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FORT SNELLING STATE PARK

October 20, 1989



SB
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MINNESOTA STATE PARK SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AN OVERVIEW OF FORT SNELLING STATE PARK

Fort Snelling is located in the heart of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. It reaches into three counties at the junction of the historic Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. The park, over 3,300 acres in size is five miles from downtown St. Paul and seven miles from downtown Minneapolis.

Ten different ecological communities may be found in the park with floodplain marshes being dominant. Even though the park is subject to a variety of external influences such as overhead commercial air traffic, highways, freeways, river barge traffic and high voltage power lines, the park still remains as an oasis of natural ecological communities and provides habitat for over 220 species of wildlife, and includes examples of one of Minnesotas' rarest plant communities, the calcium rich fens. Snelling Lake provides an opportunity for recreational swimming, picnicking is provided on Picnic Island and restored historic Fort Snelling gives visitors the opportunity to experience a part of Minnesota's past.

History abounds in and around the park. In 1805 Zebulon Pike landed on what came to be known as Pike Island and negotiated the first treaty between the United States and the Dakota people. In 1820 the federal government built an outpost in the Indian lands of Minnesota territory. From this location federal troops were sent to quell the U.S. - Dakota conflict in western Minnesota and several hundred Dakota people were interned in the park during the winter of 1862-63. It was from the river landing in the park that the Dakota were loaded on steamboats and forcibly removed from Minnesota. The significance of these and many other historic sites led to include the confluence area of the park, along with the fort, as a national historic landmark.

By 1885 the Fort fell into disrepair and was considered for demolition. Over the years Fort Snelling served as a training and induction-discharge center for troops in the Civil and Spanish/American wars and World War I and II. In 1946, the war department retired Fort Snelling as a military installation.

In 1960 the U.S. Veterans administration declared 320 acres of the old fort surplus property. Thus, the establishment of Fort Snelling State Park in the fall of 1961. State legislators in 1962 and 1963 appropriated sufficient monies to buy and develop surrounding property to the current 3,300 acres. The park officially opened for public use in 1965.

With a level of attendance second only to Itasca in the state park system, not including the large number of historic fort visitors, Fort Snelling State Park provides a significant day-use recreational and historical experience to the people of Minnesota and their guests.

