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A Management Plan for
Crow Wing
State Park

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



This document is a summary of the Crow Wing State Park management plan. All recommendations, both resource management and physical development are included here. The detailed inventory data and specific instructions for implementation of resource management and facility development have been compiled into a comprehensive management plan with technical appendices. These documents are on file in the:

Office of Planning
Department of Natural Resources
Box 10E Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

A Summary of the

Crow Wing State Park Management Plan

Office of Planning
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

October 1981

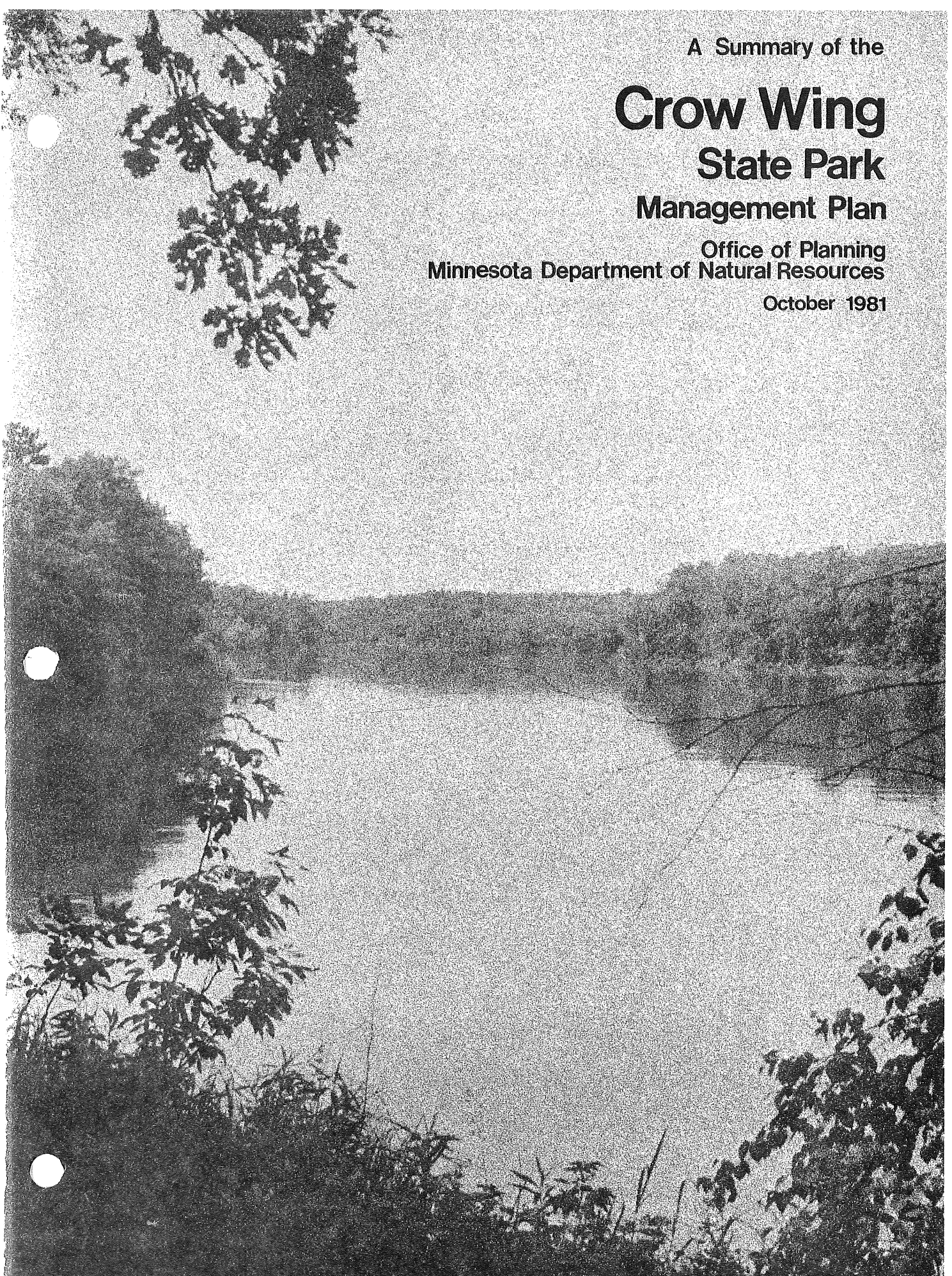


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Introduction

In 1975 the Minnesota State Legislature passed the Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA). The intent of this legislation is to ensure, through long-range planning, the protection and perpetuation of Minnesota's outstanding resources. Also included in this legislation is the mandate to provide recreational facilities which are desired by the citizens of Minnesota but which do not compete with those provided by the private sector. The Park Planning Section of the DNR, Office of Planning was established to formulate long range resource management and recreation development plans for 65 state parks and 9 waysides.

The park planning process consists of five steps:

1. An inventory of natural resources, visitor use, and existing facilities is compiled. Specialists from other DNR divisions and sections assist in collecting pertinent data. At this point the first public workshop is held.
2. Alternatives for park management and development are developed. A second public workshop is held to review these alternatives and invite further public comment. These alternatives are then reviewed by the Park Planning staff and the DNR, Division of Parks and Recreation.
3. The recommendation for park classification is made, the park goal is developed, and the draft plan is written. This step culminates in the first interdepartmental review, followed by a 30 day public review. Within this 30 day period, a third public workshop may be held.
4. The draft plan is revised according to information received from public and interdepartmental reviews. The plan is then sent to the State Planning Agency for a 60 day reviewal period.
5. The plan is implemented by the DNR, Division of Parks and Recreation.

