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STATE OF
MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Minneopa
State Park

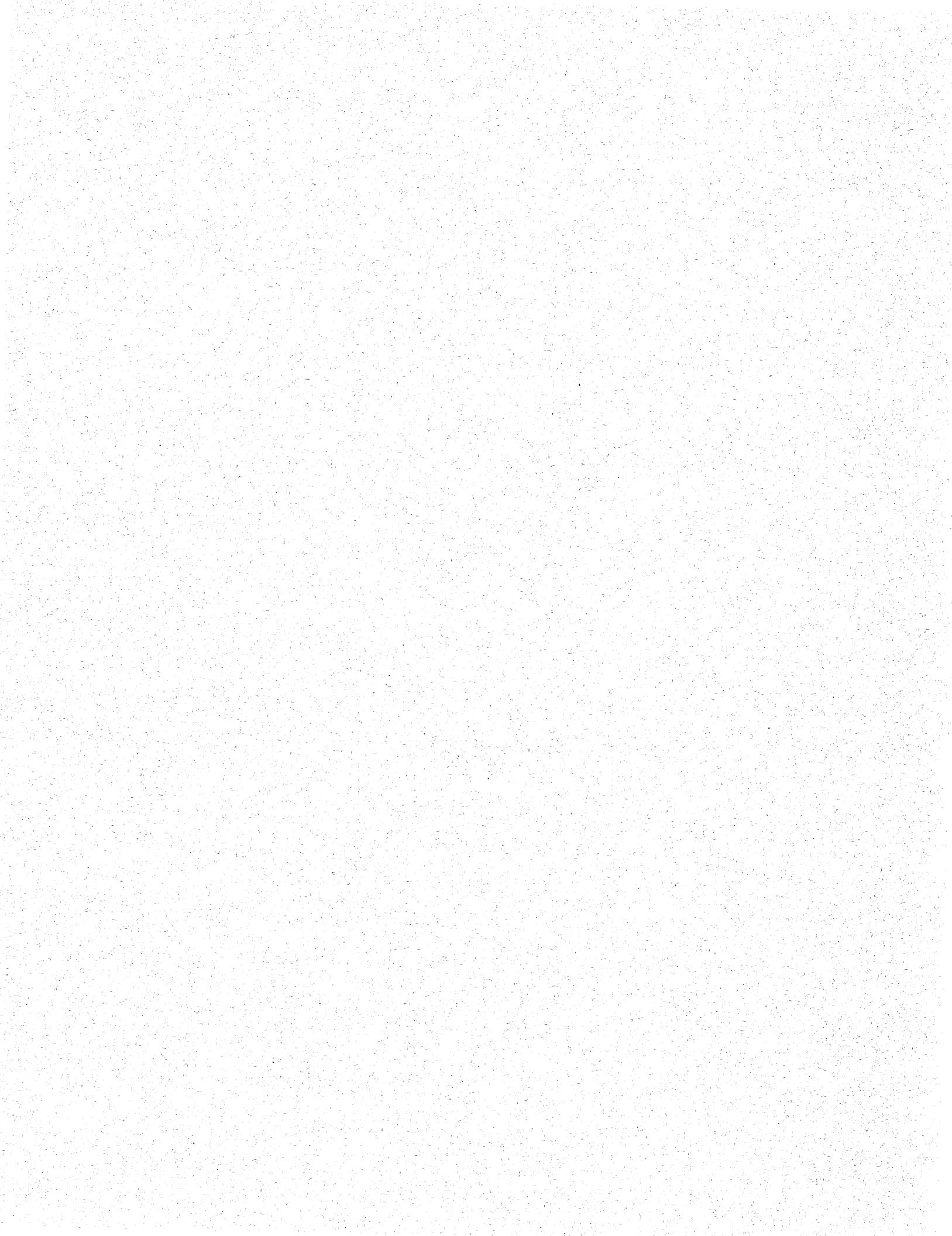


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MINNESOTA STATE PARK SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AN OVERVIEW OF MINNEOPA STATE PARK

Minneopa State Park is located in Blue Earth County five miles west of Mankato. The park was established in 1905 and has a statutory boundary that encompasses 1,145 acres. Of these 222.58 acres are privately owned.

Minneopa State Park is situated along the Minnesota River Valley and provides a look into Minnesota's geologic past. The Minnesota River Valley was carved by Glacial River Warren some 10,000 years ago. River Warren provided the southern outlet for Glacial Lake Agassiz, an enormous body of water that was 700 feet deep and covered over 120,000 square miles. Glacial Lake Agassiz provided River Warren with tremendous volumes of glacial meltwater that quickly eroded through loose glacial deposits of rock and mineral debris into underlying bedrock layers.

Over time, other outlets formed on the northeast portion of Lake Agassiz which decreased the volume and size of river Warren. As the climate became warmer and drier the river continued to decrease, until it reached its present size, the Minnesota River.

