

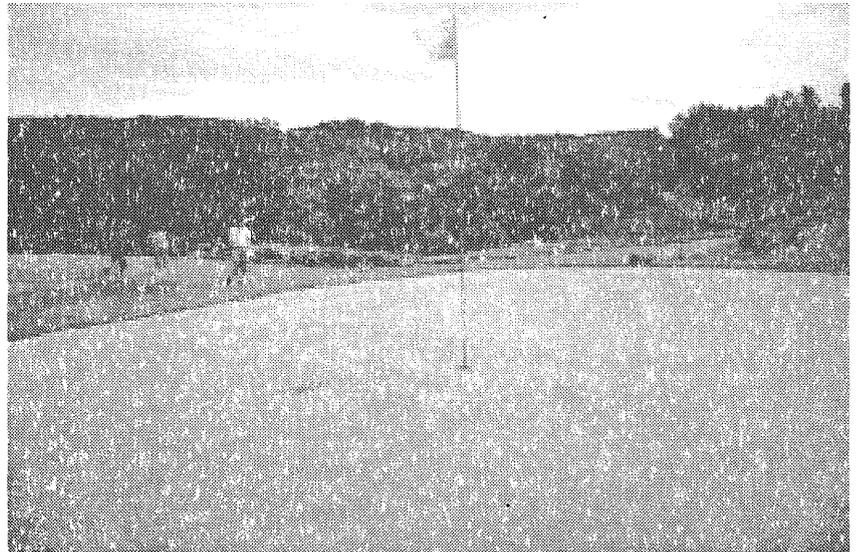
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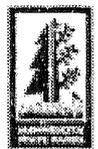


Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan

Fort Ridgely Golf Course

September 13, 2000

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

500 Lafayette Road

St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4037

Department of Natural Resources Approval of Management Plan Amendment for Fort Ridgely State Park

Minnesota Statutes 860A.09 requires that a master plan be prepared for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks and state recreation areas. Laws of Minnesota for 1911 established Fort Ridgely State Park.

Over the past year and a half, the DNR has worked in partnership with local citizens to develop a management plan amendment for this park. The plan amendment was approved through the DNR's C-TECH/Senior Managers' review process.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Allen Garber", is written over a horizontal line.

Allen Garber, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

A handwritten date "9/14/00" is written over a horizontal line.

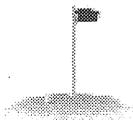
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This management plan amendment was prepared by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, in cooperation with the local community and various park stakeholders.

Special thanks to the many citizens, park users, and area residents that provided input and attended planning open houses during this amendment process. Thanks also to the many Department of Natural Resources staff that contributed to this effort, including:

Patricia Arndt	Planning and MIS Manager
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This plan amendment is also available at the DNR website, at www.dnr.state.mn.us from the State Park Planning page.



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Introduction

Fort Ridgely State Park includes approximately 584 acres within its statutory boundary. Included in this area is a 40-acre, par 35, nine-hole golf course. The golf course was originally opened for play in 1927 and has remained an important component of the park's recreational opportunities since that time. Originally constructed with sand greens, the course was redesigned in 1988 with artificial greens. The artificial greens were expected to have a 10-15 year life span. Normal wear due to use, hardening surfaces on the greens and exposure to weather have deteriorated the current greens such that the course is becoming unplayable.

This amendment replaces the existing language in the 1983 Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan addressing management of the park's golf course. The specific language being deleted from the management plan and the specific replacement language are presented below. A growing demand in the Fort Ridgely area for public golfing opportunities that cater to families, small groups, beginning golfers and cartless golfing combined with the need to address the condition of the existing greens at the Fort Ridgely golf course led to this plan amendment. (Golf course use at the park has risen from 4,400 golfers in 1988 to over 6,300 golfers in 1998). The Fort Ridgely course is the only golf course in the area that focuses on providing these opportunities. Fort Ridgely Golf Course's artificial greens are deteriorating and in need of replacement if playable conditions are to be maintained on the course. In addition, the current course has irrigation, safety and design issues that need to be addressed if golfing opportunities are going to continue to exist within the park. Given current industry standards and golfer expectations regarding golf courses, changes or improvements in the Fort Ridgely State Park course are needed if the course is going to continue to provide opportunities for a quality experience. This course will serve as a model for ecologically sensitive and sustainable golf course design and management and provide opportunity for interpretation and management of adjacent natural and cultural resources.