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Major proposals of this plan are:

- Reestablish the pre-European settlement character of park vegetation.
- Protect habitat of rare or endangered species indentified by the DNR, Natural Heritage Program.
- Conduct a thorough archaeological survey of the park.
- Upgrade park roads.
- Redesign the campground.
- Develop additional canoe campsites.
- Redesign the park trail system.
- Construct a multi-purpose trail/interpretive center for year round use.
- Construct a hard-surfaced trail through the historic site.
- Develop interpretive signs and brochures describing the natural and historic resources of the park.
- Develop interpretive displays.
- Conduct a study to determine the feasibility of providing swimming facilities in the park.
- Upgrade administrative facilities.

AN OVERVIEW OF CROW WING STATE PARK

Location

Most of the park is located in southwestern Crow Wing County in the Mississippi Sandplains Biocultural Region (see map, p12). It also extends into adjacent Morrison and Cass counties. The park is approximately 9 miles (14 km) south of Brainerd and 22 miles (35 km) north of Little Falls. Trunk Highway (TH) 371 is the primary transportation route between Little Falls and Brainerd. County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 27 is the entrance road to the park and extends one mile (1.6 km) between TH 371 and the contact station. St. Cloud is located 54 miles (86 km) south of the park and the Twin Cities are 116 miles (186 km) to the southeast. The Mississippi River flows through the park from north to south and is joined by the Crow Wing River in the south central portion of the park.

Natural Resources and Recreation

Oak forest interspersed with pine, prairie, and numerous marshes create a varied and beautiful environment. Park resources and facilities attract hikers, skiers, snowmobilers, photographers, canoeists, anglers, campers, and picnickers year round.

History

One of the most significant aspects of the park is its rich history. Located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Crow Wing rivers, it was the site of a major conflict between the Ojibway and Dakota Indians. It was also the location of several fur trading posts and a Red River Oxcart Trail outfitting post. The town of Crow Wing prospered for a short time in the mid 1800's but declined to a ghost town by 1874. Park visitors can walk down what was once the main street of old Crow Wing or along the Red River Oxcart Trail. Interpretive signs mark the location of significant events and buildings.

The locations of following historical resources are identified on the Historical Resources and Historic Site Sub-unit Map on p 35 .

- 1 Musket-loading pits
- 2 Allen Morrison's home
- 3 Allen Morrison's trading post
- 4 John Morrison's birthplace
- 5 George Berry's home
- 6 Dakota encampment site
- 7 Fairbank's store
- 8 Brown's hotel
- 9 Old mansion
- 10 Catholic church and cemetery
- 11 Lutheran mission
- 12 Schoolmaster's home
- 13 Schoolhouse
- 14 William Aitkin's trading post
- 15 Episcopal church and cemetery
- 16 Crow Wing village site
- 17 Ferry landing
- 18 Government warehouses
- 19 B. Bailey's sawmill
- 20 Clem Beaulieu's trading post
- 21 Red River Oxcart Trail ford
- 22 Red River Oxcart Trail
- 23 Hole-in-the Day's farmstead

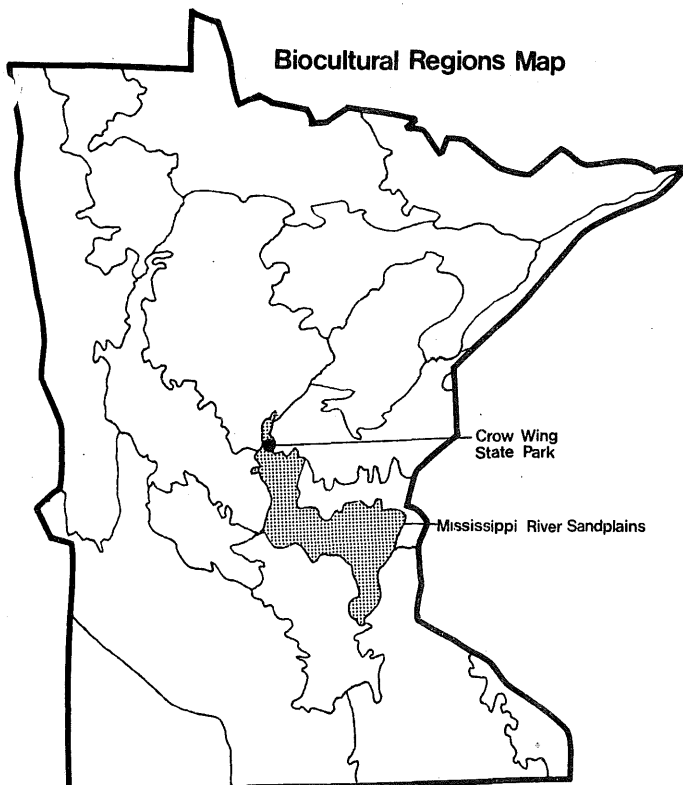
The Park Boundary

Crow Wing State Park was established by the legislature in 1959. There are now 2,042 acres (827 hectares) of land within the statutory boundary of the park. (A statutory boundary is established by the legislature. It identifies land which has outstanding recreational and resource value. The DNR has authority to acquire land only from within this boundary from willing sellers for park purposes). The state owns 1,392 acres (563 hectares) within the park boundary. The remaining 650 acres (263 hectares) are privately owned (see map, p 31). There is an area on the northeast corner of the park which is recommended for inclusion within the statutory boundary (see map, p 31). Addition of this acreage will increase river frontage in the park. It will also protect the area from the pressures of development. Jack pine stands and barrens, which are representative of pre-European settlement plant communities, could be reestablished in a portion of this expansion area.