LEGEND

TRAILS

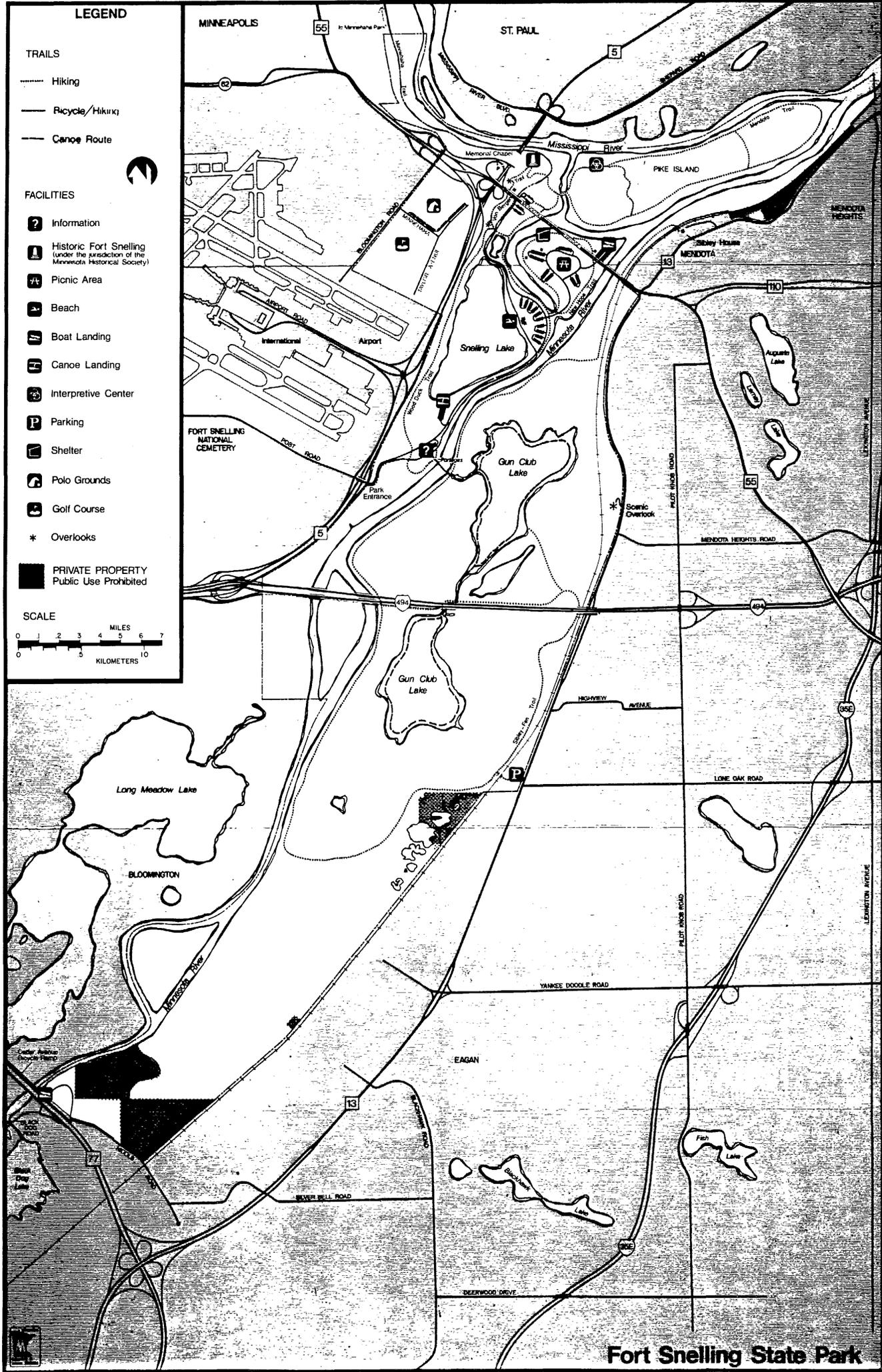
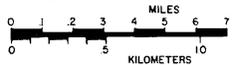
- Hiking
- Bicycle/Hiking
- Canoe Route

FACILITIES

- Information
- Historic Fort Snelling (under the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Historical Society)
- Picnic Area
- Beach
- Boat Landing
- Canoe Landing
- Interpretive Center
- Parking
- Shelter
- Polo Grounds
- Golf Course
- Overlooks

PRIVATE PROPERTY
Public Use Prohibited

SCALE



Fort Snelling State Park

EXISTING FACILITIES

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

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 3,300
Acres of state land - 3,050

Miles of Trails
Hiking - 18
Bicycle - 5
Cross Country Ski - 18

Playgrounds - 2
Beaches - 1
Canoe Rental - 6

Miles of Road
Asphalt - 5
Gravel - 1

Open and Enclosed picnic Shelters
Number of Picnic Tables - 200
Water Accesses - 4
Fishing Piers - 1

Number of Buildings
Over 100 sq.ft. - 14
Under 100 sq.ft. - 7

Miles of Posted Boundary - 19

Visitor Center

Park Utilities
Number of Sewage Lift Stations - 3
Number of Septic Tanks - 3
Number of Wells - 2
Number of Individual
Water Distribution Systems - 4
Miles of State Owned Power Line - 2.3

PROBLEMS FACING FORT SNELLING STATE PARK

Fort Snelling has particular significance because of its location in a diverse metropolitan area, potentially providing a state park experience to large numbers of people from a wide variety of economic and social backgrounds, many of whom have limited access to more distant state parks. This park can therefore help these visitors learn about natural systems if adequate interpretive facilities are provided.

Currently, the park interpretive facilities are inaccessible to the majority of park visitors. A new interpretive facility is needed to replace an old converted residence on Pike Island. Here, less than 5% of park visitors have access to displays and naturalist programs. The Pike Island center is often cut off from the rest of the park because of flooding. A facility in a new location would orient many more visitors to the natural resources and recreational opportunities of the park as well as provide a needed link to the historic fort.