In 1983, MNDNR policy indicated that facilities such as tennis courts, golf courses, ski and sliding lifts, and organized play fields should not be provided in recreational state parks. The 1983 Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan recommended that the park be designated a recreational state park. The Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Act has subsequently been amended to eliminate the recreational state park designation. The Division of Parks and Recreation recognizes that golfing is a legitimate recreational use at Fort Ridgely State Park, where golfing has traditionally been offered. The Division will use environmentally sensitive and sustainable management practices on the golf course. This amendment incorporates the division's policy change into the Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan and following a public review process, recommends continued operation of the golf course within the park, following a redesign that leads to sustainable maintenance and use of the course.

Plan Amendment Process

The process used to generate this amendment parallels that described in state park management plans written since the early 1990s. The proposed golf course rehabilitation was reviewed by the Division of Parks and Recreation's Operations and Development Managers and MNDNR regional staff in 1997. An independent consultant (Williams, Gill and Associates) with expertise in golf course design and management presented recommendations for redesign of the Fort Ridgely State Park Golf Course in June, 1997. MNDNR Division of Parks and Recreation and Bureau of Engineering staff have been reviewing design alternatives since that date.

Following these introductory stages, the steps below were followed:

- Division of Parks and Recreation Staff visited the site and reviewed the plan amendment process that would be followed for this project;
- Two public meetings were held in Fairfax and New Ulm on May 12 and 13, 1999, respectively, to discuss the possibility of golf course redesign. Notice of the meetings was distributed to approximately 150 local news organizations, residents, business owners, school districts, golf course operators and landowners. Approximately 40 people attended one of the two public meetings;
- Division of Parks and Recreation staff prepared the amendment language; and
- The amendment was approved with revisions by Departmental review (C-Tech) on September 7, 1999, and by Division of Parks & Recreation Managers in April, 2000.

Language Deleted from the 1983 Management Plan

The following language in the 1983 Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan is to be deleted in its entirety.

I. *Golf (pp. 19-20):*

The Fort Ridgely golf course was built in the late 1920s. It is the only publicly owned golf course in the study area. Two private courses are located within 12 miles (19 km) of the park. All are open to non-members. Additional courses are located in New Ulm, one near Flandrau State Park. There is not a shortage of golf facilities in the study area.

Table 8.

<u>Type of facility</u>	<u>Number of courses</u>	<u>Number of holes</u>
State Park	1	9
Private	<u>7</u>	<u>72</u>
Total	8	81

II. *Under Day Use (pp. 25-26):*

The golf facilities attract steady use from May through September. Golfers using the Fort Ridgely course are generally beginners or family groups. Prior to 1981, many senior citizen(s) played the course. Before July 1981, there was no charge to senior citizens for use of the golf course on weekdays. They were also not required to purchase a vehicle permit. After July 1981, senior citizens were required to pay golf fees and purchase a permit for \$5.00. As a result, use by senior citizens dropped off. The following chart lists the total number of golfers from 1977-1981 and what percentage of total park day visitation they comprised.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Golfer Total</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Day Visitation</u>
1981	3,284	7.5
1980	2,816	6.7
1979	4,153	6.7
1978	4,633	7.7
1977	3,146	6.2

An inventory of golf registration records was made for the years 1977 and 1980 to determine where the golfers were coming from. The majority of golfers came from within 25 miles of the park. Golfers from New Ulm, Fairfax, Gibbon, Olivia, Morgan, Sleepy Eye, Redwood Falls, and Clements accounted for 59 percent of the total number of golfers in 1977, and 69 percent in 1980. There were also a small percentage of golfers from Marshall and the Twin Cities. The park manager estimates that approximately one third of the campers golf.