The Surrounding Area

The interrelationship of Crow Wing State Park to other recreational facilities and population centers in the area was analyzed to assess the demand for particular recreational opportunities and to determine how the park should function in fulfilling this demand. The recommendations for development of the park were based on this analysis. A complete discussion of the regional analysis of the area surrounding the park is included in the comprehensive management plan.

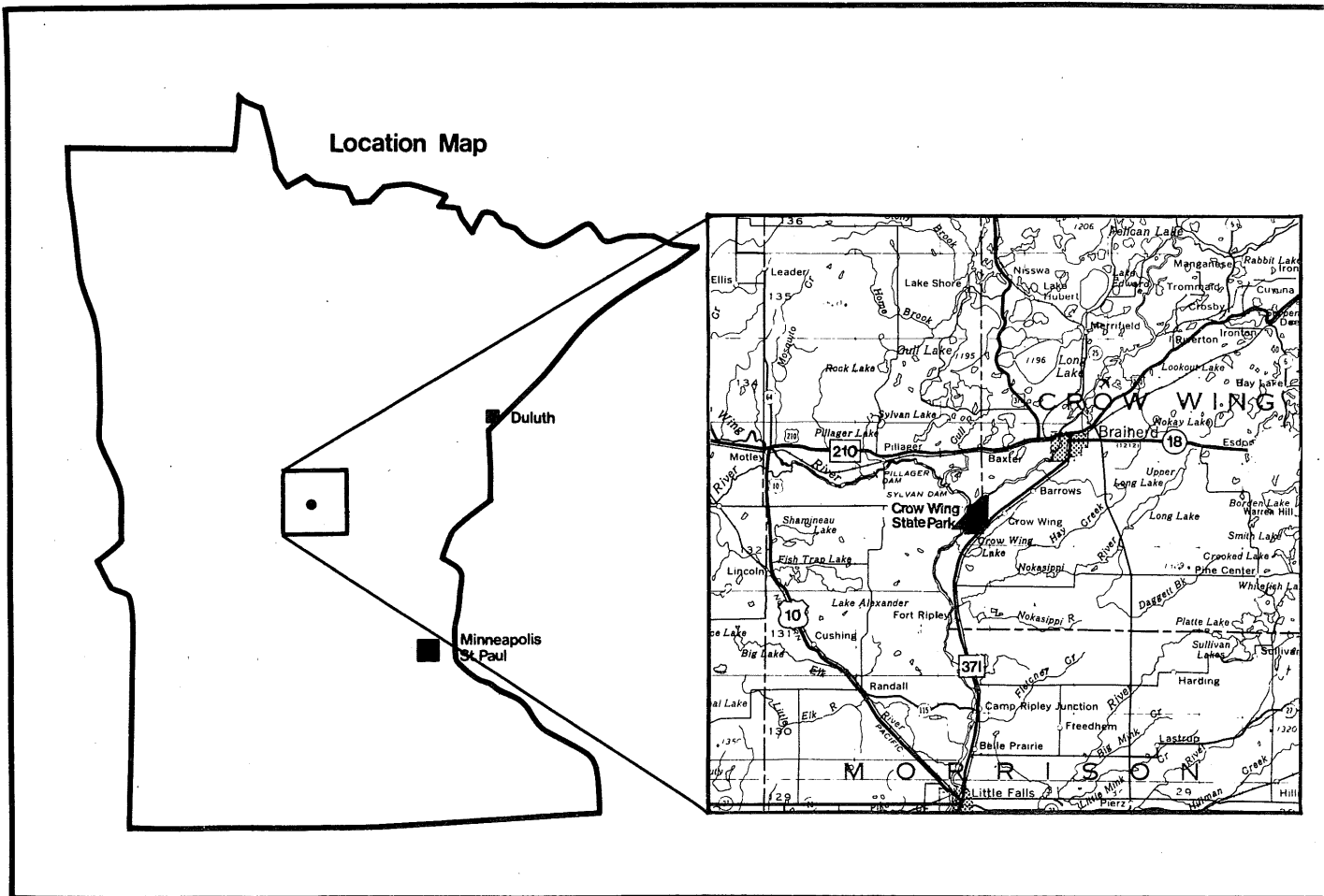
The biocultural region system divides the state into 18 regions (see map below). These regions are differentiated according to the characteristic plant and animal life, landforms, and cultural patterns which existed before, during, and after European settlement. This system is a framework which provides information valuable in planning Minnesota's state parks.