One of the most striking geologic features in the park is the double waterfalls of Minneopa Creek for which the park was named. Minneopa means "water falling twice" in the Dakota Indian language. Over thousands of years the creek has eroded through layers of sandstone at slightly different rates creating a 15 foot high water waterfall followed immediately by one that drops 30 feet.

Prior to European settlement, Dakota Indians inhabited the park area with one camp located at the mouth of Minneopa Creek where it joins the Minnesota River.

In 1853 Isaac Lyons became the first white settler to homestead on Minneopa Creek. Other settlers followed and by 1870 the townsite of Minneopa was laid out near the falls. Included in the town were a grain elevator, hotel, store, blacksmith shop and a lumber yard. The town's future abruptly ended during the

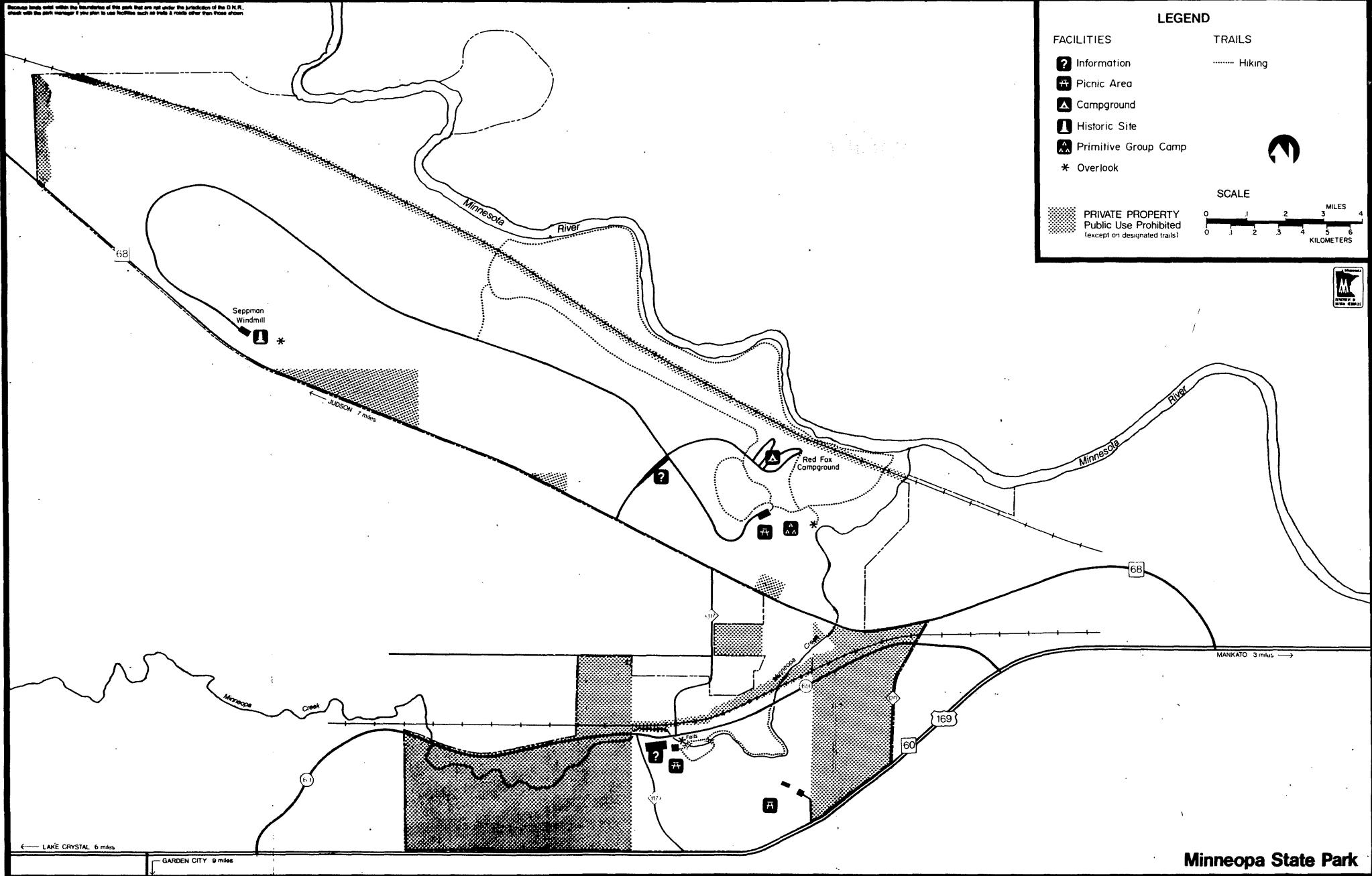
great grasshopper plagues of the 1870's. All crops were wiped out for three consecutive years and thus the town dispersed from the map.

Although most of the surrounding area was intensely cultivated much of the land within the park was too steep or rocky to plow. Except for areas used as pasture land or woodlots, much of the original vegetation remains intact. Sixteen distinct ecological communities have been identified in the park. These range from dry prairie and old fields on the dry uplands to bottomland hardwoods and marsh on the wet lowlands. Efforts are currently underway to restore areas once covered by native prairie.

