

# Monson Lake State Park Management Plan



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Recreation**

**March 2008**



## Department of Natural Resources Approval of Management Plan for Monson Lake State Park

Minnesota Statutes 86A.09, Subdivision 1, requires that a master plan be prepared for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks and state recreation areas. The Laws of Minnesota for 1937 established Monson Lake as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (MS 85.012, Subd. 44).

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources worked in partnership with Minnesota citizens and an interdisciplinary resource team to develop a management plan for Monson Lake State Park.

The management plan was approved by the Division of Parks and Recreation management team, and was approved through the DNR Regional Interdisciplinary Review Service (RIRS) during March 2008.

Handwritten signature of Mark Holsten in black ink.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Holsten, Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Handwritten date "3/25/08" in black ink.

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Date

# Monson Lake State Park Management Plan



## State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation

This management plan has been prepared as required by 2003 Minnesota Laws Chapter 86A.09 Subdivision 1.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan documents the work of a seven-month planning process and sets the general direction for the management of Monson Lake State Park for the next 20 years. Input from the community and state park users was solicited during open house events, from visitor comment forms, and during the public comment period on the draft plan. A Technical Advisory Team also provided input focused on recommended actions for the management of natural and cultural resources and recreation. It is the responsibility of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation to determine the appropriate priorities and actions needed to implement these recommendations. Specific management and operational details may change over time as new information becomes available or technologies or budgets change.

The following is a summary of the major recommendations for the park management plan. A complete list of recommendations can be found within each section of the plan and a comprehensive list of all recommendations is included in Appendix A.

## Natural Resource Management Recommendations

### *Native Plant Communities and Rare Plants*

- Restore and maintain the quality of the Basswood-Bur Oak (Green Ash) Forest in the park.
- Reconstruct and maintain native plant communities on undeveloped areas of the park.
- Conduct a search for rare plants to identify any that may be found within the park boundary.
- Periodically monitor native plant communities to ensure that invasive plants are not invading them or that these communities are not otherwise being degraded.
- Map locations of terrestrial invasive plant infestations throughout the park.

### *Native Wildlife*

- Preserve or restore populations of native vertebrates and invertebrates in the park.
- Conduct inventories of reptiles, mammals and selected invertebrates.
- Manage populations of deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not overly impacted.

### *Water Resources*

- Regularly consult with DNR's Divisions of Waters, Fish and Wildlife, and Trails and Waterways on how common goals for improving the water quality of Monson and West Sunburg lakes can be achieved.
- Work with the Chippewa River Watershed Project (CRWP), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Swift County, and other interested partners to improve water quality.
- Continue to implement Shoreland Best Management Practices (BMPs) at the park.

## **Cultural Resource Management Recommendations**

- Protect all known cultural resources, including VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District and identified archaeological sites.
- Retrofit VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District to reflect the character of the era in which they were built.
- Manage native plant communities and invasive species with appropriate methods to preserve the landscape around cultural resource sites.

## **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

- Use the state park as a gateway to the outdoors and the Department of Natural Resources by incorporating the priorities, key messages and initiatives of other DNR divisions into State Parks' guided and self-guided services, where appropriate.
- Develop one or more informational kiosks that describe the parks trail opportunities, historical significance, and the role that groups like the VCC, WPA, and Monson Lake Memorial Association have played at the park.
- Develop park-specific tools that enable visitors of all ages to learn about the park's flora, fauna, and water resources.
- Develop a park education program that teaches nature skills-building.
- Develop a volunteer program that trains and engages citizens to work on select resource management activities.
- Develop a park education program that teaches watershed conservation and protection methods and techniques for clean water in Monson Lake.

## **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations**

### *Day Use*

- Maintain a portion of the space between the park entrance and the picnic shelter open for aesthetic purposes and unstructured play.
- Develop a fish cleaning facility separate from the picnic shelter and closer to the Monson Lake water access.
- Highlight the unique architecture and historical nature of the picnic shelter via park brochures and on the Department website.

### *Overnight Use*

- Enhance some campsites through the addition of electrical service and redevelop some sites to allow for vehicle pull-through, while retaining the rustic character of the park and the integrity of the 31-acre Historic Resources District.
- Consider the electrification of additional campsites and/or the development of one or more camper cabins in appropriate areas.
- Develop one or more accessible campsites from existing sites and upgrade access to drinking water to meet ADA requirements.
- Extend the overnight camping season beyond the Fishing Opener to Labor Day weekend timeframe to provide fall camping opportunities for hunters, bird enthusiasts, and others.

### *Trails*

- Maintain existing trails in a safe and sustainable condition.
- Consider the development of new trails if the park boundary is expanded.
- Monitor local, county and state efforts to plan for trail systems, and participate in those that are consistent with uses in the park.

### **Park Boundary Recommendations**

- Add lands to the park statutory boundary as described in the Park Boundary chapter (pg. 52).
- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the current park statutory boundary that support the Division of Parks and Recreation's mission to protect and perpetuate the diverse natural, scenic, and cultural resources for low impact use, education and enjoyment of park visitors.
- Consider acquisition of parcels outside of the park statutory boundary that meet boundary change criteria and are supported by the property owner.
- Work with surrounding landowners to inform them of conservation measures they can implement on their property especially if they have significant natural resources on their land or have the potential to impact view sheds.

### **Recommendations for Park Operations**

- Review visitor use and staffing needs on a regular basis, using the Division of Park and Recreation's Operating Standards, to ensure consistency throughout the park system.
- Utilize volunteers and work programs to supplement and support park staff, where appropriate.



Monson Lake State Park picnic area.  
*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*



# INTRODUCTION

## Park Description and History

Monson Lake State Park is located 20 miles northwest of the city of Willmar in Swift County. Access is off State Highway 9, one-and-a-half miles west of Sunburg, via County Road 95.

The area near Monson Lake was the site of a deadly confrontation between Dakota Indians (also known as the Santee Sioux) and early pioneers during the US-Dakota War of 1862. The park was set-aside in 1923 as a memorial to the Broberg family, a group of pioneers who were killed at this site. The dedication of the Memorial Park on August 21, 1927 drew over 10,000 people to the area.



The smallest of the parks in the Minnesota State Park system, Monson Lake is made up of 187 acres of upland and lowland hardwoods, and remnants of prairie. The majority of this acreage is found between Monson and West Sunburg lakes, whose shorelines provide examples of flora and fauna native to west central Minnesota.

The Park lies within the Alexandria Glacial Moraine Complex, a long and narrow band of rolling hills and lakes that runs just east of the park north to the Detroit Lakes area. This major glacial geologic area was formed approximately 30,000 years ago by the Wadena Lobe of the Wisconsin glaciation.

This glacial activity created the nearby hills and undulating topography, and is surrounded by flat, fertile farmland. The entire region is heavily covered by glacial till – a mixture of clay, sand, gravel, and boulders - and the melting of ice blocks within this till formed Monson and West Sunburg lakes.

Monson Lake's historic buildings were constructed in the late 1930s by the same Veteran's Conservation Corps that built the historic buildings at nearby Sibley State Park. The architecture of these buildings is rustic style split-stone construction and featured the use of native materials in an attempt to harmonize with the natural landscape. Buildings at both state parks are on the National Historic Register.

## Legislative History

### *Legislation specific to Monson Lake State Park*

Chapter 85.012 State Parks – established the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation and authorized existing park units.

Subd. 44. Monson Lake State Park, Swift County, which is hereby renamed from Monson Lake Memorial State Park.

HIST: 1937 c 474 s 1(e); 1965 c 810 s 9; 1969 c 524 s 2; 2004 c 262 art 2 s 11 subd 7

## **Mission and Vision Statements**

The following mission and vision statements provide a perspective on the role of the Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Parks and Recreation and finally the role that Monson Lake State Park will fulfill within the park system for the next 20 years.

### *Department of Natural Resources Mission*

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 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 Recreation Mission*

We will work with people to provide a state park system, which preserves and manages Minnesota's natural, scenic and cultural resources for present and future generations while providing appropriate recreational and educational opportunities.

### *Monson Lake State Park Mission*

Protect and enhance the diverse landscapes, natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities found within the park and manage them for the use, education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

### *Monson Lake State Park Vision*

Over the next 20 years, Monson Lake State Park will continue to provide high quality resource and recreation management to ensure the Park continues to serve as a viable component of the Minnesota State Park System.

We will work with the people of Minnesota to ensure that Monson Lake State Park is managed to meet the needs of current and future generations guided by the following principles:

- Manage and enhance the natural, cultural and scenic resources.
- Perpetuate populations of listed or special status plant and animal species and any other species of concern, which may be discovered in the future.
- Control exotic and/or invasive species in an ecologically sensitive manner.
- Continue to actively seek and adopt innovative, effective and efficient management practices.
- Preserve and enhance significant vistas within the park.
- Preserve the opportunity for park visitors to experience wildness, quiet and solitude.
- Provide access to park resources for people of varying abilities.
- Provide unique, rewarding and diverse educational opportunities to ensure that visitors will understand, value and enjoy the diversity of landscapes, natural features, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities found in the park.
- Develop educational and interpretive programs to create a sense of stewardship among visitors.
- Develop partnerships and cooperative strategies for enhancing resource management, educational opportunities and tourism.
- Provide high quality public service.

## Planning Process

The Monson Lake State Park planning process began in the summer of 2007. In addition to efforts made by park and regional staff, a multi-discipline planning team was established to provide input into the process: the Technical Advisory Team.

### *Technical Advisory Team (TAT)*

An intra-agency team met to assist in gathering data and technical expertise in the development of the revised management plan. This group consisted of individuals from various divisions within the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources including Trails and Waterways, Fish and Wildlife, Ecological Services, Forestry, Waters, and Enforcement.

The Monson Lake State Park Management Plan is the result of efforts by park and regional staff, the TAT, and information gathered at additional public meetings and open houses. A draft of the management plan was made available for a 30-day public review beginning February 5, 2008. During the public review period, a public open house was held to provide citizens with the opportunity to review the plan and have questions answered and any concerns addressed. Copies of the draft plan were also distributed to individuals who had expressed an interest in the planning effort.

Following the public review, public comments were taken into consideration and the draft management plan was revised and then submitted for review by the Division of Parks and Recreation Director and staff. The Monson Lake State Park Management Plan was approved by the Commissioner of Natural Resources on March 25, 2008.

Copies of the Monson Lake State Park Management Plan (2008) and a planning process file which documents the planning effort are available at the Sibley State Park office as well as at the DNR Southern Region Headquarters in New Ulm and DNR Central Office in St Paul. The management plan is also available on DNR's Division of Parks and Recreation web page. [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/index.html)



# REGIONAL ANALYSIS

This section of the plan describes both the ecological and socioeconomic regions in which Monson Lake State Park resides, and the primary relationships between the park and these regions. The ecological region is discussed in terms of the Minnesota Ecological Classifications System (ECS). The socioeconomic region is described in terms of a regional population analysis and a description of regional recreation and tourism opportunities. Throughout this chapter, the plan will reference a 50-mile radius from the Park. This distance was chosen to represent an area roughly within a one-hour drive of the Park.

## Regional Landscape Description

Minnesota's Ecological Classification System (ECS) is part of a national classification system that separates and describes units of different landscapes. The approach stresses the interrelationships and resulting interactions among components of the ecosystem including climate, geology, geomorphology, parent materials, soil, vegetation, hydrology and historical land use. The ECS is a management tool that: (1) describes the extent and content of various ecosystems; (2) improves resource managers' abilities to predict how landscapes will change over time; (3) improves a managers' ability to manage all natural resources on a sustainable basis and (4) allows managers to communicate more effectively with one another.

### *Subsections*

Subsections are units within the provinces that are defined using glacial deposition processes, surface bedrock formations, local climate, topographic relief and the distribution of plants, especially trees. Minnesota has 25 subsections.

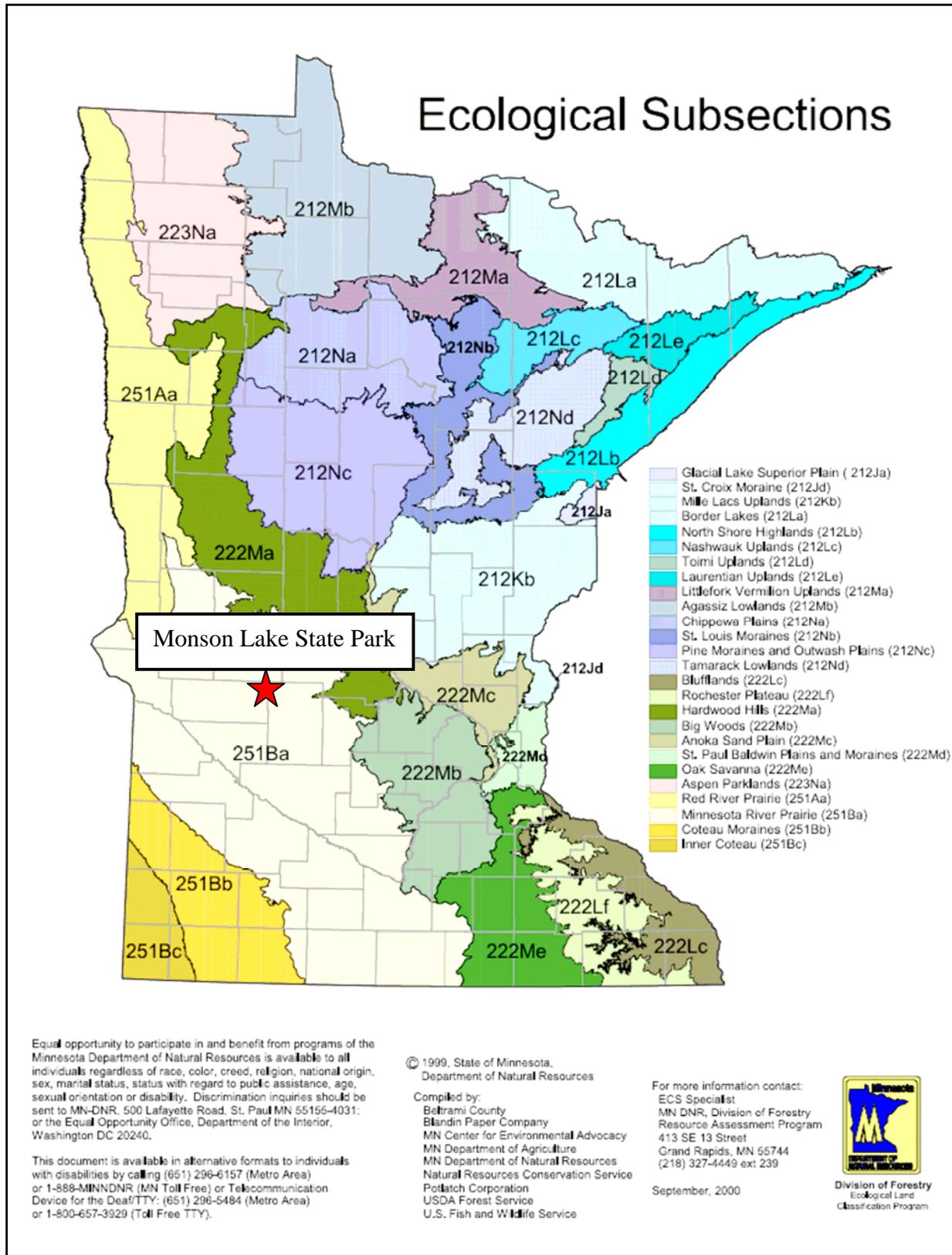
Monson Lake is part of the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection.