Crow Wing State Park is located in the Mississippi River Sandplains Biocultural Region. The "Biocultural System of Minnesota" describes the region as follows:

"The Mississippi River Sandplains was formed largely by the drainage of glacial Lake Grantsburg. As the lake drained, the meltwaters formed a series of coalescing outwash plains wherever the wasting ice exposed low ground. In this way, the vast sandplain was formed, also receiving water from the diverted Mississippi River.

"Marschner indicates that the vegetation on the sandy outwash plains was predominately oak barrens and openings."



Goal for the Park

CLASSIFICATION

There is a delicate balance which must be maintained when recreational facilities are provided for large numbers of people in areas of outstanding and often sensitive resources. Inappropriate development can result in irreparable damage to the resource. To help ensure this recreation/resource balance, the Minnesota state legislature established, through the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975 (ORA), a classification process whereby each unit in the state recreation system can be identified as one (or more) component in the system. These components are: natural state park; recreational state park; state trail; state scientific and natural area; state wilderness area; state forest and state forest sub-area; state wildlife management area; state water access site; state wild, scenic, and recreational rivers; state historic site; and state rest area. Included in this legislation are general criteria for classifying, planning, and managing each of these components.

ORA Criteria for a Natural State Park

The ORA has identified three criteria which a park should meet to qualify for classification as a natural state park. They are:

"Exemplifies the natural characteristics of the major landscape (biocultural) regions of the state, as shown by accepted classifications, in an essentially unspoiled or restored condition or in a condition that will permit restoration in the foreseeable future; or contains essentially unspoiled resources of sufficient extent and importance to meaningfully contribute to the broad illustration of the state's natural phenomena.

"Contains natural resources sufficiently diverse to attract people from throughout the state.

"Is sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources which give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for human enjoyment of these qualities."

ORA Criteria for a Historic Site

Crow Wing State Park meets the following criteria established by ORA for an area to qualify as a historic site:

"Is the site of or directly associated with a significant historical event.

"Has yielded, or is likely to yield, historical or archaeological artifacts, records, or other original data or information."

Recommended Classification

A natural state park classification is recommended because Crow Wing Park: represents its biocultural region and has vegetation which can be restored to its pre-European settlement condition; attracts visitors from throughout the state; and is large enough to protect its resources while providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy them.

A historic site sub-unit, managed by the DNR, is also recommended for the park (see map, p 35). The majority of the park's historic sites which are of statewide significance in the park are included in this area.

GOAL FOR THE PARK

The goal for all natural state parks is to protect and perpetuate, as components of the outdoor recreation system, extensive areas of the state possessing those resources which illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's natural phenomena and to provide without resource impairment for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of park resources by all citizens of Minnesota now and in the future.

The goal for all historic sites is to preserve, restore, and interpret buildings and other structures, locales, sites, antiquities, and related lands which aptly illustrate significant events, personalities, and features of the history and archaeology of the state or nation.

Resource Management

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

To perpetuate or reestablish plant and animal life which represent pre-European settlement biotic communities

To use resource management techniques that will harmonize with the park's natural eco-systems

To identify, evaluate, protect, and preserve the park's archaeological and historical resources

To provide for visitor enjoyment in a manner which minimizes adverse impacts on the resources

PARK RESOURCES

Slope. There are a few slopes of 12% or greater in the park. They are located along the Mississippi River. These slopes may be subject to erosion, therefore park facilities will be located away from them. Vegetation will be managed to minimize erosion by planting species which stabilize soils and effectively direct pedestrian traffic.

Soils. Most of the soils in the park are well-drained, outwash plain, sandy soils. They have a good percolation rate and pose few limitations to development.

Surface Water. The Mississippi and Crow Wing rivers support an abundance of wildlife. There are many species of game fish in both rivers. Several species of rough fish are also present, but their numbers do not warrant management at this time. The 100 year floodplain in the park is fairly extensive. However all existing park development except the canoe campground near the southern park boundary is located well out of the floodplain. Floods will do little, if any damage to the canoe campsites. All future development will be located out of the floodplain.

Ground Water. Park water supplies are adequate and require no management.

Vegetation. The vegetation in the park is primarily oak and northern hardwoods interspersed with jack and Norway pine, aspen, ash, marshes, prairie and grasslands. It has outstanding scenic character and provides excellent habitat for wildlife. Consistent with the park's recommended natural classification, vegetation will be managed to return the character of the park to pre-European settlement condition.