III. Golf Course (p. 102):

A nine hole par 34 golf course with sand greens is located in the park. The chalet is used to house golf registration, rental of equipment, and vending machines.

IV. Golf Course (pp. 118-121):

Objectives:

- 1) *To continue operations of the golf course in the short run*
- 2) *To discontinue operations of the golf course in the long run.*

Background

The park includes an approximately 60 acre, 9 hole, par 34 golf course with sand greens. The course was constructed in the late 1920s and is owned and operated by the state. In the late 1960s, a local golf club constructed a course 2 miles north of the park. In addition to this course, two other private golf courses are located within 20 miles of the park. It is the policy of the state "to coordinate park development with nearby private enterprises for mutual benefit of the public, the department, and the private sector."

The Fort Ridgely course is used from April to November. Golfers account for 6 to 9 percent of the park's annual day use. Use of the course requires that all vehicles entering the park have proper park permits. A separate fee is charged for golfing. The golf fees are continually being modified. The fees charged in 1982 were as follows: 1982 fee chart with proposed 1983 fees

Current DNR policy for recreational state parks specifically states:

“Facilities such as tennis courts, golf courses, ski and sliding lifts, and organized play fields will not be provided.”

There are currently two exceptions to this policy. Fort Snelling and Fort Ridgely State Parks both contain state owned golf courses within their statutory boundaries.

In keeping with the recreational goals of the state park system, use of park lands should be directed toward providing natural resource based recreation and education opportunities which will provide service for and attract people from throughout the state.

Discussion

The future of the golf course in the park was carefully analyzed during the planning process. There was debate as to whether or not it should remain in Fort Ridgely. The arguments for and against are summarized below.

There are several arguments for maintaining the golf course in the park. The course is already in existence and receives good use. Golfers account for approximately 6 to 9 percent of the total day users. The golf course is a revenue producing facility in the park and appears to be operating in the black. This revenue produced by the golf course is used for park maintenance and operation and accounts for 30 percent of the total park revenue. At the present time, it appears the golf course at Fort Ridgely is not a direct competition with the private courses in the areas as it tends to serve a different clientele. The primary acreage currently occupied by the golf course is not needed for the recreation developments outlined in the plan.

The operation of golf courses is inconsistent with the goals and policy of state parks. The land base used for the golf course may be better used in the future for more resource related recreational activities such as camping and historic interpretation.

Operation of the golf course will continue as long as it does not interfere with the park's other primary resources and its use can justify operation, however, its operation will be continually reevaluated based on new data regarding its use and cost of operations and maintenance in light of overall use of the entire [park] and the historic site.

At such time that the golf course's land base is needed for other recreational activities, more in keeping with the goals of state parks, the golf course should be eliminated. The following actions apply to operating the golf course in the short run.

Action #1. Develop a cost accounting system for the golf course.

Initial analysis reveals the golf course is breaking even in terms of the revenue and expenditures, however, a more detailed financial analysis is needed. This analysis will help the DNR, Division of Parks and Recreation determine whether park staff should continue to operate the golf course or whether a private concessionaire should be sought to operate it. It will provide information for any decisions that are made in the future.

Action #2. Modify the numbering and alignment of the fairways when the new contact station/ golf registration building is constructed.

Hole #8 should be made into #1 and #1 should be #2 and so on. This will facilitate circulation around the course and coordinate registration and parking activities at the proposed contact station. (For additional discussion see Administrative Facilities, Action #1, p. 121 and Parking and Roads, Action #1, p. 117.