The Minnesota River Prairie Subsection is made up of a gently rolling ground moraine about 60 miles in width (Hobbs and Goebel, 1982). The presettlement vegetation was primarily tallgrass prairie, with many islands of wet prairie (Kratz and Jensen, 1983; Marschener, 1974). Forests of silver maple, elm, cottonwood, and willow grew on floodplains along the Minnesota River and other streams. Portions of the Big Stone Moraine supported dry and dry-mesic prairie (Wheeler et al. 1992). There were also dry gravel prairies on kames (Albert 1993).

Fire was the most common natural disturbance before settlement. Fire suppression has allowed woodlands to develop from what were originally oak openings or brush prairies (Wheeler et al. 1992). Other causes of disturbance are floods and tornados. Today agriculture is the dominant land use.

One hundred-and-fifty-six species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are known or predicted to occur within the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection. At least 43 species of wildlife found at Monson Lake State Park are on the list of SGCN, all of which are bird species. Seven species have been documented within the park that are state or federally listed, or are regionally uncommon.

Figure 1: Ecological Subsections of Minnesota



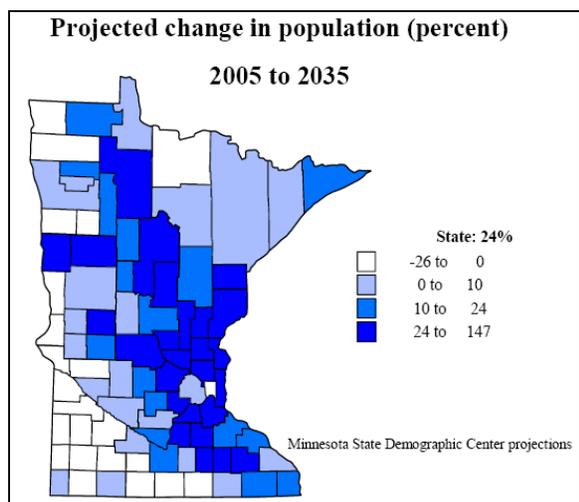
The classification of the Monson Lake State Park Land Cover encompasses approximately 190 acres (lands inside the statutory boundary). Eighteen acres are classified as developed or use areas (such as administrative area, campground, recreational use areas, roads and trails). Forty-two acres are mapped as Basswood-Bur Oak-(Green ash) forest areas and 93 acres are classified as “other natural system;” in this case, a portion of West Sunburg Lake. As of this writing, 49 acres are unclassified.

In 1980, the Basswood-Bur Oak- (Green Ash) forest was ranked by Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) as C quality (fair). Nearly the entire park has been designated by MCBS as a site of moderate biodiversity significance. No old growth forest occurs in the park.

## Regional Population Analysis

According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, the state’s population is projected to grow to 5,709,700 by 2015 and 6,446,300 by 2035. The Twin Cities, Rochester, St. Cloud, and Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan areas are all expected to see substantial growth over the next 30 years, with the St. Cloud metropolitan area expected to see the largest change in population (+38.4%). With few exceptions, the estimated population increases are not nearly as marked outside most metropolitan areas, however. In fact, some regions are expected to lose population over the next 30 years including the Southwest and Upper Minnesota Valley regions<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2: Projected Change in Minnesota Population, 2005-2035**



Monson Lake State Park, located in the extreme eastern portion of Swift County, is within the Upper Minnesota Valley region. By itself, Swift County is also expected to lose population between 2005 and 2035, though neighboring Kandiyohi County is projected to have a modest increase.

Of the four counties closest to the park, Swift County is the second smallest in terms of population. As of the 2000 census, Swift County’s population was 11,956 people while in 2005, the population was estimated to be 11,445. By 2035, Swift County expects to have 9,800 residents, a decrease in population of 14.4% from the 2005

estimate.

Kandiyohi County, just east of the park, is the second largest of the four counties closest to the park. As of the 2000 census, Kandiyohi County’s population was 41,203 while in 2005, the population was estimated to be 41,639. With continued growth, Kandiyohi County expects to have 44,180 residents by 2035, a modest increase in population of 6.1% from the 2005 estimate.

<sup>1</sup> The Southwest region (8) is made up of Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Rock, Nobles, and Jackson counties. The Upper Minnesota Valley region (6W) is made up of Big Stone, Swift, Lac qui Parle, Chippewa, and Yellow Medicine counties.

Pope County, just north of Monson Lake State Park, is the smallest of the four counties closest to the park. As of the 2000 census, Pope County's population was 11,236 while in 2005, the population was estimated to be 11,360. With continued growth, Pope County expects to have 12,760 residents by 2035, an increase in population of 12.3% from the 2005 estimate.

Stearns County, to the northeast of the Park, is the largest of the four counties closest to the park. As of the 2000 census, Stearns County's population was 133,166 while in 2005, the population was estimated to be 144,204. With strong anticipated growth, Stearns County expects to have 194,490 residents by 2035, an increase of 34.9% from the 2005 estimate.

13 other counties are within a 50-mile radius of Monson Lake State Park, including Wright County, which is expected to grow from an estimated 2005 population of 112,153 to an estimated 2035 population of 241,850. This is a 115.6% increase. The only other counties with an appreciable increase over the 30-year timeframe are Douglas (+32.3%), McLeod (+23.1%), and Meeker (+16.5%). All other projected growth is less than 10% or is negative. The counties expected to lose the most population include Lac qui Parle (-15%), Yellow Medicine (-9%), and Big Stone (-8.5%) counties.

**Table 1: Population Estimates and Projections**  
*State of Minnesota; Kandiyohi, Pope, Stearns, and Swift counties*

Location	2000 Census	2005 Estimate	2035 Projection	% Change 2005-2035
Minnesota	4,919,479	5,192,122	6,446,270	24.2
Kandiyohi	41,203	41,639	44,180	6.1
Pope	11,236	11,360	12,760	12.3
Stearns	133,166	144,204	194,490	34.9
Swift	11,956	11,445	9,800	-14.4

Minnesota Population Projections 2005-2035  
<http://www.demography.state.mn.us/projections.html>

### Impacts of an Aging Population on Recreation

Recreational activities change dramatically throughout an individual's life. Changes are due not only to changes in physical abilities, but also social, economic, and other factors as well. Older adults may take on new recreational interests especially after their children have grown or when they retire. Demographic changes will affect levels of participation in various recreational activities. "Baby Boomers" are approaching retirement age, but as compared with previous generations these individuals are generally more active. Most park and recreational facilities will undoubtedly continue to undergo adjustments to accommodate an older recreational market.

The continued aging of the baby boom generation will produce an explosion in the number of people ages 55 to 69 during the coming decade. Over the longer term, the population over age 65 in Minnesota will more than double, from an estimated 623,241 in 2005 to 1,399,960 in 2035. By contrast, the population under age 65 will grow only 10 percent.

Swift County is projected to have about 800 more people over age 65 years by 2035, a growth of 38%. The age change projections for the other counties near the park – including Kandiyohi, Pope, and Stearns – illustrate the potential for much stronger growth. Stearns and Kandiyohi counties are projected to see the largest growth in this category, at 134% and 91% respectively.

**Table 2. Population Estimates and Projections, Age 65+**  
*State of Minnesota; Kandiyohi, Pope, Stearns, and Swift counties*

Location	2005 Estimate	2035 Projection	% Change 2005-2035
Minnesota	623,241	1,399,960	124.6
Kandiyohi	6,284	11,970	90.5
Pope	2,304	3,960	71.9
Stearns	16,478	38,600	134.3
Swift	2,106	2,910	38.2

Minnesota Population Projections 2005-2035  
<http://www.demography.state.mn.us/projections.html>

## Regional Land Use

Like much of southern and central Minnesota, row-crop agriculture is the predominant land use in the Minnesota River Prairie subsection. According to the DNR's Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife<sup>2</sup>, 82% of the area is cultivated, 12% is grassland, 3% is water, 2% is forest or wetland forest, and 1% is developed. Of significant concern are the impacts on water quality from intensive agricultural activities, including use of fertilizers and pesticides, expanding use of pattern tiling, and ditching and draining of small wetlands. In addition, continued loss of the small amounts of native upland habitat and over-intensive grazing are a concern.

As with the subsection more broadly, the counties near Monson Lake State Park are made up largely of agricultural lands as well. According to Minnesota Land Management Information Center, Swift County is 83% cultivated, 7% grassland, 5% is forest or wetlands, 2% is developed, and 1% is water. Please see the figure below for the land cover in counties near Monson Lake State Park.

**Table 3: Land Cover near Monson Lake State Park**  
*MN River Subsection; Kandiyohi, Pope, Swift, and Stearns counties*

Location	% Cultivated	% Grassland	% Forest/Wetland	% Water	% Urban/Rural Development
MN River Subsection	82	12	2	3	1
Kandiyohi Co	68	11	10	7	3
Pope Co	62	16	10	7	2
Stearns Co	58	20	14	3	5
Swift Co	83	7	5	1	2

<sup>2</sup> From Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2006. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Division of Ecological Services.  
[http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/nrplanning/bigpicture/cwcs/profiles/minnesota\\_river\\_prairie.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/nrplanning/bigpicture/cwcs/profiles/minnesota_river_prairie.pdf)

In June 2006, the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission began the process of drafting a Comprehensive Plan for Swift County<sup>3</sup>. The Draft Plan, “attempts to minimize land use conflicts while maintaining environmental quality and economic viability by protecting critical resources and balancing the preservation of viable agricultural land uses with non-farm rural residential and other development types.” Like the Monson Lake State Park Management Plan, Swift County’s Draft Plan is meant to guide activities over a 20-year timeframe.

The Draft Plan also outlines a series of over-arching objectives for various categories like housing, transportation, agriculture, and natural resources/parks/recreation. These vision statements – especially those in the last two categories – reflect the agricultural focus of the area and a desire to protect the area’s natural resources.

#### *Agriculture*

Swift County envisions a sustainable balance between being a leading agricultural county and managing natural and human resources for long-term benefit...Enhancing the agriculture economy through value-added agriculture and renewable energy opportunities will be a component of Swift County agriculture moving forward.

#### *Natural Resources/Parks/Recreation*

Swift County recognizes the full potential of the scenic, natural, historic and recreational resources available in the County and their contributions to quality of life and the economy. The County will work toward maintaining a balance between protecting, preserving and enhancing the County’s valuable natural resources and environment while retaining the County’s rural character and encouraging new economic opportunities.

Like the county in which it is located, Monson Lake State Park will also “work toward maintaining a balance between protecting, preserving and enhancing” its natural resources and the environment, as well as the other goals and objectives outlined in this plan.



Monson Lake State Park fishing pier and rental watercraft.

*Photo courtesy of the Glacial Ridge Trail Scenic Byway.*

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<sup>3</sup> From Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission, 2007. *Draft Swift County Comprehensive Plan*. <http://www.umvrdc.org/site/pages/getObject.php?ID=72>

## **Regional Recreation and Tourism Opportunities (within 50-mile radius)**

Numerous recreation and tourism opportunities can be found in the counties surrounding Monson Lake State Park. There are five Minnesota state parks including Sibley, Glacial Lakes, Lake Carlos, Lac qui Parle, and Upper Sioux Agency. There is also a state wayside and state forest campground in the vicinity: Joseph R. Brown (Renville) and Birch Lake Campground (Stearns) respectively. Other public recreation areas include a number of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) preserves, Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) and county and local parks. There are also a handful of nature centers in the area.

WMAs close to Monson Lake include Monson (Swift), Sunburg (Kandiyohi), Oleander (Kandiyohi), Camp Kerk (Swift), Hollerberg Lake (Swift), and Little Joe (Pope). There are also some larger WMA's worth note a bit further a field, especially Danvers (Swift) and Lac qui Parle (Lac qui Parle). The approximately 32,000-acre Lac qui Parle WMA adjoins the 11,521-acre Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge, protecting over 43,000 contiguous acres of wetland and wildlife habitat.

Nearby SNAs include the Bruce Hitman Heron Rookery (Stevens) and Roscoe Prairie (Stearns). Not far from St. Cloud, Cold Spring Heron Colony and Partch Woods may be found in Stearns County. There is also a handful of SNA's near Granite Falls including Blue Devil Valley and Gneiss Outcrops (both in Yellow Medicine), as well as Swedes Forest (Yellow Medicine and Redwood).

TNC also has some beautiful preserves in the area including the Ordway Preserve (Pope), Moe Woods (Pope/Kandiyohi), Regal Meadow (Kandiyohi), and the Chippewa Prairie (Chippewa/Swift).

WPAs in the vicinity include Monson Lake, Roderick, Brady, Gilbertson and Bowman in Swift County and Sunburg in Kandiyohi. Larger WPAs may be found at slightly greater distances from the park including Loen, Syor, Welsh and Big Slough in Swift County, and Randall and Arctander in Kandiyohi.

There are also a few county and local parks in the surrounding area including Swift Falls, Ambush, Pillsbury, and Appleton Area Recreation in Swift County and Big Kandiyohi, Diamond Lake, Green Lake, and Games Lake in Kandiyohi County. Nearby Pope County also has a few offerings in the form of Barsness, Knapp, and Lakeshore Parks. Individuals or groups looking for educational opportunities can visit the Sibley State Park Interpretive Center or the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, both in Kandiyohi County.

In addition to the parks and natural areas, a few state recreational trails can be found in the area including the Glacial Lakes, Luce Line, and Central Lakes state trails. The 22-mile Glacial Lakes State Trail, running between Willmar and just east of Richmond, is the closest. The 245-mile Glacial Ridge Scenic Byway, a mostly circular driving route between Willmar and Alexandria, also runs by Monson Lake. It winds through the rolling landscapes and along side lakes that were formed by glaciers during the Ice Age.

The Kandiyohi Lakes Region of the Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail can also be found in the vicinity. This "trail" connects a variety of good bird watching sites including Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, Sibley and Monson Lake state parks, Camp Kerk WMA, and

others. More than 200 different bird species have been recorded in Sibley State Park alone, the first place in Minnesota where nesting Yellow-throated Warbler were recorded.<sup>4</sup>

There are also numerous public water accesses for boaters that provide recreational and fishing opportunities on many area lakes and rivers. Not counting the water access on Monson Lake, there are 58 accesses in Swift and Kandiyohi counties alone, with a majority of those found in Kandiyohi.