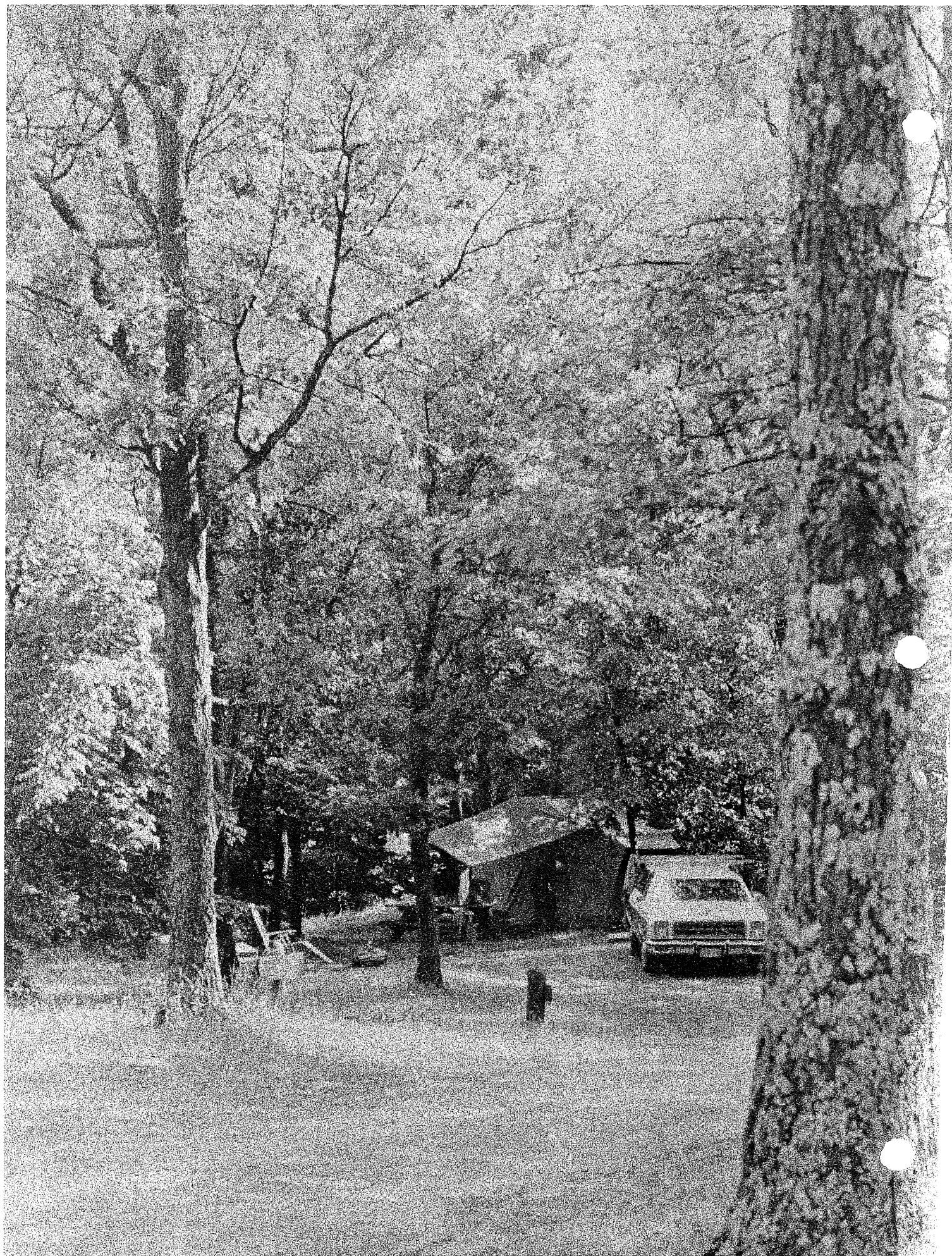
The focus of vegetation management will be to restore oak savanna and jack pine barrens and manage prairie communities. Complete restoration of some areas will not be possible within the time frame of this area. The specific vegetation management actions and procedures are included in the comprehensive management plan. The actions below are general management units. The management unit numbers correspond with the map codes on the Vegetation & Vegetation Management Map, p 33.

Mgmt. Unit	Action	Phases					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Restore oak savanna and jack pine barrens. Prescribed burning schedule will be implemented. Seed and plant prairie species.	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	Ongoing
2	Restore character by planting scattered jack pine and oak. Burn periodically.		1,000		1,000		Ongoing
3	Maintain aspen.			1,500		1,500	Ongoing
4	Manage as prairie.				1,000		Ongoing
5	Control brush encroachment.			6,000			Ongoing

Mgmt. Unit.	Action	Phases					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
6	Maintain Norway pine or establish red pine.	Conditional					
7	Thin Norway pine and cut Scotch pine.		\$ 3,000				\$ 3,000
8	Maintain upland grass.					\$ 1,000 Ongoing	
9	Maintain lowland brush.				\$ 1,500	Ongoing	
10	Remove dead and dying elm that are a safety hazard.	\$ 2,000					2,000
11	No management.						

Wildlife. The DNR, Natural Heritage Program has identified several wildlife species that are in need of special management consideration. They include: bald eagle, sandhill crane, marsh hawk, common tern, and blandings turtle. All of the vegetation management recommendations above will improve habitat for wildlife in the park. An additional \$8,000 has been recommended for planting high seed and berry producing species and nesting structures along the Mississippi River.

History and Archaeology. The history of this area is rich and varied. In fact, a portion of the park has been classified as a historic site sub-unit. The map, p 35 locates all the known historic sites in the park. It is recommended that archaeological surveys of the park be undertaken at once. A total of \$65,000 will be needed to complete these surveys.



Physical Development and Recreation Management

RECREATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

To construct facilities which are necessary for the park visitor to gain access, knowledge, and appreciation of the park's resources

To construct facilities which will help meet the demand for outdoor recreational opportunities without impairing park resources

To integrate development into the surrounding landscape as much as possible by using native materials and topography to their best advantage

To ensure the physical accessibility and program usability of new developments by special populations

EXISTING FACILITIES (See map, p 37)

Picnicking. There are two picnic grounds in the park. Each has parking and toilet facilities.

