pike”) Island: trail from the Visitor Center to the Mississippi River
- Other trails: repair degraded areas that are limiting accessibility

At the Carlos Avery and Whitewater WMAs, the DNR will conduct a comprehensive, site-specific assessment of accessibility needs and opportunities at each WMA and complete the accessibility improvements identified to have the greatest benefit. Projects are expected to include improved accessibility of parking lots, gated trails, and hunting blinds.

Project Rationale

Many DNR buildings and facilities are more than 50 years old and were built before the advent of state and federal accessibility standards. All recent renovations and construction projects meet these standards. However, such projects are currently only implemented as building and facility components are in need of major repairs. As a result, most parks and recreation areas remain only partially accessible.

The importance of increased accessibility extends beyond state parks and recreation areas to other DNR-managed outdoor recreation lands and facilities. The DNR also has been partnering with the Minnesota Council on Disability and interested stakeholders to identify opportunities to enhance accessibility at WMAs. As was done for William O’Brien State Park, the first step is to identify the needs and opportunities that exist to improve the comprehensive accessibility of these locations.

Funding this proposal will create more comprehensive accessibility at specific state parks and WMAs. This will demonstrate what more comprehensive accessibility looks like, serve as a model for efforts on other state lands, and, most importantly, provide a much more accessible experience so that all Minnesotans can enjoy these public lands and facilities in their entirety.

Project Timeline

The project will be completed within the given time frame.

Other Considerations

The DNR is responsible for providing a wide range of recreational opportunities and these opportunities need to be available to everyone. Enhanced accessibility opens outdoor experiences to people with disabilities and improves access and experience for people of all abilities.

Impact on Agency Operating Budgets

This will have a minimal impact on operating budgets.

Description of Previous Appropriations

L2020, (5th SS), Ch. 3 - Bond \$3,000,000

L2018, Ch. 214, Bond, \$500,000