### Visitor Use Patterns

An estimated 19,479 people visited Monson Lake State Park in 2006 and 1,129 of those people stayed overnight. Compared to the rest of the state park system, this placed Monson Lake 62<sup>nd</sup> in both overall visitation and overnight visits.

Aside from total attendance being relatively low over the last decade – compared to the rest of the state park system – no clear patterns are evident. It is promising, however, to see an up tick in the last two years in which records are available. Overnight visitation has also shown similar inconsistencies. Opportunities definitely exist to increase visitation on the weekends, during weekdays, and throughout the year.

**Table 4: Ten Year Comparison of Attendance at Monson Lake State Park**

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total Attendance (in 1,000's)	11.4	9.4	9.7	11.4	7.2	12.9	13.8	12.8	15.2	19.5

**Table 5: Ten Year Comparison of Overnight Visitation at Monson Lake State Park**

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Overnight Visitors (in 1,000s)	10.1	9.5	12.0	12.0	10.4	10.5	11.7	9.2	8.7	11.3

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail, Kandiyohi Lakes Region.  
<http://www.birdingtrail.org/KandiyohiLakesRegion.html>

## Overnight Recreation Opportunities

There are 57 campgrounds located within a 50-mile radius of Monson Lake State Park, mostly managed by private entities. Of all the campsites available, there are almost four times as many sites with electricity than without. More remote walk-in, canoe-in, and backpack campsites are also available in the area, in state and some county parks.

**Table 6: Camping opportunities within 50-mile radius of Monson Lake State Park**

Managing Agency	# camp-grounds	Drive in w/out elec	Drive in w/ elec	Walk-in /canoe-in/bkpk	Group Camps (# of people)	Horse Camping (# of people)	Camper Cabins
State Parks/Rec Areas	9	207	220	14	10 (553)	66(507)	1
Counties	9	21	371	0	2 (112)	0	0
Municipal	6	44	63	0	0	0	0
Private	33	172	1,091	0	0	0	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>1,745</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12 (665)</b>	<b>66 (507)</b>	<b>141</b>

## Trail Opportunities

Given the widely disparate nature of information on regional, county, and municipal trail networks, it is extremely difficult to quantify the number of trail miles in these categories. Instead, the analysis here focuses on trail opportunities in state parks and on state trails, where clearly presented, updated information is available.

**Table 7: Trail opportunities within 50-mile radius of Monson Lake State Park**

Managing Agency	Hiking (miles)	Equestrian (miles)	Cross Country Ski (miles, groomed)	Biking (miles, paved)	Biking (miles, off-road/mtn)	Snowmobile (miles)
State Parks	73	50	28	9	0	40
State Trails	92	61	0	53	39.5	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>132</b>

### *Hiking*

There are over 160 miles of trails within a 50-mile radius of Monson Lake. The locations with the most hiking miles available include the Glacial Lakes (44 mi) and Central Lakes (31mi) state trails, and Sibley (18 mi) and Upper Sioux (18 mi) state parks.

### *Equestrian*

Currently there are over 100 miles of equestrian trails within 50 miles of the Park, most of which are made up by the Glacial Lakes (44 mi) and Luce Line (17.5) state trails. The Glacial Lakes trail is paved with asphalt for 22 miles between Willmar and the Kandiyohi/Stearns County line. The segment from Willmar to New London has 10 miles of parallel, grass treadway that is particularly nice for horseback riding, while the New London to the Kandiyohi/Stearns County line segment has grass shoulders to accommodate this activity.

### *Cross-Country Skiing*

There are about 28 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails within 50 miles of Monson Lake. Cross-country skiing is also allowed on any portion of the three state trails in the area, although they are not groomed. The locations with the most cross-country ski trails available include Sibley (10 mi) and Glacial Lakes (6 mi) state parks.

### *Bicycling (Paved Trail)*

An extensive network of state, regional and local biking trails exist near Monson Lake State Park. Within 50 miles of the park, there are over 50 miles of trail. The Central Lakes State Trail makes up the greatest portion of this mileage, accounting for 31 miles between Evansville and Osakis. The Glacial Lakes State Trail – between Willmar and Paynesville – has 22 miles available for bicycle enthusiasts as well. Regional trails also contribute to the network: the Lake Wobegon Trail, offering 46 paved miles, connects the Central Lakes Trail in Osakis to St. Joseph.

### *Off-Road/Mountain Biking*

There are about 40 miles of off-road or mountain bike trails within a 50-mile radius of Monson Lake State Park. The bulk of these opportunities are located on the natural and undeveloped sections of the Glacial Lakes State Trail, and the limestone-surfaced Luce Line. No designated mountain bike trails exist within Monson Lake State Park.

### *Snowmobile Trails*

The state parks and trails in the area combine to offer over 130 miles of winter cruising, with an additional 46 miles coming from the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail. Of the state parks that offer snowmobiling, Upper Sioux Agency (14 mi) and Glacial Lakes (11 mi) offer the most mileage. There is also an extensive Grant-in-Aid (GIA) trail network in the area, including nearby routes 151 and 326, which connect to Sibley and Glacial Lakes state parks respectively.

### *Canoe/Kayak Routes*

Portions of six designated canoe routes are found within a 50-mile radius of Monson Lake. They include the Long Prairie (~49 mi), Sauk (~121 mi), North Fork Crow (~41 mi), Minnesota (~105 mi), Chippewa (54 mi), and Pomme de Terre (29 mi) rivers. The DNR notes that the upper portion of the North Fork Crow is not canoeable except in high water years, and that there are several sections of rapids and snags on the lower portion of the Pomme de Terre between Appleton and Marsh Lake. The DNR has maps available for these and many other canoe routes, which provide a description of public access points, campsites, rest areas, navigational features and river miles.

### *Off-Highway Vehicle Riding*

The Appleton Area Recreation Park, managed by Swift County, is a 300-acre ATV park containing groomed trails for ATV riders, off-highway motorcycles, and snowmobiles. There is also a picnic area and motorcycle practice track. It is open sunrise to sunset seven days a week.

## Revenue Generation and Economic Impact

Monson Lake State Park generated \$11,340.55 in revenue during 2006. Revenue for both years was collected for camping, annual and daily permits, equipment rentals, consumables (e.g. firewood and ice), and merchandise. Fifty-one percent of the 2006 revenue came from camping and 36% came from annual and daily permit sales, while the remaining 13% was spread fairly evenly from the remaining categories.

Monson Lake State Park has a positive impact on the local economy. Visitors contributed to the state and local economies during trips to the park in 2006 and whenever they visit. Surveys of overnight visitors to the state park system<sup>5</sup> determined that day visitors spend \$24.75 per person per day and overnight visitors spend \$21.86 per person per day. These expenses include groceries, gasoline, and other items bought expressly for this trip as well as money spent at restaurants, shops and other places for non-state park lodging during the trip. These spending estimates do not include government payments – i.e. state park permits, camping reservation fees, fishing licenses, etc.

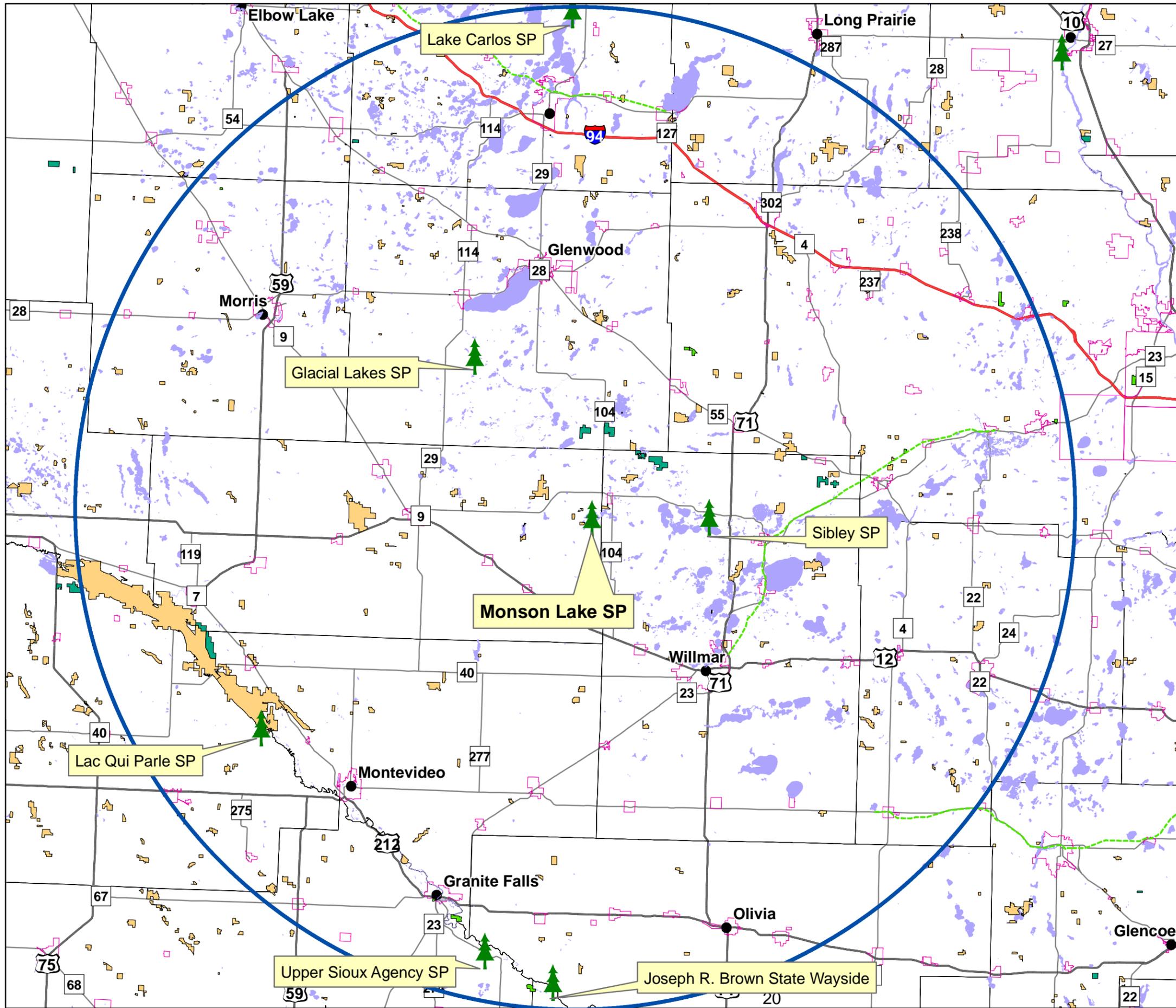
**Table 8: Economic Impact of Visitors to Monson Lake State Park, 2006**

	# of Visitors 2006	Average Spending/Day	Subtotals
Day	18,350	\$24.75	\$ 454,162.50
Overnight	1129	\$21.86	\$ 24,679.94
Total Economic Impact =			\$ 478,842.44



Campsite overlooking Monson Lake.  
Photo courtesy of MN DNR.

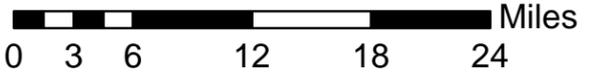
<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2002. Office of Management and Budget Services. *Contributions of the Minnesota State Park System to State and Regional Economies*.  
[http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/parks/parkecon\\_report.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/parks/parkecon_report.pdf)



**Monson Lake State Park**  
 Map 1: 50-Mile Radius for Recreation Opportunities

**Legend**

-  State Park, Rec Area, or Wayside
  -  Wildlife Management Areas
  -  Scientific and Natural Areas
  -  The Nature Conservancy Preserves
  -  Lakes and Rivers
  -  County Seats
  -  Municipal Boundaries
  -  State Trails
  -  County Boundaries
- MN DOT Interstate and Trunk Highways**
-  Interstate
  -  Federal Trunk
  -  State Trunk



Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources  
 Division of Parks and Recreation

# NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources are at the heart of the Minnesota State Park system and as such, they play a key role in the mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation:

*We will work with the people of Minnesota to provide a state park system which preserves and manages Minnesota's natural, scenic and cultural resources for present and future generations while providing appropriate recreational and educational opportunities.*

Stemming from this wide-reaching mission, a series of goals have been developed to help guide resource management activities throughout the state park system.

## Resource Management Goals

The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Resource Management Program has the following resource management goals:

1. Protect and perpetuate natural and cultural resources within the state park system.
2. Minimize damage to the natural and cultural resources of the state park system while providing appropriate recreational and educational activities.
3. Restore natural communities and ecosystems in the state park system.
4. Promote understanding and awareness of the natural and cultural resources within the state park system to enable their management and protection.
5. Participate in landscape-level planning activities relative to the protection of the natural and cultural resources of the state park system.



Solomon's Seal can be found in the herbaceous layer at the state park, especially in the spring following a prescribed burn.

*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*

## Guided by State Statute

The Division of Parks and Recreation plays an important role in the preservation and interpretation of Minnesota's natural resources, and that role is clearly defined in state statute. According to Minnesota Statutes 86A.05, Subdivision 2c:

*State parks shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision to (1) preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and (2) other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features that are present. Management shall seek to (3) maintain a balance among the plant and animal life of the park and to (4) re-establish desirable plants and animals that were formerly indigenous to the park area but are now missing.*

*Programs to interpret the natural features of the park shall be provided. Outdoor recreation activities to utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality into the natural scene may be permitted. 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. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved.*

## Climate

Like the rest of the state, Monson Lake State Park has a humid continental climate that is characterized by variable weather patterns and a large temperature range due to its interior location in mid-latitudes. Precipitation in this climate type is primarily due to invasions of maritime tropical air, originating in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

This climate produces an almost ideal environment for a wide variety of recreational pursuits. In addition to the state's multitude of lakes, the comfortable summer season (May - August) – with its warm days and cool nights – attracts tourists. Recreational activity in the autumn season (September - November) ranges from camping and hunting to watching the change of leaves and the annual migration of birds. In the winter season (December - March), the state usually receives sufficient snowfalls and low temperatures that maintain conditions for skiing, snowmobiling, and skating.

According to the Midwestern Regional Climate Center, the highest mean temperature at the park is in July with 71.8 °F and the lowest is in January with 9.7 °F<sup>6</sup>. The hottest date on record was on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1901 when a high temperature of 110 °F was recorded.

June is typically the wettest month, with an average of 5.45 inches of precipitation. February is usually the driest month, with only 0.78 inches of precipitation. Between 1893 and 2001, the wettest single day on record was June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1957 when 6.10 inches of rain fell. Annually, an average of 31.67 inches of precipitation falls and there are 20.1 days with precipitation greater than 0.50 inches, typically in spring (5.8 in) or summer (8.5 in).