Camping. The campground has 61 sites, a sanitation building with showers and flush toilets, four pit toilets, a trailer dump station, and an amphitheater for interpretive programs. There is a primitive camp for groups and canoeists near the southern boundary. It has a log cabin shelter and two pit toilets.

Trails. There are four miles (6 km) of ski touring trails and 9 miles (14 km) of snowmobile trails. All park trails are used for hiking in the summer.

Interpretation. In addition to the amphitheater in the campground, there is a display center near the contact station with an adjacent 15-car parking lot.

Water Activities. A boat launch on the Mississippi River provides access to both rivers.

In addition to these recreational facilities, the park has administrative facilities consisting of a contact station, service center, manager's residence, and storage building. There is also a small chapel owned by the Diocese of Duluth which is dedicated to Father Pierz, the first Catholic missionary in Crow Wing.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT (See map, p 39)

The facility improvement and development recommendations have been prioritized into five phases. The most critical needs are scheduled into the first two phases. The actual year in which development is implemented is contingent on the biennial appropriation of funds by the legislature. Conditional scheduling means that implementation of the action is dependent on factors impossible to project at the present time.

Action	Phases					Total	Conditional
	1	2	3	4	5		
<u>Roads</u>							
1	Upgrade the road to the group camp.	\$ 20,000				\$ 20,000	
2	Pave the road to and through the campground with asphalt.		\$ 40,000			40,000	
3	Pave the road to the interpretive/trail center and the parking area with asphalt.						\$ 40,000
<u>Camping</u>							
1	Redesign the campground to provide additional space between campsites and intersite screening.	To be determined by DNR, Bureau of Engineering					
2	Develop three additional canoe campsites.		2,000			2,000	

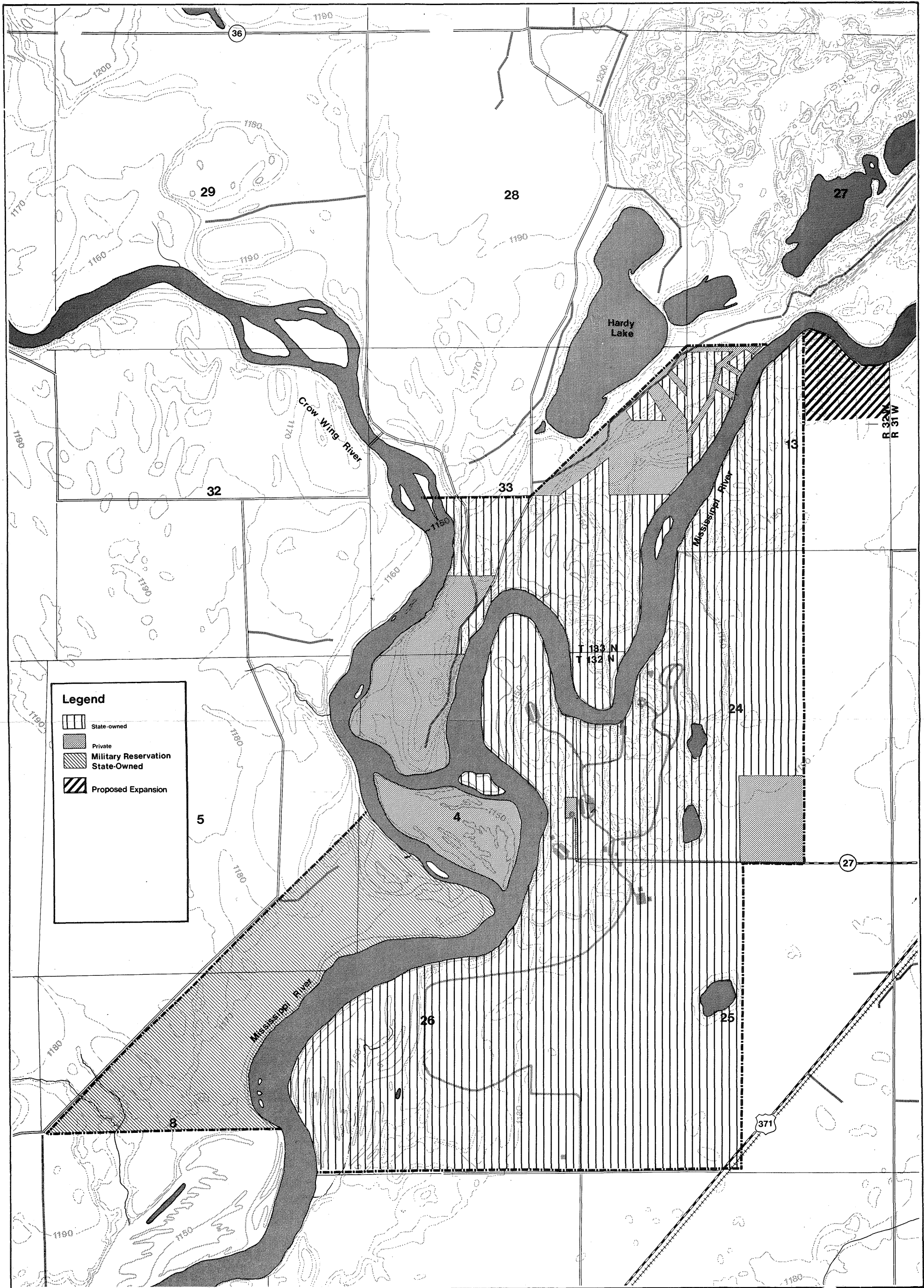
Action	Phases					Total	Conditional
	1	2	3	4	5		
<u>Trails</u>							
1	Develop a system of signed ski touring trails.	\$ 8,250				\$ 8,250	
2	Develop a system of signed snowmobile trails.	5,500				5,500	
3	Construct a building which can be used as a trail center in winter and as an interpretive center in the summer.						\$300,000
4	Develop a system of hiking trails.	5,000				5,000	
5	Develop a hard surfaced trail through the historic site.			\$ 40,000		40,000	
<u>Interpretive Facilities</u>							
1	Develop displays which interpret the natural history of the park.						5,000
2	Develop signs interpreting significant natural features of the park.			\$ 3,000		3,000	
3	Develop a self-guided interpretive brochure to explain in further detail, the natural history and natural features of the park.						
4	Develop interpretive historical displays.						5,000
5	Develop some new interpretive signs to replace existing signs in the townsite.	3,000				3,000	
6	Develop a self-guided interpretive brochure to be used in the historic site.			3,000		3,000	
7	Construct a building which can be used as an interpretive center in the summer and as a trail center in the winter.						
	See Trails, Action #3						