Action #3. Modify the golf course as required to decrease its impact on the historic site, accommodate the group picnic area at the chalet and accommodate any other proposed recreational development in the park.

Some redesign and relocation of holes is necessary. A variety of options should be reviewed. The land base is most likely suited for a par three course. A professional design consultant should be contacted to establish criteria for safety and layout.

Golfing should be accommodated in the park until this recreational land base is needed for opportunities more in keeping with state park goals.

Language to be Added to p. 118 of the 1983 Management Plan

Golf Course

Goals:

- 1) To continue to provide safe and reasonably priced public golfing opportunities that cater to a variety of golfers, including families and golfers who appreciate a more natural setting than found on traditional golf courses.
- 2) To redesign and redevelop the golf course using the most appropriate and environmentally sensitive and sustainable practices available for use on natural turf golf courses, modeling alternatives to traditional course design and management

- 3) To protect the natural and cultural resources surrounding the golf course and to enhance visitor appreciation of those resources.

To accomplish these objectives, redesign of the course should involve appropriate resource management activities such as prairie, wildflower and oak savanna preservation and/or restoration and non-native plant species removal adjacent to tees, fairways and greens. In addition, interpretive signs should be placed near restoration projects, tees and fairways to enhance understanding of the park's natural and cultural resources. Interpretive material should also communicate the commitment to managing the golf course as an environmentally sustainable model, with sensitivity toward the park's natural and cultural resource. Any course redesign should also incorporate the most environmentally sound golf course management practices available.

Background

The park includes an approximately 40 acre, 9 hole, par 35 golf course with artificial greens. The course was originally constructed with sand greens in the late 1920s and is owned and operated by the state. The course was opened for public use in 1927. The greens were rehabilitated and changed to artificial surface during the late 1980s. Other golfing opportunities are available in the area at private golf courses. These private courses cater to more experienced golfers than those that traditionally play the Fort Ridgely course. In 1999, there were four other golf courses within 30 miles of Fort Ridgely State Park.

The Fort Ridgely course is used from April to November. Golfers account for 6 to 9 percent of the park's annual day use. Use of the course requires that all vehicles entering the park have proper park vehicle permits. A separate fee is charged for golfing. The golf fees are continually being modified. The golfing fees collected offset the cost of operating the course.

Discussion

The future of the golf course in the park was analyzed during the amendment process. There are arguments for and against continued operation of the Fort Ridgely golf course. These arguments are summarized below.

There are several arguments for maintaining the golf course within the park. The course is already in existence, has a long history within the park (in excess of 50 years), and receives good use. The golf course is one of the attractions that draw people to the park. The course serves an important local need for beginner and family oriented golfing opportunities. At the present time, the golf course is not in direct competition with other locally operated courses because it serves a different clientele. The golf course is essentially self-sufficient except for capital improvement costs. Improved turf management practices and design elements that make it possible to operate a more sustainable golf course could be applied to the Fort Ridgely course to protect the park's natural and cultural environment and model environmentally sustainable golf course design to course users.

A primary argument against continued operation of the golf course is that Fort Ridgely State Park is a rich cultural and historical resource that represents a major battle site for the 1862 Dakota Conflict in southwestern Minnesota. As such, remnants of historic Fort Ridgely's main complex and a monument honoring the settlers and soldiers killed during the 1862 conflict are preserved within the park. The valleys and ravines that surround the historical fort contain culturally significant evidence of Dakota Indian use of the Minnesota River Valley and historically significant battle sites from the 1862 conflict. The Fort's main complex is administrated by the Minnesota Historical Society, and the majority of the park, including the golf course itself, is within a designated National Register Historic District. (see figure 1). Location of the golf course to completely avoid these cultural and historical resources is difficult given the current land base within the park.

In addition, golf course management is less environmentally sensitive than other potential uses for the land. Although efforts are being made to develop sustainable management practices, effective golf course management still requires consumption of large amounts of water, use of herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals, maintaining large cleared and well mowed areas and manicuring of greens and fairways.