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<sup>6</sup> Weather data collected in New London, 16 miles to the east of the park, between 1971 and 2000. Information compiled from [http://mcc.sws.uiuc.edu/climate\\_midwest/mwclimate\\_data\\_summaries.htm#](http://mcc.sws.uiuc.edu/climate_midwest/mwclimate_data_summaries.htm#)

January is the snowiest month with an average of 12.5 inches falling a year. Between 1893 and 2001, the snowiest single day on record was 24 inches on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Annually, an average of 53.6 inches of snow falls and there are 12.4 days with snowfalls greater than 2 inches, most frequently in January (3.2 days) or March (2.4 days).

The length of the growing season varies, with a median of 156 days above a 32 °F base temperature. The shortest growing season was 130 days while the longest was 181 days.

## **Geology and Topography**

Monson Lake State Park lies within the Alexandria Glacial Moraine Complex, which was laid down by glaciers more than 30,000 years ago. The rocks, sand, and gravel left by the last glacier make up the drift that formed the rest of the landscape. Melting ice in the glacial till formed Monson and Sunburg Lakes.

Most of the Minnesota River Prairie subsection – of which Monson Lake is a part – is covered by 100 to 400 feet of glacial drift<sup>7</sup>. Cretaceous shales, sandstones, and clays are the most common kinds of bedrock. Loamy ground moraine (till plain) is the dominant landform, but end moraines, and lake plains also occupy a significant area. Ground moraine topography is level to gently rolling. The landforms left by glaciation and erosion over time has played a significant role in development of the soils and vegetation found within the park.

## **Soils**

Well- to moderately well-drained loamy soils formed in gray calcareous till of Des Moines lobe origin are dominant in the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection. Some soils are clayey and sandy and gravelly soils are present locally, but these account for only a small percentage of soils in the subsection (Dept. of Soil Science, Univ. of Minnesota 1969, 1979, 1981). Cummins and Grigal (1981) show most of the subsection as Udolls and Aquolls on relatively level topography, generally with 15 feet or less of local relief. Dry prairie soils (primarily Ustolls) are also present on level to gently rolling topography. They occupy convex knobs on the landscape.

There are a variety of soil types in Monson Lake State Park all of which are the result of glacial activity depositing till overlying bedrock. The Esmond-Heimdal complex with 2-6% slopes is the most common, followed by Emrick loams and Bigstone and Parnell soils. Also present are Ortonville loams, the Lakepark-Parnell complex, and the Esmond-Heimdal complex with steeper 6-12% slopes.

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<sup>7</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. *Minnesota River Prairie Subsection*.  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecs/251Ba/index.html>

## Hydrology

### Surface Water

Monson Lake is part of the Chippewa River Watershed that feeds into the Minnesota River at Montevideo. Drainage patterns within the watershed have been severely altered in places with the elimination of numerous wetlands and extensive channelization<sup>8</sup>.

The Chippewa River Watershed contains a number of large lakes as well as hundreds of smaller lakes, located mostly in the northern and eastern sections of the watershed. Some of the major lakes include: Emily, Minnewaska, Norway, Florida, Chippewa, Lobster, Reno, Aaron, Moses, and Red Rock. These lakes have reasonably stable water levels because of good ground water contributions and are important recreational resources. Often connected to local creeks or streams, these lakes also provide an important storage function and have been successful in reducing downstream peak flows.

According to a 2005 survey<sup>9</sup>, Monson Lake covers 152 acres, is at most 21 feet deep, and has been described as a “moderately productive lake.” There are three small sized inlets that flow into Monson, on the northwest, northeast, and south shores. Monson’s outlet connects to West Sunburg Lake. The watershed is mostly row crops with small areas of woodland,



East side of Monson Lake.

*Photo courtesy of the Glacial Ridge Scenic Byway.*

grassland, pasture, and wetland. Agricultural runoff is the main source of nutrient pollution into Monson, though nutrient levels were low to moderate during 2005. Water clarity was good during the survey, despite the fact that blue-green algae blooms can be common during the mid- to late-summer. The lake, however, is not classified as impaired water; one that requires restrictions on its Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). It is also not considered “infested” relative to Eurasian milfoil or other highly invasive aquatic plants at the time of this writing.

Submergent vegetation is dense and diverse with northern milfoil, coontail, water moss, filamentous algae, and various pondweed species. Emergent vegetation is also abundant and varied consisting of bur reed, arrowhead, and various bulrush species, cattails and duckweeds. Invasive reed-canary grass scattered throughout the bay, shoreline, and island areas.

As noted above, algal blooms periodically occur in Monson Lake, which is due, in part, to the lake’s eutrophic conditions. Eutrophic lakes tend to be relatively shallow, warm and nutrient-rich waters. Lakes may be eutrophied by speeding up the rate of nutrient input, commonly by runoff of agricultural or residential fertilizers or occasionally through the introduction of human

<sup>8</sup> Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. *Minnesota River Basin: Chippewa River Watershed*.

<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/basins/mnr/river/watershed-chippewa.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. *Lake Information Report: Monson*.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=76003300>

wastes via failing septic systems. Such changes can occur over periods of decades and are only reversible if human-caused nutrient loading can be controlled.

Poor water quality in lakes like Monson can have a number of unwanted consequences including the decline of game fish populations and subsequent fishing opportunities, and changes in submergent and emergent vegetation. In addition, the unpleasant odor and appearance that results from eutrophication reduces the aesthetic appeal of the lakes. During the writing of the Monson Lake State Park Management Plan, local residents and resource managers alike expressed an interest in improving water quality in Monson Lake. For more information on Water Resources, please see pages 32 and 33.

### *Groundwater*

According to the U.S. Geological Survey's *Water Resources of the Chippewa River Watershed*, ground water is available almost anywhere within the watershed, principally from glacial drift. However, ground water is also available to a limited extent from Cretaceous and Precambrian rocks. Ground water movement within the glacial drift is mainly across the watershed from northeast to southwest, depth to water is quite variable (near surface to over 100 feet). Wells in the moraine more commonly yield "hard" bicarbonate type waters and those in the till plains the "softer" sulfate type. Many wells within the watershed, with the exception of those in the Benson area, are also high in iron, often exceeding 3 parts per million (ppm). Water containing more than 3-ppm iron is considered unsatisfactory for many uses.

## **Fisheries**

### *Monson Lake*

According to the DNR's Lake Information Report for Monson Lake, a fishery survey was conducted in 2005 to assess the fish community and aquatic habitat. Monson is managed primarily for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, black crappie, yellow perch, and bluegill. Walleye fingerlings or yearlings are generally stocked into Monson every other year.

Walleye numbers were moderate in 2005 (2.00 fish/gillnet) compared to the normal range for similar lakes, but low compared to the historical average catch rate (4.48 fish/gillnet). The average size of walleye was large (3.09 lbs, 19.1 in); the historical average weight is 1.97 lbs. Walleye growth rates for Monson were generally within or above the Spicer Area<sup>10</sup> normal ranges. The 2001 walleye year class comprised 33% of the 2005 walleye resurvey catch. Walleye natural reproduction in Monson is generally infrequent and insignificant based on previous fall and summer surveys. The largest walleye captured was 25.5 inches from the 2005 assessment.

Northern pike numbers were moderate in 2005 (4.75 fish/gillnet) compared to the normal range for similar lakes, but slightly higher than the historical average catch rate (4.08 fish/gillnet). The average size of northern pike was moderate (2.87 lbs, 23.7 in); the historical average weight is 2.55 lbs. Northern pike growth rates were below the Spicer Area normal ranges for ages 1-8. The 2000 northern pike year class comprised 30% of the 2005 northern

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<sup>10</sup> The Spicer Area is made up of portions of Kandiyohi, Swift, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, and Lyon counties.

pike resurvey catch. The largest northern pike captured was 32.2 inches from the 2005 assessment.

Largemouth bass numbers were moderate in the 2005 spring electrofishing survey (52.94 fish/hour) compared to the Spicer Area average catch rate (47.20 fish/hour). The historical average catch rate is 41.83 fish/hour for Monson. The average size of largemouth bass was large (2.44 lbs, 16.0 in); the historical average weight and length were 1.92 pounds and 13.8 inches respectively. Largemouth bass growth rates in Monson Lake were above the Spicer Area normal ranges for ages 1-8. The 1997, 1998, and 1999 year classes comprised 22%, 23%, and 20% respectively of the 2005 total largemouth bass spring electrofishing catch. The largest largemouth bass captured was 18.9 inches from the 2005 spring electrofishing survey

Black crappie numbers were moderate to abundant in 2005 (3.67 fish/trapnet) compared to the normal range for similar lakes. The historical average catch rate is 0.90 fish/trapnet for Monson. The average size of black crappie was small (0.14 lbs, 5.4 in); the historical average weight is 0.27 pounds. Growth rates in Monson were generally below the Spicer Area normal ranges for ages 1-3. The 2004 and 2003 black crappie year classes comprised 41% and 37% respectively of the 2005 black crappie resurvey catch.

Yellow perch numbers were abundant in 2005 (25.25 fish/gillnet) compared to the normal range for similar lakes. The historical average catch rate for yellow perch is 10.18 fish/gillnet for Monson. The average size was small (0.12 lbs, 6.2 in); the historical average weight is 0.27 pounds. Yellow perch growth rates in Monson were within the Spicer Area normal ranges for ages 1-4. The 2003-year class comprised 82% of the 2005 yellow perch resurvey catch.

Bluegill numbers were moderate in 2005 (14.11 fish/trapnet) compared to the normal range for similar lakes. The bluegill historical catch rate is 3.94 fish/trapnet for Monson. The 2005 bluegill average size was small to moderate (0.19 lbs, 5.6 in); the historical average weight is 0.28 pounds. Bluegill growth rates in Monson were within the Spicer Area normal ranges for ages 1-4, but above the normal ranges for ages 5-8. The 2000 and 2003 bluegill year classes comprised 28% and 32% respectively of the 2005 bluegill resurvey catch. The largest bluegill captured was 9.1 inches from the 2005 assessment.

Black bullhead numbers were moderate in 2005 (39.50 fish/gillnet) compared to the normal ranges for similar lakes. The black bullhead historical average catch rate is 128.10 fish/gillnet for Monson. The 2005 black bullhead average size was large (0.90 lbs, 11.11 in); the historical average weight is 0.67 pounds.

Current fish management activities on Monson include monitoring the fish population on a periodic basis, protecting aquatic vegetation through the permit process, participating in local watershed initiatives, and stocking various fish species as warranted. The Monson fishery will be sampled again in the summer of 2010 for all fish species.

### *West Sunburg Lake*

This lake, on the east side of the park, is approximately 178 acres. About 93 acres of West Sunburg is contained within the park's statutory boundary. It is also classified as a DNR protected water. Compared to Monson Lake, there is very little physio-chemical or biological data available on West Sunburg.

## Wildlife and Rare Species

Monson Lake State Park is located in the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection of the Ecological Classification System (ECS). One hundred-and-fifty-six of the 292 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified for Minnesota occur in the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection<sup>11</sup>. The park's existing plant communities provide habitat for many wildlife species including species of concern and threatened or rare species. Seven species have been



Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*). Photo courtesy of Iowa DNR.

documented in the park which are state listed or are considered regionally uncommon by taxon experts, all of which are birds. With the exception of the Henslow's sparrow and bald eagle, all are waterbirds.

Several species of wildlife that were present historically have vanished from the park due to extinction, changes in vegetation, and encroachment and fragmentation of habitat. Bison, passenger pigeons, and sharptail grouse are examples of wildlife that likely once lived in the park. On the other hand, several species now documented in the park were not present prior to European settlement including ring-necked pheasant, European starling, and the house finch.

Monson Lake State Park has been identified by the Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as being an important area that provides habitat and protection for SGCN within the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection. The remaining wetlands and grasslands of the Subsection offer high quality habitat for bald eagles, prairie chickens, upland sandpipers, Richardson's ground squirrels, Swainson's hawks, and others. This is also an important nesting area for prairie ducks and is a major migratory corridor in the Mississippi River Flyway.

Visitors to Monson Lake can see a variety of birds in the park including white pelicans, herons, western grebes, shorebirds, and waterfowl. As mentioned, Monson Lake is also a very popular fishing spot for bass, walleye, northern pike, and several species of panfish.

**Table 9: State Listed or Regionally Uncommon Species Documented at Monson Lake State Park**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	FED T, MN Special Concern
Henslow's Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus henslowii</i>	MN Endangered
American white pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	MN – special concern
Forster's tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	MN – special concern
Franklin's gull	<i>Larus pipixcan</i>	MN – special concern
Horned grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	MN – threatened
Trumpeter swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	MN – threatened

<sup>11</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2006. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Division of Ecological Services. [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/nrplanning/bigpicture/cwcs/profiles/minnesota\\_river\\_prairie.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/nrplanning/bigpicture/cwcs/profiles/minnesota_river_prairie.pdf)

## Vegetation

### *Pre-European Settlement Vegetation*

In general, the sections in Township 121 and 122 containing the park were tallgrass prairie, with groves of timber in the fire shadows of the lakes. Land Surveyor John Ryan (1856) said "Timber of oak, elm, lind (basswood) & ironwood was situated on the shore of Lake Monson in the NE ¼ [of the township], this quarter being the only area in the township with a notable sum of timber." The surface he describes as gently rolling prairie.

### *Current Land Cover*

Today, agriculture is the dominant land use in the Minnesota River Prairie subsection. Based on herbarium records, Wheeler et al. (1992) found upland prairie species to be common throughout most of the subsection. Remnant stands of tallgrass prairie are rare.

Monson Lake State Park itself is made up primarily of basswood-bur oak-green ash forest, prairie bulrush-arrowhead marsh, and young forest. Common buckthorn, an invasive species, is present throughout the park, though some work has been done to curb its growth. The marsh system areas that have been identified on inland portions of the park are of low quality and are infested with invasive reed canary grass.

## Natural Plant Community Classification<sup>12</sup> of Monson Lake State Park

### *Mesic Hardwood Forest System*

#### Basswood-Bur Oak-(Green Ash) Forest (MHs38b)

*Mesic hardwood forests on hummocky topography or near lakes on till plains and stagnation moraines; slopes are generally not steep. Canopy most often is dominated by basswood, bur oak, or green ash, with northern red oak abundant in a few stands. Subcanopy and shrub layer have abundant ironwood with occasional basswood. In general, MHs38b can often be distinguished from the other types in this class by the presence of abundant green ash in the canopy and abundant Virginia waterleaf in the ground layer.*

### *Marsh System*

#### Prairie Bulrush - Arrowhead Marsh (MRp93)

*Emergent marsh communities typically dominated by bulrushes, bur reeds, arrowheads, or spikerushes. Present along lakeshores and stream borders. MRp93 develops in settings where standing water is present most of the year, providing conditions favorable to hydrophytic plants. The community is most common along shorelines where exposure to waves hinders accumulation of peat and formation of floating mats.*

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<sup>12</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (2005). Field Guide to the Native Plant Communities of Minnesota: The Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province. Ecological Land Classification Program, Minnesota County Biological Survey, and Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program. MNDNR St. Paul, MN.