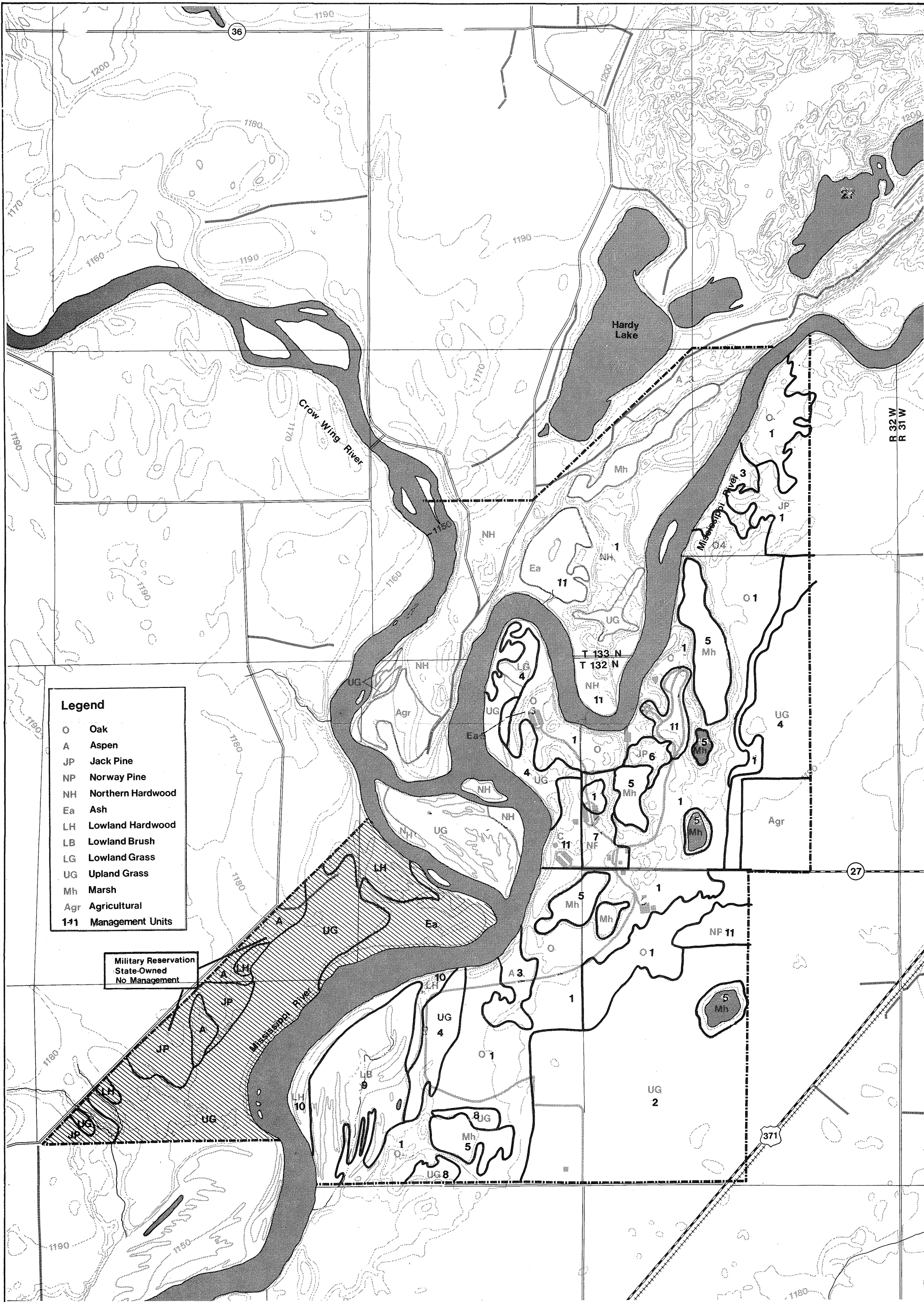
Action	Phases					Total	Conditional
	1	2	3	4	5		
<u>Water Activities</u>							
1	Upgrade the swimming facility. To be determined by DNR, Bureau of Engineering						
2	Purchase several canoes to rent to park users.						\$ 20,000
<u>Administrative Support Facilities</u>							
1	Construct an unheated storage building approximately 30 ft x 60 ft (9 m x 18 m).					\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
2	Move the metal quonset hut from its present location to the service area.					1,000	1,000
3	Move the old office/warehouse building to service area. Construct a well house.						\$ 2,000 2,000
4	Dismantle and remove the barn and storage building on the south of the park.					1,000	1,000
<hr/>							
Total	\$ 92,750	\$ 40,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 26,000	\$ 2,000	\$404,500	\$370,000