Natural and cultural resource protection in urban parks such as Fort Snelling present unique problems to resource managers. Due to many years of human use, the resources have been disturbed and restoration efforts are more complex. Adjacent suburban development already has influenced many of the natural ecological processes and the tools used to restore them, i.e., fires, are difficult to use in this setting. Noxious weeds, unnatural deer levels and urban pollution all contribute to the resource management challenges of Fort Snelling State Park.

Fort Snelling State Park is also rich in cultural history. Some historic sites require additional exploration, identification and interpretation. Other sites outside of the park boundary require decisions pertaining to the ultimate management authority for some historical features presently in private or quasi-public ownership.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN FORT SNELLING STATE PARK

The task of providing services to the public and security for park facilities and resources 24 hours per day, 12 months of the year is monumental. During the busy season, full-time operations are necessary 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. seven days a week. The remaining hours are covered by a conservation officer and the presence of the resident manager. During other seasons only part-time operations are provided, however maintenance repair, and park security responsibilities, account for many extra person-hours.

Some important improvements have been completed at Fort Snelling State Park in recent years, yet many goals identified in the first management plan, 10 years ago, have not been completed.

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Partial renovation of the park's underground electrical service, now owned and maintained by Northern States Power Company.
2. Construction of a new boat access facility on the Minnesota River.
3. Rehabilitation of eight softball fields to include realignment of infields, new bases and full backstops. \$16,000 donation.
4. Chapel parking lot to accommodate 90 cars. \$80,000 donation.
5. Chapel tuck pointing. \$13,000 donation.
6. Rehabilitation of Snelling Lake access. \$9,000 donation.
7. Chapel carpeting. \$5,000 donation.

FORT SNELLING STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Resource Management Plan - \$10,000

This will include the preparation of a long range vegetation restoration plan and its implementation. Park and regional staff are working closely with various experts and concerned citizens in the park area.

Inventory Resources - \$30,000

An updated inventory of both natural and cultural resources needs to be completed for Fort Snelling State Park. No thorough study of the plants or cultural resources has been completed for the park.

Control Exotic Species - \$100,000

Efforts at monitoring and controlling exotic species need to be accelerated. These species include purple loostrife (present), leafy spurge (present), European buckthorn (present) and Eurasian watermilfoil (not currently present).

Forest Management Studies - \$30,000

As part of Fort Snelling's deer management program, long term vegetation (browse) studies need to be continued and expanded. The long term health of the floodplain forests is dependant on this.

Bog Research - \$30,000

Research needs to be initiated on the perched bogs (fens) of Fort Snelling. Nearby fens have been seriously affected by changing water regimes in the suburban area.

Subtotal \$200,000

MAJOR REHABILITATION

Chapel Rehabilitation - \$125,000

An engineering study in 1987 identified a number of serious structural problems that must be repaired. They include a new roof and insulation, replacement of the heating system, and repairs or replacement of electrical wiring.

Water Line Replacement - \$75,000

As with the other underground utilities at Fort Snelling, the 6" water mains are old, and their extreme depth makes repairs very expensive. Constant settling and shifting of fill sites causes shearing and crushing of the main lines. All of these lines will eventually have to be replaced.

Well Abandonment - \$15,000

This project is to properly seal off three old wells. This must be done to protect the ground water. One of the wells is a 12" cased well and is a safety hazard.

Pave Trail Access/Parking Lot - \$40,000

This project would eliminate a serious safety hazard by controlling dust on a heavily used, narrow, winding road. Paving would also eliminate erosion, which is a costly maintenance item.

Pave Shop Road/Service Area - \$50,000

Paving will eliminate severe dust problems in the summer, and slippery muddy conditions in the spring and during rainy weather.

Replace Electrical Lines - \$25,000

This project will complete the replacement of underground electric service to park facilities. The existing system is old and results in numerous and lengthy interruptions in service.

Remodel Park Office - \$100,000

The present structure is much too small. It provides offices for park staff and for Area Enforcement

Officers. Staff have very small work areas, and there is no room for storage. This project will include expanding office space as well as providing room for public orientation to the park.

Rehabilitation of Hiking/Ski Trails - \$175,000

This project includes grading, gravel, and culverts to improve 18 miles of heavily used trails in the park. Flood plain drainage and unstable soil make maintenance and vehicle access a year round problem.