## Recommendations for Desired Future Conditions

### *Native Plant Communities and Rare Plants*

The long-term goals for Monson Lake's native plant communities, rare plants, wildlife, significant natural features and cultural resources are listed below.

The long-term goals for Monson Lake State Park's land cover and rare plants are to:

- Restore and maintain the quality of the Basswood-Bur Oak (Green Ash) Forest in the park.
- Reconstruct and maintain native plant communities on undeveloped areas of the park.
- Conduct a search for rare plants to identify any that may be found within the park boundary.
- Maintain old fields/croplands in herbaceous vegetation until reconstruction of native plant communities can begin.
- Periodically monitor native plant communities, particularly high quality areas, to insure that terrestrial invasive plants are not invading them or that these communities are not otherwise being degraded (e.g. lack of fire in fire-dependent communities).
- Review and update the status of listed species where necessary.
- Map locations of terrestrial invasive plant infestations throughout the park.

### *Native Wildlife*

The long-term goals for management of wildlife at Monson Lake State Park are to:

- Preserve or restore populations of native vertebrates and invertebrates in the park.
  - Over 80% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are "important in providing habitat for wildlife."
- Conduct inventories of reptiles, mammals and selected invertebrates.
- Manage populations of deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not overly impacted.

### *Water Resources*

As a large landowner on the shores of Monson and West Sunburg lakes, the park plays an important but limited role in the management of the lake's resources. The Division has the ability to moderate negative lake inputs from the property by maintaining the appropriate natural land cover within the park and adjacent to the lake.

Among other benefits, maintaining or restoring native, natural landscapes within the park helps to reduce erosion and stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff can negatively affect water quality by carrying excess nutrients and sediment into adjacent water bodies. Natural vegetation, especially along the lakeshore, allows rainwater to infiltrate the soil and nourish plants and animals instead of carrying excess nutrients into the lake.

The Division of Parks and Recreation – and the Department of Natural Resources more generally – strives to maintain good water quality where it exists and to improve it where it does not. Shoreland Best Management Practices (BMPs) are followed within the park system and on other Department properties.

The Department also encourages landowners – including residences, businesses, communities, and others – situated on or near water bodies to follow Shoreland BMPs and

maintain sustaining shoreland ecosystems. The way a landowner manages their property and the wastewater that comes from it can have a major impact on water quality downstream, even if they do not live directly on the shoreline.<sup>13</sup> Drain tiles, ditches, storm sewers, paved roads, and shallow ground water can carry pollutant loads from residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas into lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

A healthy lake is a functioning ecosystem. When shoreline property owners and others living in a watershed take steps to ensure the lake's ecological health, the ecosystem is better able to function. The DNR encourages lakeshore owners manage their shoreline in a natural condition so that the fish and wildlife populations of the lake stay healthy and abundant, and water quality is maintained or improved.

The long-term goals for Monson Lake State Park's water resources are to:

- Regularly consult with DNR's Divisions of Waters, Fish and Wildlife, and Trails and Waterways on how common goals for improving the water quality of Monson and West Sunburg lakes can be achieved.
  - Almost 70% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are "important in protecting water quality."
- Work with the Chippewa River Watershed Project (CRWP), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Swift County, and other interested partners to improve water quality.
- Continue to implement Shoreland Best Management Practices (BMPs) at the park.
- Inform nearby landowners of Shoreland BMPs and encourage them to implement them.



Ice fishing is a popular activity on Monson Lake in the winter.  
*Photo courtesy MN DNR.*

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<sup>13</sup> University of Minnesota Extension Service. *Protecting Our Waters: Understanding Shoreland BMPs*.  
<http://www.shorelandmanagement.org/depth/bmp.pdf>



**Monson Lake State Park**  
Map 2: Land Cover

**Legend**

-  State Park Statutory Boundary
- State Parks System Level Land Cover**
-  Marsh System
-  Mesic Hardwood Forest System
-  Non-Natural System (Old Fields)
-  Facilities System (Campground, etc.)
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  MN DOT County Roads





**Monson Lake State Park**  
 Map 3: Desired Future Conditions

**Legend**

-  State Park Statutory Boundary
- State Parks System Level Land Cover**
-  Marsh System
-  Mesic Hardwood Forest System
-  Upland Prairie System
-  Facilities (Campground, roads, etc.)
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  MN DOT County Roads

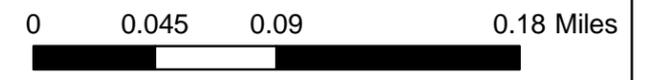




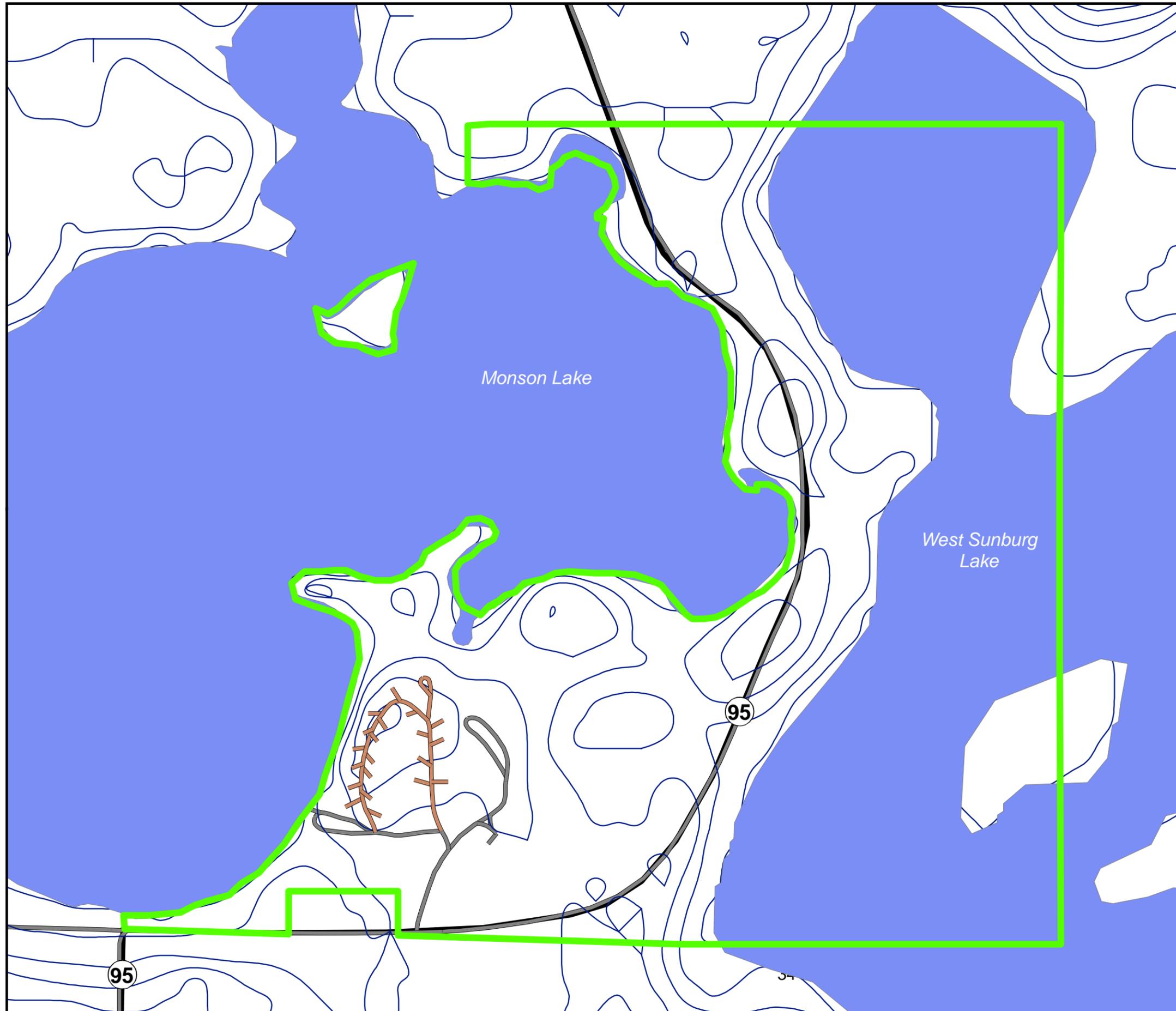
**Monson Lake State Park**  
 Map 4: Significant Areas and Rare Features

**Legend**

-  Rare Natural and Cultural Features
-  State Park Statutory Boundary
- State Parks System Level Land Cover**
-  Marsh System
-  Mesic Hardwood Forest System
-  Non-Natural System (Old Fields)
-  Facilities System (Campground, etc.)
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  State Park Campground Loops
-  MN DOT County Roads



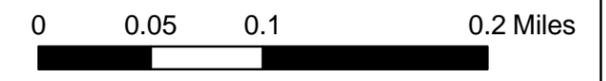
MN Department of Natural Resources  
 Division of Parks and Recreation



**Monson Lake State Park**  
 Map 5: 5' Contours

**Legend**

-  State Park Statutory Boundary
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  5' Contours
-  State Park Roads
-  State Park Campground Loops
-  MN DOT County Roads



## CULTURAL RESOURCES

The land which now makes up Monson Lake State Park was inhabited – at least seasonally – by American Indians prior to Euro-American settlement. The State Park Cultural Resource Program has identified three archaeological sites in the park, one of which is a Woodland period (1000 BC – 1000 AD) American Indian habitation site. Stone tools found at the site suggest trade or transportation from a broad range of locations including the western Great Plains (obsidian), north-central North Dakota (Knife River Flint), and west-central Wisconsin (Hixton Quartzite). The other archaeological sites identified within the park were established after Euro-Americans began to settle in Minnesota.

Prior to Euro-American settlement, the Dakota (Sioux) Nation covered a broad expanse in modern-day central, western, and southern Minnesota. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, westward-moving settlers and the US government compressed Dakota lands through a series of treaties, the most important of which were signed in 1851 at Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. The treaties left the Dakota two reservations bordering the upper Minnesota River. Besides resenting the location of the reserves, the Dakota believed that they had been cheated in other ways during the transactions in 1851 and again in 1858.<sup>14</sup>

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1861 the Swedish immigrant families of Anders and Daniel Broberg purchased 160 acres of land in Hayes Township<sup>15</sup>. The area where the Brobergs – and neighboring Lundborg and Oman families – began to put down their roots was known as the West Lake Settlement and includes the area where Monson Lake State Park is now located. This area, on the extreme eastern border of Swift County, had what most early pioneer families were looking for: timber, water, and prairie land.

On August 17, 1862, a small band of Dakota Indians clashed with settlers in Acton Township, effectively starting the US-Dakota War. Three days later, the Brobergs found themselves squarely in the middle of it. On that day, Dakota Indians attacked a group of pioneers in West Lake Settlement, and thirteen members of the Broberg and Lundborg families were killed. Anna Stina Broberg, then 16, and her cousin Peter Broberg were the only two members of the families to survive the attack.



Broberg and Lundborg Memorial.  
*Photo courtesy of Glacial Ridge Scenic Byway.*

In 1917, a marker to memorialize the event was placed at the Broberg cabin site by Peter Broberg. In 1927, the Monson Lake Memorial Association was established. Later that year, the association purchased two acres of land from Albert Monson. The two-acre private memorial “park” was maintained by members of the association and was used for annual observances to commemorate the memories of the West Lake Settlement victims. The original Memorial “Park” was dedicated on August 21, 1927 and the dedication was attended by over 10,000 people.

<sup>14</sup> Carley, Kenneth (1976). *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War*.

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2007. *A Brief History of Monson Lake State Park*. Division of Parks and Recreation, Interpretive Services.

In 1935, during the Great Depression, members of the Monson Lake Memorial Association appealed to Minnesota State Emergency Relief Administration to consider funding the acquisition of additional lands at the site. This land, which included the Memorial “Park”, would be used to establish Monson Lake Memorial State Park. The primary purpose of Monson Lake Memorial State Park was to commemorate, interpret and honor the local pioneers who were victims of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

Monson Lake Memorial State Park was originally a park in name only. This changed in 1936 when the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) began work at what was to become Monson Lake State Park. The primary work accomplished was the construction of a combination building (picnic shelter) and a sanitation building. In 1956, the name Monson Lake Memorial State Park was changed to Monson Lake State Park.

In 1989, 31-acres of Monson Lake State Park were listed on the National Historic Register as a Historic Resources District. The historic district was listed for its significance as representative of the massive public works projects of the 1930s and 1940s. It is also one of four Minnesota State Parks originally termed as a Memorial State Park, another contributing factor to the Historic Register nomination. The nomination included the two structures built by the VCC, and the gravel entrance road and parking lot built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

### **Recommendations for Cultural Resource Management**

The long-term goals for cultural resources at Monson Lake State Park are to:

- Protect all known cultural resources, including VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District and identified archaeological sites.
- Retrofit VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District to reflect the character of the era in which they were built.
- Configure trails and other developments to avoid or limit impacts to cultural resources.
- Conduct mitigation, in those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, that preserves the artifacts and information.
- Manage native plant communities and invasive species with appropriate methods to preserve the landscape around cultural resource sites.



Historic VCC-built Monson Lake Combination Building (Picnic Shelter).  
*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*

# INTERPRETIVE SERVICES

## Introduction

The purpose of interpretive services is to provide first-hand, resource-based accessible programs and activities that work to create a sense of connection with and stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage. Telling the park's unique stories and illuminating the changing relationship between people and landscapes over time may accomplish this. Division of Parks and Recreation interpretive staff work in collaboration with other Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) divisions, agencies, educational institutions, local communities and citizens to develop programs and activities that will enhance the visitor's experience by increasing their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural and cultural resources.

## Division of Parks and Recreation Interpretive Services Mission

*To provide accessible interpretive services which create a sense of stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage by illuminating the changing relationships between people and landscapes over time.*

## Division of Parks and Recreation Interpretive Services Goals

The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation views interpretation as a site specific, DNR sponsored, communication process using recreational and environmental experiences to reveal the meanings and relationships of our natural and cultural heritage. To fulfill the DNR's legislative obligation to provide environmental education and interpretation in state parks, the Division's interpretive programs aim to:

- Promote increased understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources in Minnesota.
- Assist in protecting each State Park's resources.
- Promote public understanding of and support for the DNR and the Division of Parks and Recreation.
- Increase public awareness of critical environmental problems and challenges on a local, state, national and worldwide scope.