The diversity of Minneopa's plant communities provide welcome wildlife habitat in an area of intense agriculture. The park is home to a wealth of bird life and is especially attractive to prairie and deciduous woodland species including the eastern bluebird, western and eastern meadowlarks, pileated woodpeckers and Cooper's hawks. The Minnesota River attracts a host of waterfowl and shorebird species especially during spring and fall migrations. Many mammals also inhabit the park including white-tailed deer, red fox, mink, beaver, raccoon and fox squirrels.

Minneopa State Park offers visitors a variety of recreational experiences in an ecologically diverse and historical setting. Miles of trails provide opportunities to explore the park's natural features, its geology, plant life and abundant wildlife, as well as its historical features including Seppman Windmill. Other popular activities include camping, picnicking and cross county skiing.

Bureau lands and areas within the boundaries of this park that are not under the jurisdiction of the D.N.R., check with the park manager if you plan to use facilities such as trails & roads other than those shown.



Minneopa State Park

EXISTING FACILITIES

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

Acres in Statutory Boundary -1,145

Acres of state land - 921.05

Acres of private land - 221.88

Campsites

Drive in - 62

Showers

Modern toilets

Miles of Trails

Hiking - 4.5

Cross Country Ski - 4

Miles of Road

Gravel - 5

Open Picnic Shelter - 2

Number of Picnic Tables - 105

Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 12

Under 100 sq.ft. - 15

Miles of Posted Boundary - 13

Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 3

Number of Wells - 3, one legally sealed

Number of Individual

Water Distribution Systems - 4

Miles of State Owned Power Line - .3

PROBLEMS FACING MINNEOPA STATE PARK

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

Many challenges face Minneopa State Park. As a result of the park's close proximity to Mankato, educators are looking towards the park to fulfill a local needs for environmental education. In addition, many groups that use the park, including horse riders, off-road bicyclists, hikers and cross-country skiers are demanding more trails. Since some of these uses are not compatible, extensive trail work needs to be completed to meet these needs. Currently, funds are lacking to meet any of these challenges.

The parks natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management to perpetuate Minneopa's resources. Grassland areas have not recovered from past overgrazing. These areas need to be restored to pre-settlement conditions. In the past, facilities were developed in areas of ancient encampments. These encampments must be protected and interpreted.

The Seppman mill, a historic grist mill, located in the park is currently in need of major rehabilitation. This landmark carries statewide significance and is listed on the National Register of Hisotric Places.

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

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN MINNEOPA STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Picnic shelter rehabilitation.
2. Picnic area toilet building rehabilitation.
3. Trail and bridge rehabilitation in the falls area partially completed.
4. Planted over 20 acres of old fields to native prairie grasses and forbs.

MINNEOPA STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Natural Resources Assessment - \$15,000

An inventory and evaluation of the resources in Minneopa would provide a significant management tool.

Savanna Prairie Restoration - \$35,000

This project includes conversion of old fields to prairie vegetation.

Subtotal \$50,000

MAJOR REHABILITATION

Campground Rehabilitation - \$24,000

This project would include installing campground electrical outlets, landscaping, graveling and grading spurs and improving drainage.

Contact Station - \$15,000

Rehabilitate the contact station for more efficient staff operation and improved public service.

Subtotal \$39,000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

New Visitor Center - \$300,000

This facility would combine interpretive and trail shelter opportunities.

New Office/Contact Station - \$100,000

Project includes construction of a new park office and orientation building.

Trailer Dump Station - \$25,000

Construct a trailer dump station to accommodate park visitor needs.

Prairie Picnic Area Shelter - \$18,000

Construct a shelter in the prairie picnic area to protect visitors during inclement weather.

Group Camp Water System - \$20,000

Construct a pressurized water system in the upper group camp area to provide drinking water.

Subtotal \$463,000

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$552,000

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 limit 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 limit public use.

LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN MINNEOPA STATE PARK

| Parcel # | Acres |
|----------|-------|
| 1b | 19.31 |
| 4 | 2.75 |
| 6 | 82.76 |
| 7 | 24.20 |
| 8 & 8a | 10.84 |
| 9 | 7.81 |
| 10 | 4.27 |
| 12 | 6.71 |
| 13 | 0.04 |
| 13a | 17.01 |
| 13b | 28.51 |
| 16a | 1.74 |
| 17 | 1.13 |
| 18 | 0.73 |
| 19 | 0.56 |
| 20 | 0.60 |
| 21 | 11.40 |
| 22 | 0.66 |
| 23 | 1.55 |
| 25 | 1.30 |

Total 223.88 acres.

PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Minneopa 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. Active management will be required to maintain and regenerate existing habitats. These will ensure that future visitors will be able to experience the diverse nature of Minnesota's prairies and forests.

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 detract from the natural beauty of Minneopa State Park.

A stable funding source is essential for effective long term resource management and capital budget planning for the Minnesota State Park system and Minneopa 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.

Minneopa State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Minneopa State Park development needs- **\$552,000**.

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