Replace Picnic Tables, Grills, and Fixtures - \$30,000

Most of the tables at Fort Snelling are twenty plus years old and are beyond reasonable maintenance. Grills as well are old and many of them are burned out.. Drinking fountains and other fixtures shown signs of heavy use and abuse, and must be replaced.

River Bank Stabilization - \$100,000

Project includes design and construction of erosion control devices around the perimeter of Pike Island. heavy boater use and barge traffic on both the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers result in abnormal erosion along three miles of unprotected shoreline.

Polo Grounds Rehabilitation - \$150,000

Many years of heavy use have resulted in depressions and erosion which hold standing water after a rain. This causes muddy conditions and further erosion. Entire grounds need to be graded for proper drainage, and installation of new turf. Existing vault toilets are absolutely inadequate, and should be replaced with a modern building.

Remodel Shop - \$75,000

Existing shop is very short of storage space. This project would provide new workbench areas, shelving, storage cabinets and bins, and cabinets, cupboards, and tool racks for proper storage of tools and equipment. Project would also replace inadequate and unsafe heating system, and add space for an office and

storage for bulky supplies.

Pave Bicycle Trails - \$75,000

Existing bike trail must be re-surfaced to prevent further erosion and wear, and to eliminate safety hazards. In many places the surface is very rough. This segment of trail is the most heavily used in the State.

Rehabilitation of Sanitation Building - \$50,000

Existing buildings show obvious signs of heavy use. Skylights leak and must be replaced, and plumbing fixtures are worn and abused.

Subtotal \$1,085,000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Cold Storage Building - \$60,000

There are no storage facilities at Fort Snelling other than the Shop building. This results in storing most vehicles, equipment lumber and supplies outdoors. Fencing does not provide adequate security for sensitive items or protect them from the elements.

Visitor/Trail/Information Center - \$850,000

A major new interpretive center is needed to provide a link between Historic Fort Snelling and the natural and cultural resources of Fort Snelling State Park. This project would also provide a trail center and information area for the most heavily used trail system in Minnesota. Existing facility located on Pike Island is a converted residence, is grossly inadequate for heavy use, and is inaccessible for extended periods due to flooding.

Picnic Shelter - \$100,000

A new picnic shelter is badly needed on Picnic Island. The present shelter is very heavily used, is often reserved all weekend, and an additional shelter is needed just to meet the present demand for reservations.

Sanitation Buildings - \$250,000

Additional buildings are needed, one on each side of Picnic Island. Present buildings are over-used, on busy weekends people must stand in line.

New Trail Development - \$150,000

This project includes clearing right-of-way, building grade and drainage, constructing three 10'x50' bridges, and gravel surfacing. This will be a very heavily used section of trail, and will provide a connection (hiking trail) to the Cedar Avenue Bridge Trail and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge area headquarters.

Sibley Gate Trail Access/Parking - \$55,000

This site is a very popular access site to Fort Snelling's trail system. There is no parking at present. This project would provide space for parking as well as provide direct access from a MN/DOT commuter

parking area. It will also connect to a major bike route via the Mendota Bridge and the Village of Mendota. Project includes repair of a historic stone archway bridge, which would serve a control gate.

Picnic Island/Pike Island Trail Bridge - \$100,000

This bridge would provide a needed link between Picnic Island and Pike Island. An abandoned river channel separates the two areas and the distance involved in going around it makes it out of the question for hikers. This project would eliminate a traffic bottleneck, and provide access to Pike Island for a lot of people who otherwise would not have the opportunity.

Quarry Lakes Day Use/Picnic Area - \$100,000

Quarry Lakes is a popular fishing area, and is easily accessible to residents of Eagan, Apple Valley, and Burnsville. There are no facilities at present. This project would provide parking, access, and minimal picnic facilities for public use and enjoyment of this scenic area.

Subtotal \$1,665,000

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$2,950,000

LAND ACQUISITION

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

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

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

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

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

PRIVATE LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN FORT SNELLING STATE PARK

Parcel	#Acres
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49	49.75
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131	6.85
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Total	56.60 acres.
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PARK POTENTIAL

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

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

New facilities will improve customer service while giving the visitor a greater opportunity to learn about Minnesota's natural and cultural resources.

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

SUMMARY

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

Fort Snelling State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Fort Snelling State Park development needs - **\$2,950,000**.

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