## Goal and Objectives for Interpretive Services at Monson Lake State Park

Based on the Minnesota State Park System's Interpretive Services Plan and an understanding of the park's resources, the following goal and objectives have been developed by the Regional Naturalist.

### *Goal*

Visitors to Monson Lake State Park will be made aware of, come to appreciate and understand the scenic landscapes, the human impact on both lakes and the surrounding landscape, seasonal recreational opportunities and wildlife viewing opportunities found in the park. Through this process, they will take ownership in the Park and work to protect, preserve and enhance the Park's resources.

## Objectives

- Volunteer and guest presenter interpretive programs offered will focus on the park's interpretive themes.
- Visitors will have opportunities to learn about the park's native plant and wildlife communities.
- Visitors will have opportunities to learn about human presence and impact on park resources.
- Visitors will have opportunities to learn outdoor recreation skills.
- Visitors will have opportunities to learn nature observation skills.
- Visitors/volunteers will have opportunities learn about and work on selected resource management activities.
- Visitors will have an opportunity to learn about the important historical events that took place at the park.

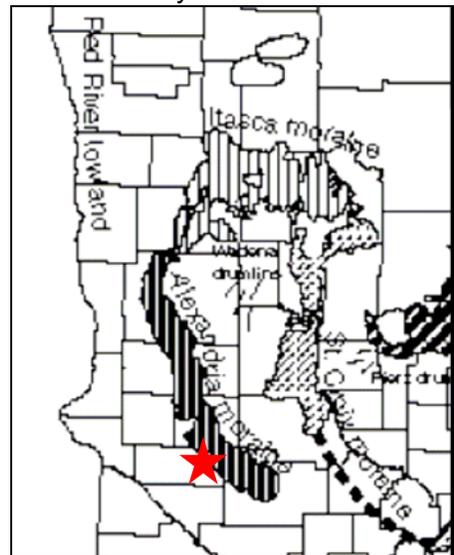
## Primary Interpretive Themes

Monson Lake State Park provides opportunities for visitors to learn about native and restored natural communities, and recreate in and around Monson Lake and the Alexandria Moraine Complex.

### *Natural Communities and Wildlife*

Geology and humans shaped this landscape and continue to do so today.

- The lakes and hills we see today are the result of the geologic forces of deposition and erosion during the Ice Age.
- How have glacial activities shaped the landscape?
- How have the natural communities changed since the end of the Ice Age?
- How did fire shape pre-European settlement vegetation in Monson Lake State Park?
- Invasive plant species degrade Monson Lake's native communities.
- How is the park restoring and reconstructing natural communities in the park?
- Prescribed fire is a tool used to manage and restore the park's natural communities.
- Monson Lake State Park is habitat for several rare and many sensitive native plants.
- What steps is the park taking to protect its natural communities?
- What affect will climate change have on the park, Monson Lake and the Alexandria Moraine Complex?



Location of Monson Lake State Park (star) in relation to the Alexandria Moraine.  
*Figure courtesy of the Minnesota Geological Survey.*

### *Human Presence and Impact in the Alexandria Moraine Complex*

Monson Lake State Park provides a window into the cultural and natural changes of the Alexandria Moraine Complex and surrounding area.

- Evidence of early people that lived and hunted in the area since the end of the great ice age is abundant.
- Ever since the Europeans came into this area they began an ever-increasing rate of change on the people and natural resources of the Alexandria Moraine Complex.
- What attracted early people to Monson Lake?
- How have we changed the Monson Lake and Alexandria Moraine Complex?
- What is causing the degradation of water quality in Monson Lake?
- What can we do to improve the water quality of Monson Lake?
- Everyone lives in a watershed.
- Why was Monson Lake State Park established?

### *Outdoor Recreation and Nature Skills*

Monson Lake State Park provides great opportunities for visitors to learn about and recreate in the Alexandria Moraine Complex.

- Monson Lake State Park provides some of the best bird and wildlife watching in the area.
- How can I learn about the park's birds, plants and wildflowers and wildlife in Monson Lake State Park, and in the Alexandria Moraine Complex and Monson Lake?
- Monson Lake State Park's abundant wildflowers offer photo opportunities throughout the warm season.
- Monson Lake State Park's trails provide opportunities for hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the area.
- Monson Lake State Park provides opportunities for observing nature, scenic vistas, and experiencing solitude.
- What trails would you recommend to explore and enjoy the park?

### *Human History and the Development of Monson Lake State Park*

Monson Lake State Park was developed because of important local historic events.

- The tragic event of the West Lake Settlement leads to the establishment of Monson Lake State Park.
- What were the causes of the West Lake tragedy and how were they related to the US-Dakota War of 1862.
- The Monson Lake Memorial Association improved Monson Lake State Park.
- The work of the VCC and WPA made Monson Lake a modern State Park.

### **Existing Interpretive Services**

The Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan (1995) places Monson Lake State Park in Group 1. "Parks in this group have a resource significance that is medium to low and visitor use that is low. This park's interpretive efforts focus on self-guided interpretation such as trails or wayside exhibits. It may merit occasional programming. "

### *Naturalist-led Programs and Activities*

- Currently there is not a naturalist assigned to the park and there are no naturalist-led programs and activities.

### *Non-Personal Interpretation*

- A Minnesota Biomes interpretive panel and a Monson Lake State Park Windows to Minnesota interpretive panel are in a two-sided information and interpretive kiosk located by the park office
- Bulletin Boards located in the picnic area and office are available and used for posters and interpretive messages, notices, and other visitor information.
- The park's Bird Checklist is available in the park office and on-line from the MN DNR state park website.
- A woodland wildflower interpretive sign is located at the trailhead at the east corner of the picnic area parking lot.

### **Recommendations for Interpretive Services**

- Use the state park as a gateway to the outdoors and the Department of Natural Resources by incorporating the priorities, key messages and initiatives of other DNR divisions into State Parks' guided and self-guided services, where appropriate.
  - A strong majority of respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* said that "explor(ing) and discover(ing) new things" was the most important experience or motivation for visiting state parks.
- Develop one or more informational kiosks that describe the park's historical significance, the role that groups like the VCC, WPA, and Monson Lake Memorial Association have played at the park, and the park's trail opportunities.
- Develop a series of temporary and on-site interpretive signs that tell the resource management stories in the park such as: prescribed burns, prairie reconstruction, savanna restoration and management, wildlife species re-introductions, and invasive/alien species management.
- Develop park-specific tools that enable visitors of all ages to learn about the park's flora, fauna, and water resources including a Wildflower Kit, Discovery Kit, and several Kids Nature Explorer Kits.
- Use volunteers to work at the park office during busy times to answer questions.
- Develop "first stop for park visitors" orientation, information, and interpretive exhibits of the park and area that are incorporated with the park office.
- Develop a park education program that teaches nature skills- building such as: fishing, birding, tree and wildflower identification, nature photography, story telling and writing, etc.
- Develop a volunteer program that trains and engages citizens to work on select resource management activities such as invasive/alien species management, wildlife or native plant community monitoring, restoration and reconstruction.
- Develop a park education program that teaches watershed conservation and protection methods and techniques for clean water in Monson Lake.
- Consider charging a fee for selected "value added" interpretive and recreation programs.
- Use volunteers to develop a guest presenter program schedule for the warm and cool weather seasons based on the park's major themes.

# RECREATIONAL USE AND VISITOR SERVICES

Providing a spectrum of recreational opportunities is fundamental to the mission of the Division of Parks and Recreation. The park planning process provides the opportunity to determine what types of recreation people have an interest in and then evaluate whether those options fit appropriately within the park's resource base and complement versus duplicate what is available within the surrounding region.

## **Guided by Statute**

Recreation is an important component of the state park system. According to chapter 86A of the Minnesota Statutes, the Division of Parks and Recreation shall provide appropriate recreation to "utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality on the scene..." The statute goes on to say, "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." The specific types of recreational opportunities available will be tailored to each park's unique resources and topography.

## **Access to All**

Minnesota state parks are for the use and enjoyment of all of its citizens. Accordingly, state and local governments – including the state park system – may not discriminate on the basis of disability (Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, a28 CRF Part 36). That is, access must be provided to park services, programs and activities and all services – when viewed in their entirety – must be usable by individuals with disabilities. This includes facilities like parking, restrooms, drinking water, recreation facilities, and pedestrian access routes. Pedestrian access routes are continuous unobstructed paths that connect accessible elements within a picnic area, camping area, or designated trailhead, like the paths that connect a parking lot to a picnic or camping area, a picnic area to a sanitation building, or accessible picnic tables to other accessible elements.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidance for accommodating the natural environment's variable character when providing accessibility. The ADA-delineated modifications and exceptions are applied as necessary to maintain the integrity of an outdoor recreation setting, accommodating such elements as hydrology, terrain, surface characteristics and vegetation. Information regarding accessibility will be available through the use of brochures and on the DNR website ([www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)) to guide visitor expectations.

## **Visitor Expectations: The 2007 Minnesota State Park Survey**

This survey indicated that state park visitors, in general, want to have experiences that add value to their lives. Visitors seek out experiences where they have the opportunity to have fun, enjoy natural scenery, get away from life's usual demands, enjoy smells and sounds of nature, and spend time with family. The activities that appear to be most important include hiking/walking, observing/photographing nature, sightseeing, picnicking, and shopping in the

parks nature store. In addition, learning-related activities are a very important part of overall the experience.

Visitors generally support recreation-based and education-based opportunities that are aligned with the park system's core mission including expanding hiking opportunities and self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits. At the same time, the report says that visitors don't support expanding recreation or development if it harms the existing natural and cultural resources.

The survey also shows that visitors to the park system come from all parts of the state, and all age classes and socioeconomic levels. State parks are visited more frequently by middle-aged adults and children, and less frequently by minority groups and young adults. Annual attendance at Minnesota State Parks varies depending on seasonal availability of camping and weather. Throughout the park system, the majority of visitors are day visitors (86.3%) with overnight visitors (camping and lodging) making up 13.6% of overall use.

Most visitors regularly voice satisfaction with their state park experience. The proportion of all visitors who thought their expectations were satisfied (95.14%) was the highest since survey records were kept, beginning in 1987. The satisfaction rate plays an important role in the DNR's Conservation Agenda and measures a fundamental component of the Division of Parks and Recreation's mission: providing high quality, rewarding experiences to state park visitors.

## **The Strategic Plan, 2006-2011**

Though this management plan considers park management and development over a 20-year timeframe, it is important to consider Division-wide goals proximate to the writing of the plan. As this plan was being written, the Minnesota State Park's 2006-2011 Strategic Plan<sup>16</sup> was published. Divided into five core areas – one being Recreation – the Strategic Plan is intended to provide guidance to the Division over a six-year timeframe.

In addition to covering topics like interpretation, natural and cultural resource management and others, the Strategic Plan outlines a series of desired outcomes and goals for recreation at state parks. Most importantly, the Division will maintain the loyalty and satisfaction rates of its current visitors and attract new user groups. The Strategic Plan also delineates a series of goals to help accomplish this and other desired outcomes.

### **Goals**

- Increase overnight and day use in order to more effectively utilize the existing infrastructure capacity.
- Maintain high visitor satisfaction during a time when traditional services are being reduced or service delivery methods are being changed.
- Keep visitors safe, reduce conflicts among visitors and keep the natural and cultural resources intact for future generations.
- Evaluate the type and amount of recreation offerings in state parks and recreation areas.
- Minimize the impacts of specific user groups on natural and cultural resources in order to meet the Division's mandate.
- Evaluate potential new additions to the state park system, including expansion of existing units or proposals for new units. Evaluations will follow statutory direction to

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<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2007. *Strategic Plan 2006-2011*. Division of Parks and Recreation.

“preserve an accurate representation of Minnesota’s natural and historical heritage...provide an adequate supply of scenic, accessible, and usable lands and waters to accommodate the outdoor recreation needs of Minnesota’s citizens.” It will also follow the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda for a sustainable network of natural lands.

- Provide infrastructure improvements or new infrastructure development in order to meet changes in recreation needs, generate revenue, augment visitor’s education and understanding of the park or to protect natural and cultural resources, and scenic beauty.
- Determine how much capital is needed annually to protect the investment of the state park system infrastructure.

## **Existing Recreational Resources and Facilities**

### *Day use*

#### Contact Station/Park Office

This building serves as the first point of contact for visitors entering the park, though it is not open regular hours. When the office is open, visitors may obtain park information and purchase firewood and ice. Otherwise, visitors are able to obtain information and register for a daily or overnight permit by self-registering. A bulletin board displaying the park map and self-registration information is attached to the front of the building. This building houses the park’s administrative office and maintenance shop.

#### Access to Monson Lake

A popular boat ramp is available within the park. Two canoes and a rowboat are available for rent next to the boat ramp and fishing pier. Though there is a fair amount of parking for vehicles and trailers near the boat ramp itself, the park campground does not have adequate auxiliary parking space available for parking boat trailers.

#### Picnic Area

The park offers a picnic area including a large, covered stone shelter. There are numerous picnic tables available, along with standing grills and fire rings. A bathroom and shower building with sinks and running water (in-season) is available, between the picnic shelter and campground. One vault toilet nearby is available year-round, adjacent to the parking area. A horseshoe pit and opportunities for unstructured recreational play (e.g. baseball, soccer, football, Frisbee, etc.) are available here.

## Overnight use

### Rustic Campground

Monson Lake State Park has a 20-site campground that offers modern restrooms, showers, and water. No campsites offer electrical service. Camping is available between the fishing opener in the spring through Labor Day in the summer. Each campsite has the standard state park amenities including a picnic table, fire ring and parking spur. No sites are handicapped accessible at this time. A handicapped accessible sanitation building with showers and flush toilets is available in-season.

## Trails

There is one mile of trail within Monson Lake State Park providing visitors with limited trail experiences. The trail provides opportunities for hiking and a portion of it has interpretive signage. In the winter, snowshoeing is allowed anywhere in the park when sufficient levels of snow are available.

In addition, a canoe route begins at the park's boat ramp on Monson Lake and ends in West Sunburg Lake on the park's east side. A short portage (28 rods or about 463 feet) between Monson Lake and West Sunburg Lake is required.



Interpretive Trail.  
*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*

## **Recommendations for Recreational Use and Visitor Services**

### *Overarching Goals*

- Provide outdoor recreational activities that feature the park's resources that can be accommodated without negatively impacting the natural or cultural resources, that do not detract from the views, and that preserve a sense of place.
- Incorporate strategies developed as a result of the 2007 Visitor Survey and the marketing programs to increase visitor use of Monson Lake State Park.

## **Day Use**

### *Goals*

- Increase day use of Monson Lake State Park.
- Continue to develop partnerships and outreach opportunities with appropriate organizations, including the Monson Lake State Park Improvement Association, local chambers of commerce, and regional tourism associations.
- Provide access and use for visitors of all physical capabilities, with facilities that meet ADA standards.