Overall, the arguments in support of continued operation of the golf course in this particular park outweigh the arguments against the continued operation. The following actions are recommended to redesign the course as an environmentally sustainable model, and to maintain the course in a playable condition.

Recommendation #1 Replace the existing artificial greens with natural greens.

The existing greens were installed in 1988 with a 10-15 year life expectancy. Consistent with the original expectations, they have continuously deteriorated and are nearly in an unplayable condition. The greens are small, much of the artificial turf has been worn away, the subsurface has become increasingly hardened and the greens have become uneven. Collectively, these conditions make the greens overly fast, inconsistent and very difficult to play. Failure to address these design issues will lead to totally unacceptable play in the near future.

Recommendation #2 Install a new irrigation system for the greens and fairways.

Currently, water is pumped from three low capacity groundwater wells to irrigate the course. Unfortunately, water flow from the wells is not sufficient to adequately irrigate the course. Developing an automated irrigation system should be considered. This system might possibly utilize water from the Minnesota River and/or irrigation ponds to irrigate the course. The processes to secure the appropriate permits for implementation of this action will be followed prior to carrying out the proposed rehabilitation.

Recommendation #3. Redesign the course alignment such that safety issues are addressed and that as much of the course as possible is moved away from the 22 acre historical fort site. At the same time, this would allow for corrections of some fairway and green placements that are not up to currently accepted golf course standards.

The current course alignment has golfers teeing off from some holes in the direction of people putting on other greens creating potential safety hazards. Stray balls hit into the park's parking lots are also not uncommon. The slopes between tees and greens for some of the holes also make the course difficult for some people to walk. Redesign should realign tees and greens such that the course does not present a hazard to other golfers, parking lots and park visitors.

Portions of three of the current golf holes are located within the boundaries of the 22 acre historical site. Efforts should be made in the redesign to reduce the direct impact that the golf course has on the historic site by relocating as much of the golf course as possible away from the site. Design of the new course should be coordinated carefully with the Minnesota Historical Society staff responsible for management of the historic site and the park's other cultural and historical resources.

Recommendation #4 Protect the aesthetic quality of Fort Ridgely State Park in selection of a golf course redesign.

Currently, the park provides scenic vistas of prairie and river valleys that are unusual in southwestern Minnesota. These vistas are available to park visitors from locations on the golf course. Such opportunities should be preserved and enhanced following course redesign.

Recommendation #5 Incorporate appropriate resource management and interpretive activities into golf course design and construction.

The Fort Ridgely State Park golf course is also unique because it is located within a state park. As such, it is important that the golf course be designed and managed in such a way that the park's natural and cultural resources are protected. Special care should be taken in any course redesign to incorporate resource management activities such as native prairie, wildflower and oak savanna preservation and restoration into design of tees, fairways and greens. Design should involve removal of non-native species that are currently found near or on the course as part of any redevelopment project, and reducing or eliminating negative effects on water quality due to chemical applications.

Cultural resource surveys shall be conducted as part of any redesign and redevelopment project. Final golf course design and construction shall avoid or properly protect culturally and historically sensitive areas. Architects, engineers and construction contractors shall work closely with the Division of Parks and Recreation and the Minnesota Historical Society to ensure that proper care and protection of the park's cultural and historical resources is given during construction.

Post-construction management activities shall ensure continued protection of the park's cultural and historical resources.

A major component of the state park mission is to provide environmental educational opportunities through the state park interpretive program. Redesign of the golf course should also involve an interpretive component that communicates why the course is being redeveloped, explains the resource management efforts conducted in conjunction with the redevelopment and underscores the care given to use of the most environmentally sensitive and sustainable construction and management techniques possible on the site.

Figure 1. Fort Ridgely Historic District and Fort Ridgely State Park CCC/Rustic Style Historic District