### *Recommendations*

- Maintain a portion of the space between the park entrance and the picnic shelter open for aesthetic purposes and unstructured play.
- Develop a fish cleaning facility separate from the picnic shelter and closer to the Monson Lake water access.
- Highlight the unique architecture and historic nature of the picnic shelter on the Department website and via brochures.

## **Overnight Use**

### *Goals*

- Enhance the quality of the visitor experience.
- Maintain rustic appeal with minimal development visible.
- Provide an adequate number of campsites and facilities that meet ADA standards.

## **Camping**

### *Goals*

- Develop capacity to accommodate increased numbers of visitors and a wider variety of camping styles.
- Redevelop some existing sites to meet accessibility requirements and to meet demands for this style of camping.
- Increase comfort of visitors at the bathroom building.

### *Recommendations*

- Enhance some campsites through the addition of electrical service and redevelop some sites to allow for vehicle pull-through, while retaining the rustic character of the park and the integrity of the 31-acre Historic Resources District.
- Consider the development of additional electrical sites and/or camper cabins in appropriate areas.
  - Over 80% of campers responding to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* support parks providing “additional rustic camper cabins.”
- Assess potential site locations and consider development of an RV sanitation station.
- Develop one or more accessible campsites from existing sites and upgrade access to drinking water to meet ADA requirements.
- Extend the overnight camping season beyond the Fishing Opener to Labor Day weekend timeframe to provide fall camping opportunities for hunters, bird enthusiasts, and others.
- Develop new overnight facilities if the park boundary is expanded, including one or more canoe campsites, one or more walk-in campsites, a rental cabin, and/or a primitive group camp.

## **Trails**

### *Goals*

- Provide visitors with varying interests and physical capabilities with a variety of trail opportunities to explore the park and learn about its natural and cultural resources.
- Identify and address potential resource impact issues along park trails.

### *Recommendations*

- Maintain existing trails in a safe and sustainable condition.
- Consider the development of new trails if the park boundary is expanded.
  - Over three-quarters of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* support parks providing “more hiking opportunities.”
- Monitor local, county and state efforts to plan for trail systems, and participate in those that are consistent with uses in the park.

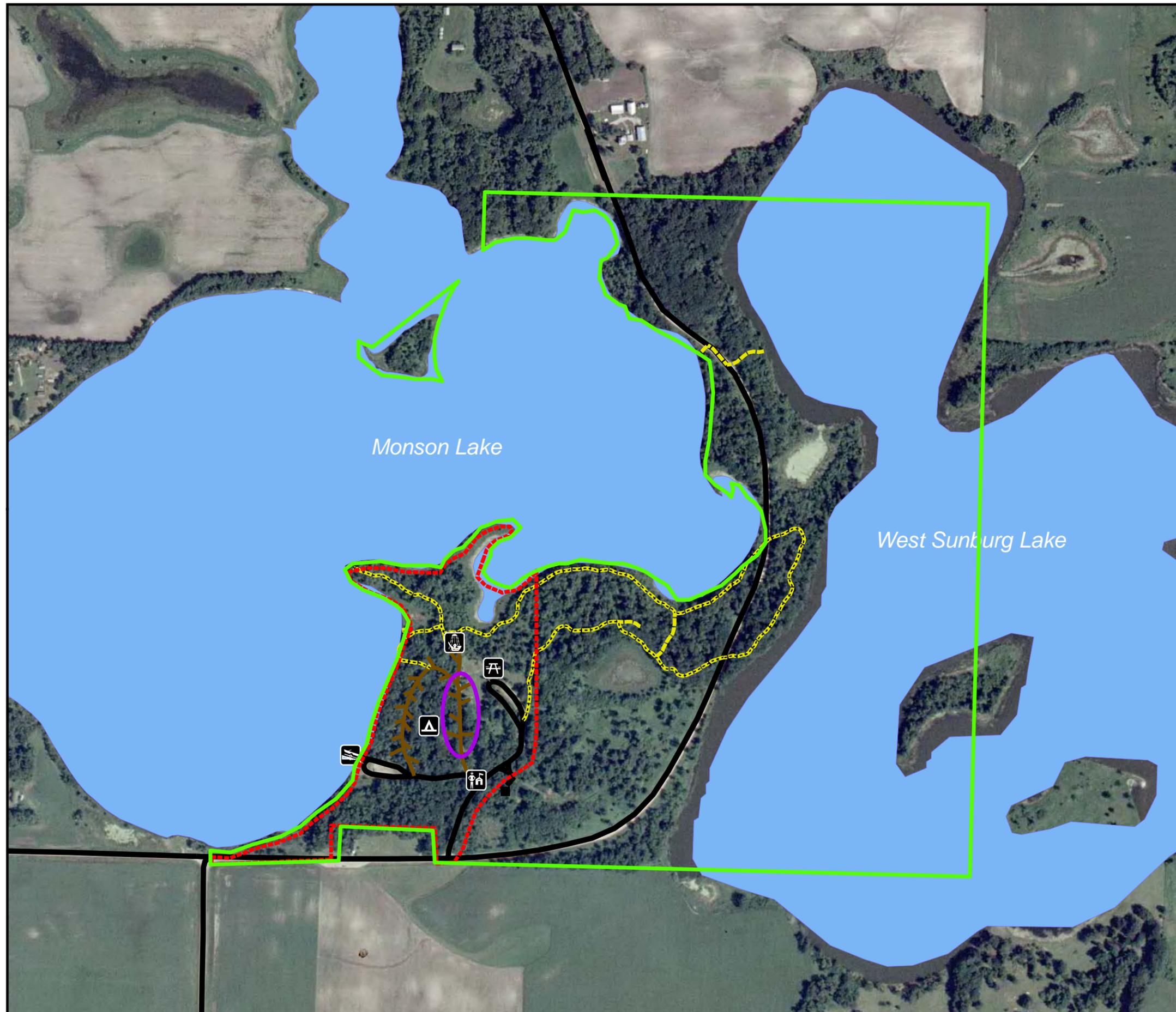
## **Contact Station/Park Office**

### *Goals*

- Provide a facility that meets the needs and interests of visitors, and provides a productive work environment and adequate storage space to accomplish administrative, supervisory and public contact needs of staff.
- Provide a level of customer service that meets or exceeds visitor expectations for park staffing.

### *Recommendations*

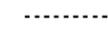
- Consider extending staff hours at the park to accommodate a longer camping season, if one were instituted.



### Monson Lake State Park

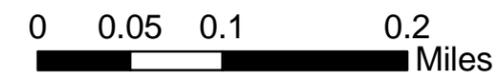
Map 6: Historic Resources District and Recreation Opportunities

#### Legend

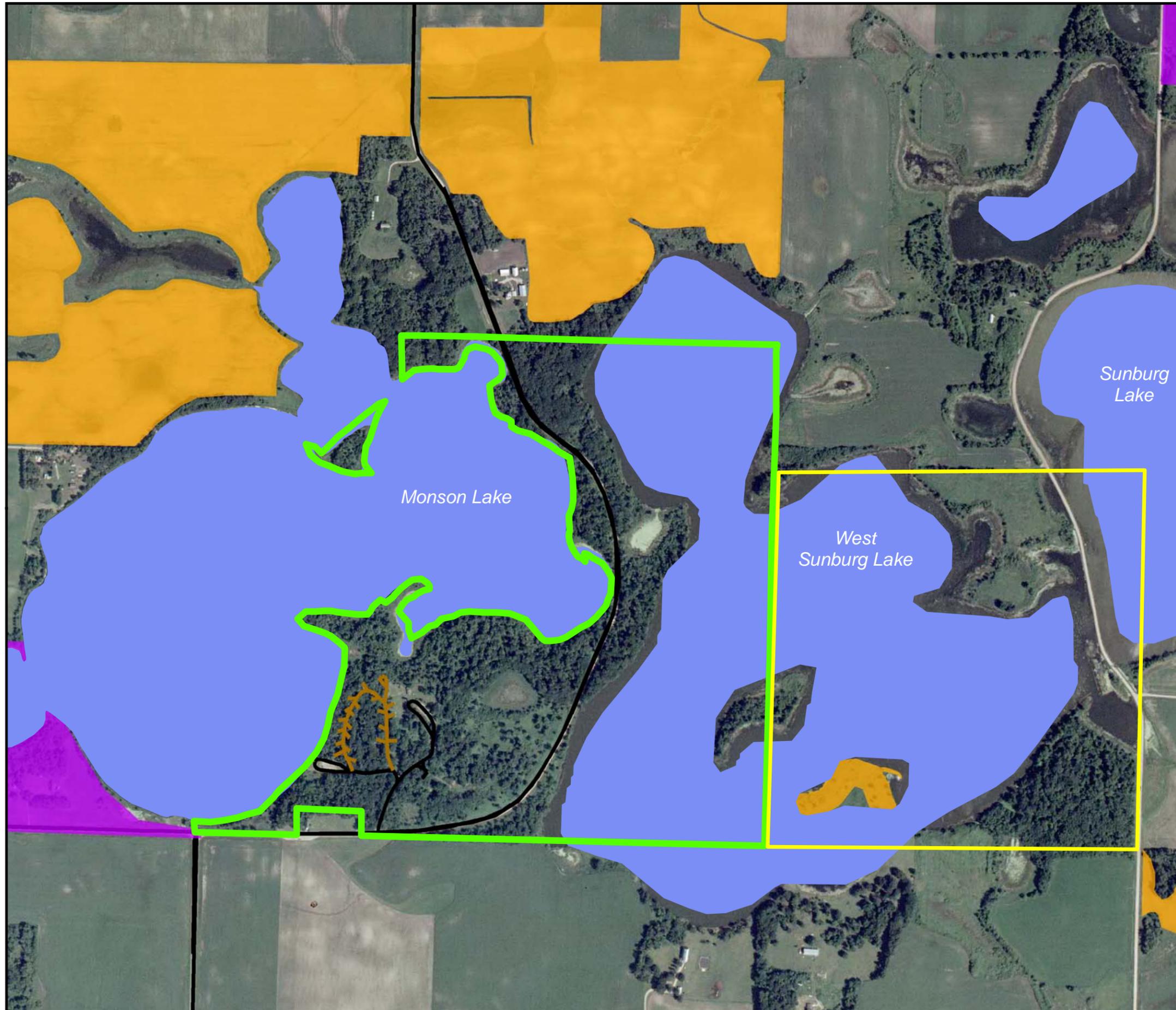
-  State Park Statutory Boundary
-  Historic Resources District
-  Proposed Electrification Project
-  Lake or River
-  Interpretive Trails
-  Hiking Trails/ Portage
-  Campground Loops
-  State Park and County Roads

#### Recreation Facilities

-  Campground
-  Boat Ramp
-  Picnic Area
-  Contact Station
-  Bathroom and Shower Building



MN Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Recreation



**Monson Lake State Park**  
 Map 7: Park Boundary and  
 Adjacent Lands

**Legend**

-  State Park Statutory Boundary
-  Proposed Boundary Expansion
-  Wildlife Management Area
-  Conservation Reserve Program
-  Lake or River
-  State Park and County Roads



# PARK BOUNDARY

## Introduction

The Minnesota State Legislature establishes state park boundaries. The park statutory boundary defined in Minnesota Statutes provides staff, citizens and policy makers with a common understanding of which lands are appropriate for inclusion in the park. It is the current policy of Division of Parks and Recreation to include within a statutory boundary only those lands where the landowner has agreed to inclusion. The DNR is then authorized to negotiate with willing sellers for acquisition of lands contained within that statutory boundary. Being within a statutory park boundary does not have any impact on the landowner. He or she retains full ownership and rights to the land unless he or she decides to sell to the park.

As a part of the planning process, DNR staff and the Technical Advisory Team review the existing state park land base, and discuss what boundary alterations should be considered to ensure that natural and cultural resources are protected, and recreational and educational opportunities consistent with the park's mission can be provided. The Division of Parks and Recreation review those suggestions and at such time as a boundary modification the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will contact landowners affected and ask for documented support. Local units of government will also be contacted during the process.

## Background

### *Existing Park Statutory Boundary*

Monson Lake State Park includes 190.46 acres within its statutory boundary. Of that acreage, 187.46 acres is owned by the state of Minnesota, while 3 acres within the boundary remain in private ownership.

### *Adjacent Land Use*

A substantial portion of land immediately to the north of Monson Lake State Park is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP is a voluntary land retirement program that helps farmers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and protect ground and surface water. CREP is an offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the country's largest private-lands environmental improvement program.



There is an abundance of land near the park in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).  
*Photo by MN DNR.*

## **Park Boundary Modification Process**

DNR staff and Technical Advisory Team carefully considered the opportunities for boundary adjustments at Monson Lake State Park. Committee and team members are interested in preserving and buffering natural resources, wildlife habitat, and viewsheds to preserve the sense of wildness within the park from the potential impacts of future development. The following criteria provide examples of how the park's natural resources, wildlife habitat, and interpretive and recreational opportunities can be protected and/or enhanced.

Criteria defined for addition of land to park include:

- Buffer key areas adjacent to the park.
- Preserve important viewsheds to protect sense of place within the park.
- Protect or provide opportunities to enhance significant habitat, natural resources and cultural sites.
- Provide additional opportunities for recreation.

### *Goal*

As the area around the park is threatened by development, preserving the surrounding natural areas, wildlife habitat and viewsheds will serve an important role in preserving and protecting Monson Lake State Park.

## **Proposed Park Statutory Boundary Additions and Deletions**

### *Addition*

One parcel with four owners totaling 158.32 acres was identified as a possible addition to the park statutory boundary. This parcel is located on the eastern side of the park, immediately adjacent to the current park boundary. The parcel contains 44.5 acres of upland, 113.82 of waters, and a total of 10,200 feet of shoreline, including island shores.

The uplands in the parcel are undeveloped, with the exception of a small cabin used by the current owner as a hunting retreat. This area is considered to be a high quality woodland including many large bur oak, basswood, and hackberry trees. Spring woodland wildflowers are abundant and include nodding trillium, large-flowered bellwort, Dutchman's breeches, bloodroot, jack-in-the-pulpit, Virginia waterleaf, and starry false Solomon seal. This plant cover type is considered rare in this part of Minnesota. The water quality in West Sunburg Lake – partially contained in the parcel – is very high, and the lake attracts high numbers of migratory waterfowl each year. West Sunburg Lake offers high quality fishing opportunities, but suffers winterkill on occasion.

Almost two miles of shoreland protection would benefit all park users, and the wide range of wildlife that inhabit and pass through this area. The parcel would also protect an important viewshed from the park and as such, would afford opportunities for viewing scenic natural features. In addition, the parcel could provide space for appropriate recreational opportunities like canoe camping, walk-in camping, or other uses.

### *Deletions*

None recommended.

## Recommendations

The Division will focus acquisition efforts primarily on undeveloped lands and parcels with important natural resource qualities or restoration potential. The Division will seek to minimize purchase of parcels with homes or other development due to the increased cost of acquisition. The Division will inform and seek the support of local units of government when a statutory boundary change is proposed. In addition the Division of Parks and Recreation will also work cooperatively with neighboring landowners and local units of government to preserve natural and cultural resources, recreational opportunities and important view sheds. Conservation easements, local government protective zoning, coordinated resource management efforts and other actions are additional ways in which the local communities can work in cooperation with staff in protecting Monson Lake State Park.

The following are general recommendations for acquisition and or conservation for the future, when opportunities arise:

- Add lands to the park statutory boundary as described on the previous page.
- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the current park statutory boundary that support the Division of Parks and Recreation's mission to protect and perpetuate the diverse natural, scenic, and cultural resources for low impact use, education and enjoyment of park visitors.
  - Almost 90% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are "important in protecting the landscape from development."
- Consider acquisition of parcels outside of the park statutory boundary that meet boundary change criteria and are supported by the property owner.
- Support the use of conservation tools like conservation easements and cooperative resource management projects in working with neighboring communities, special interest groups, county and regional units of government, and private property owners.
- Work with surrounding landowners to inform them of conservation measures they can implement on their property especially if they have significant natural resources on their land or have the potential to impact view sheds.
- Work with special interest groups and local and county units of government to develop education and stewardship opportunities to be implemented by surrounding land owners on their property to buffer, protect and enhance significant natural resources and important view sheds.
- Provide local units of government the opportunity to review proposals.



The south shore of West Sunburg Lake, looking west from the proposed statutory boundary expansion area. If the parcel were acquired by the state, over 10,000 feet of shoreline would be protected.

*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*

# **PARK OPERATIONS**

Monson Lake State Park is managed as a seasonal-level unit by Sibley State Park. Therefore, the park's Manager and Assistant Manager have duties at more than one unit and cannot devote a majority of their time to Monson Lake State Park.

## **Current staffing at Monson Lake State Park includes:**

- Buildings and Grounds (1 - 90% seasonal, April - September)

## **Operating Costs and Staffing Issues**

Monson Lake State Park has relatively few operational or staffing issues, but three are worth mentioning. First, there are two days a week when no staff is on duty at the park between April and September when the campground is open. This, combined with having no regular office hours at the park, can be problematic because no one is available to answer questions, provide visitor services, etc.

With all fee payment utilizing a self-registration system, it is difficult to provide firewood, ice, and watercraft rentals, as needed. The park has been creative in adapting to this issue, but again the two days per week without a Building and Grounds Worker limit what can be provided.

The safety of one employee working alone in a park is a concern. For one, no chainsaw work can be undertaken unless someone from Sibley State Park travels to Monson Lake to assist. A number of park-related tasks could be accomplished more easily with a second person available at the park.

## **Recommendations for Park Operations**

- Review visitor use and staffing needs on a regular basis, using the Division of Park and Recreation's Operating Standards, to ensure consistency throughout the park system.
- Utilize volunteers and work programs to supplement and support park staff, where appropriate.

## **Enforcement**

Law Enforcement within the park will comply with guidelines in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Enforcement Manual (March, 2001) and Minnesota State Park Rules (2000).

The Sibley Park Manager and Assistant Park Manager have limited enforcement authority within the Monson Lake State Park boundary. For assistance, they may call on other law enforcement agencies including Minnesota Department of Natural Resources conservation officers, and the Swift County Sheriff's Department. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation will continue to work with local authorities to assure effective law enforcement in the park.



Park staff assists resource staff with prescribed or controlled burning when time and funding allow. Such burns help to control the spread of invasive species and help to return needed nutrients to the soil, among other benefits.

*Photo courtesy of MN DNR*

# PLAN MODIFICATION PROCESS

DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's management plans document a partnership-based planning process, and the recommended actions resulting from that process. These comprehensive plans recognize that all aspects of park management are interrelated, and that management recommendations should also be interrelated.

Over time, however, conditions change that effect some of the plan recommendations or even an entire plan. Plans need to acknowledge changing conditions, and be flexible enough to allow for modifications as needed.

There are two scales or types of plan modifications: plan revisions and plan amendments. Minor plan revisions concern less controversial issues and can generally be made within the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation as plan modifications. Larger issues that represent changes in management direction or involve other portions of the Department or other state agencies are addressed as plan amendments. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Planning Manager will make the decision of whether a plan amendment or plan revision is appropriate

To maintain consistency between plans and processes, all revisions and amendments will be coordinated through the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning section. Requests for planning assistance should be directed to the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Planning Manager in the Central Office, St. Paul.

## Plan Amendments

### *Plan Amendment Criteria*

The criteria outlined below will be used to determine whether the proposed change warrants a plan amendment:

The proposed change:

- Alters Monson Lake State Park mission, vision, goals, specific management objectives, or proposed development plans outlined in the plan;
- Is controversial between elected officials and boards, park user groups, the public, adjacent landowners, other DNR divisions or state agencies; or
- Directly affects other state agencies (e.g., Minnesota Historical Society).

### *Plan Amendment Process*

The plan amendment process has a series of steps.

1. Review the proposed change at the state park and regional level. Determine which stakeholders potentially have a major concern and how those concerns should be addressed. If the major concerns are within the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation, the issue should be resolved within the Division, with input from the public. The proposed change is then reviewed with the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Management Team
2. If the proposed change involves other DNR Divisions, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the affected Division Directors. This may require one or two

area/regional integrated resource management team meetings. The proposed change will be reviewed through the DNR Regional Interdisciplinary Review Service (RIRS).

3. If the proposed change issue involves other state agencies, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Management Team - with input from the public - and reviewed by RIRS.
4. If the proposed change is potentially controversial among elected boards, park user groups, adjacent landowners or the public, an open house will be held that is advertised in the local and regional area.
5. All plan amendments should be coordinated, documented, and distributed by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning staff.

## **Plan Revisions**

If a plan change is recommended that does not meet the amendment criteria above, and generally follows the intent of Monson Lake State Park management plan (through mission, vision, goals, and objectives), the Department has the discretion to modify the plan without a major planning process.

### *Revisions related to Physical Development Constraints and Resource Protection*

Detailed engineering and design work may not allow the development to be completed exactly as it is outlined in the plan. A relatively minor modification, such as moving a proposed building site to accommodate various physical concerns, is common. Plans should outline a general direction and document the general “areas” for development rather than specific locations. For the most part, plans are conceptual, not detail-oriented. Prior to development, proposed development sites are examined for the presence of protected Minnesota Natural Heritage Program elements and historical/archeological artifacts. If any are found, the planned project may have to be revised to accommodate the protection of these resources.

### *Program Revisions*

The resource management and interpretive services plan sections should be updated periodically as needed. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation’s Resource Management and Interpretive staff will determine when an update is needed, and coordinate the revision with Monson Lake State Park planning section. Program sections should be rewritten in a format consistent with the plan as originally approved by the Department. To retain consistency, DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning staff will be involved in the revision review, editing and distribution.

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- University of Minnesota Extension Service. 2005. *Protecting Our Waters: Understanding Shoreland BMPs*. <http://www.shorelandmanagement.org/depth/bmp.pdf>

*Additional on-line sources of information used in this plan include:*

Explore Minnesota. Minnesota Office of Tourism.  
<http://www.exploreminnesota.com/home.aspx>

Swift County, Minnesota. <http://www.swiftcounty.com/>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Ecological Classification System.  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecs/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Minnesota County Biological Survey.  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Canoeing.  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/canoeing/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Minnesota Snowmobile Trails Assistance Program (Grants-in-Aid) [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/gia\\_snowmobile.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/gia_snowmobile.html)

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Minnesota State Parks.  
[http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/index.html)

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Minnesota State Trails.  
[http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_trails/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_trails/index.html)

Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail. <http://www.birdingtrail.org/>

National Scenic Byways Program: Minnesota. <http://www.byways.org/explore/states/MN/>

NOAA Satellite and Information Service. National Climatic Data Center, U.S. Department of Commerce [http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climatenormals/clim60/states/Clim\\_MN\\_01.pdf](http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climatenormals/clim60/states/Clim_MN_01.pdf)

United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=prod&topic=cep>

# APPENDIX A – PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

## Natural Resource Management Recommendations

### *Native Plant Communities and Rare Plants*

- Restore and maintain the quality of the Basswood-Bur Oak (Green Ash) Forest in the park.
- Reconstruct and maintain native plant communities on undeveloped areas of the park.
- Conduct a search for rare plants to identify any that may be found within the park boundary.
- Maintain old fields/croplands in herbaceous vegetation until reconstruction of native plant communities can begin.
- Periodically monitor native plant communities, particularly high quality areas, to insure that terrestrial invasive plants are not invading them or that these communities are not otherwise being degraded (e.g. lack of fire in fire-dependent communities).
- Review and update the status of listed species where necessary.
- Map locations of terrestrial invasive plant infestations throughout the park.

### *Native Wildlife*

- Preserve or restore populations of native vertebrates and invertebrates in the park.
  - Over 80% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are “important in providing habitat for wildlife.”
- Conduct inventories of reptiles, mammals and selected invertebrates.
- Manage populations of deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not overly impacted.

### *Water Resources*

- Regularly consult with DNR’s Divisions of Waters, Fish and Wildlife, and Trails and Waterways on how common goals for improving the water quality of Monson and West Sunburg lakes can be achieved.
  - Almost 70% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are “important in protecting water quality.”
- Work with the Chippewa River Watershed Project (CRWP), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Swift County, and other interested partners to improve water quality.
- Continue to implement Shoreland Best Management Practices (BMPs) at the park.
- Inform nearby landowners of Shoreland BMPs and encourage them to implement them.

## Cultural Resource Management Recommendations

- Protect all known cultural resources, including VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District and identified archaeological sites.
- Retrofit VCC-built buildings within the 31-acre Historic Resources District to reflect the character of the era in which they were built.
- Configure trails and other developments to avoid or limit impacts to cultural resources.
- Conduct mitigation, in those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, that preserves the artifacts and information.

- Manage native plant communities and invasive species with appropriate methods to preserve the landscape around cultural resource sites.

## **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

- Use the state park as a gateway to the outdoors and the Department of Natural Resources by incorporating the priorities, key messages and initiatives of other DNR divisions into State Parks' guided and self-guided services, where appropriate.
  - A strong majority of respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* said that "explor(ing) and discover(ing) new things" was the most important experience or motivation for visiting state parks.
- Develop one or more informational kiosks that describe the parks trail opportunities, historical significance, and the role that groups like the VCC, WPA, and Monson Lake Memorial Association have played at the park.
- Develop a series of temporary interpretive signs that tell the resource management stories in the park such as: prescribed burns, prairie reconstruction, savanna restoration and management, wildlife species re-introductions, and invasive/alien species management.
- Develop park-specific tools that enable visitors of all ages to learn about the park's flora, fauna, and water resources including a Wildflower Kit, Discovery Kit, and several Kids Nature Explorer Kits.
- Use volunteers to work at the park office during busy times to answer park-related questions.
- Develop "first stop for park visitors" orientation, information, and interpretive exhibits of the park and area that are incorporated with the park office.
- Develop a park education program that teaches nature skills-building such as: fishing, birding, tree and wildflower identification, nature photography, story telling and writing, etc.
- Develop a volunteer program that trains and engages citizens to work on select resource management activities such as invasive/alien species management, wildlife or native plant community monitoring, restoration and reconstruction.
- Develop a park education program that teaches watershed conservation and protection methods and techniques for clean water in Monson Lake.
- Charge a fee for selected "value added" interpretive and recreation programs.
- Use volunteers to develop a guest presenter program schedule for the warm and cool weather seasons based on the park's major themes.

## **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations**

### *Day Use*

- Maintain a portion of the space between the park entrance and the picnic shelter open for aesthetic purposes and unstructured play.
- Develop a fish cleaning facility separate from the picnic shelter and closer to the Monson Lake water access.
- Highlight the unique architecture and historical nature of the picnic shelter via park brochures and on the Department website.

## Overnight Use

- Enhance some campsites through the addition of electrical service and redevelop some sites to allow for vehicle pull-through, while retaining the rustic character of the park and the integrity of the 31-acre Historic Resources District.
- Consider the electrification of additional campsites and/or the development of one or more camper cabins in appropriate areas.
  - Over 80% of campers responding to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* support parks providing “additional rustic camper cabins.”
- Assess potential site locations and consider development of an RV sanitation station.
- Develop one or more accessible campsites from existing sites and upgrade access to drinking water to meet ADA requirements.
- Extend the overnight camping season beyond the Fishing Opener to Labor Day weekend timeframe to provide fall camping opportunities for hunters, bird enthusiasts, and others.
- Develop new overnight facilities if the park boundary is expanded, including one or more canoe campsites, one or more walk-in campsites, a rental cabin, and/or a primitive group camp.

## Trails

- Maintain existing trails in a safe and sustainable condition.
- Consider the development of new trails if the park boundary is expanded.
  - Over three-quarters of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* support parks providing “more hiking opportunities.”
- Monitor local and county efforts to plan for trail systems, and participate in those that are consistent with uses in the park.

## Park Boundary Recommendations

DNR staff developed a set of criteria to guide consideration of boundary changes. The criteria include: acquiring additional lakeshore, protecting the lakes and their associated habitat and hydrology; buffering the park from impacts of future development; provide additional protection of significant native plant communities; protect view sheds that enhance the park experience and make connections to significant plant communities that extend beyond current boundary to protect habitat and wildlife corridors.

- Add lands to the park statutory boundary as described in the Park Boundary chapter (pg. 52).
- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the current park statutory boundary that support the Division of Parks and Recreation’s mission to protect and perpetuate the diverse natural, scenic, and cultural resources for low impact use, education and enjoyment of park visitors.
  - Almost 90% of all respondents to the *2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey* agree that parks are “important in protecting the landscape from development.”
- Consider acquisition of parcels outside of the park statutory boundary that meet boundary change criteria and are supported by the property owner.
- Support the use of conservation tools like conservation easements and cooperative resource management projects in working with neighboring communities, special interest groups, county and regional units of government, and private property owners.

- Work with surrounding landowners to inform them of conservation measures they can implement on their property especially if they have significant natural resources on their land or have the potential to impact view sheds.
- Work with special interest groups and local and county units of government to develop education and stewardship opportunities to be implemented by surrounding land owners on their property to buffer, protect and enhance significant natural resources and important view sheds.
- Provide local units of government the opportunity to review proposals.

### **Recommendations for Park Operations**

- Review visitor use and staffing needs on a regular basis, using the Division of Park and Recreation's Operating Standards, to ensure consistency throughout the park system.
- Utilize volunteers and work programs to supplement and support park staff, where appropriate.



The park's namesake lake in the late fall.  
*Photo courtesy of MN DNR.*