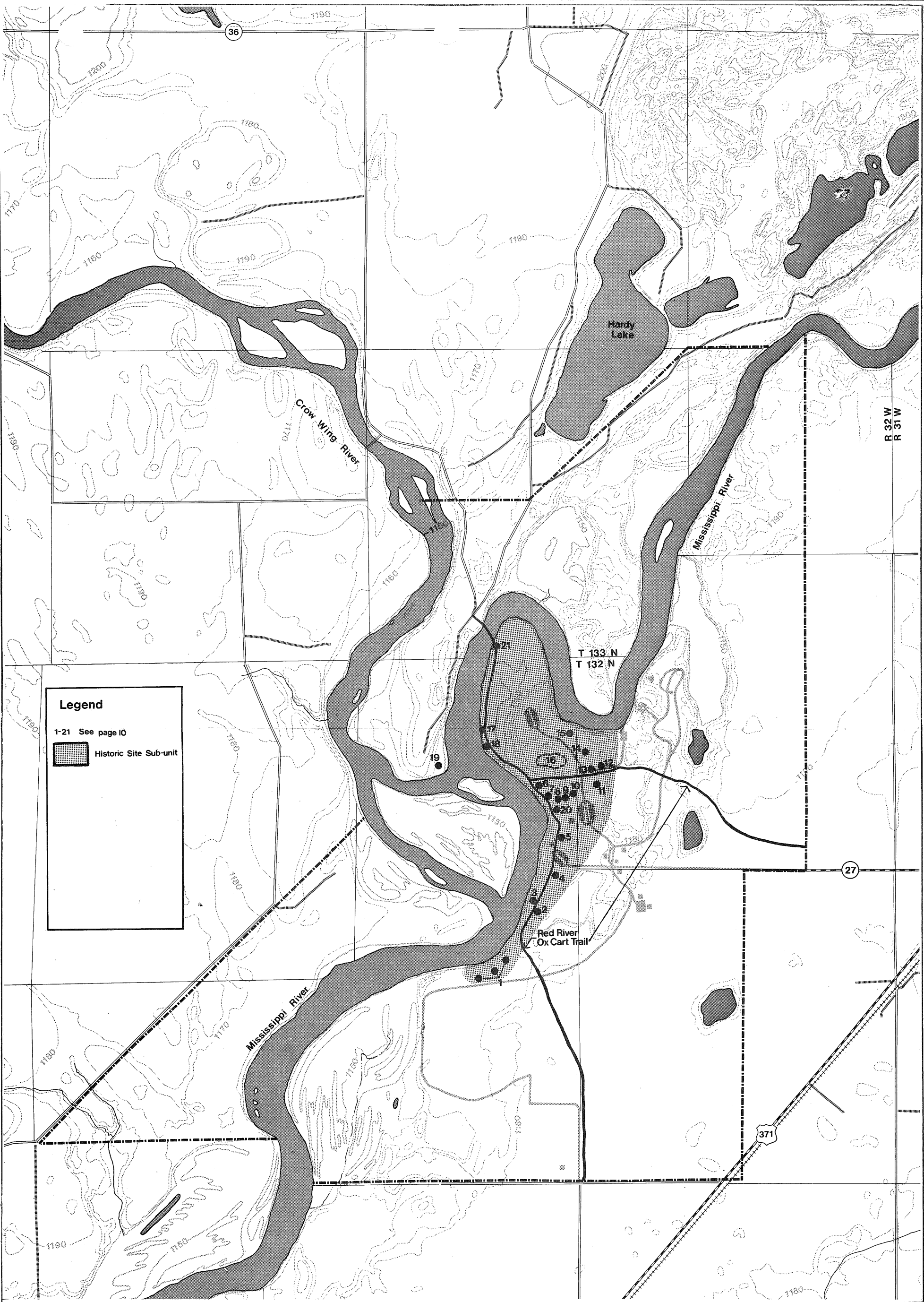
Total Costs

Physical Development	\$404,500	Conditional
Vegetation	28,000	\$370,000
Wildlife	6,000	Ongoing
Archaeological Surveys	65,000	
	<u>\$503,500</u>	<u>\$370,000</u>

Maps

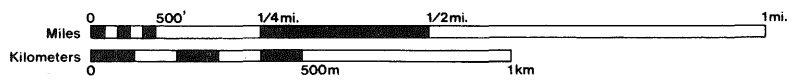
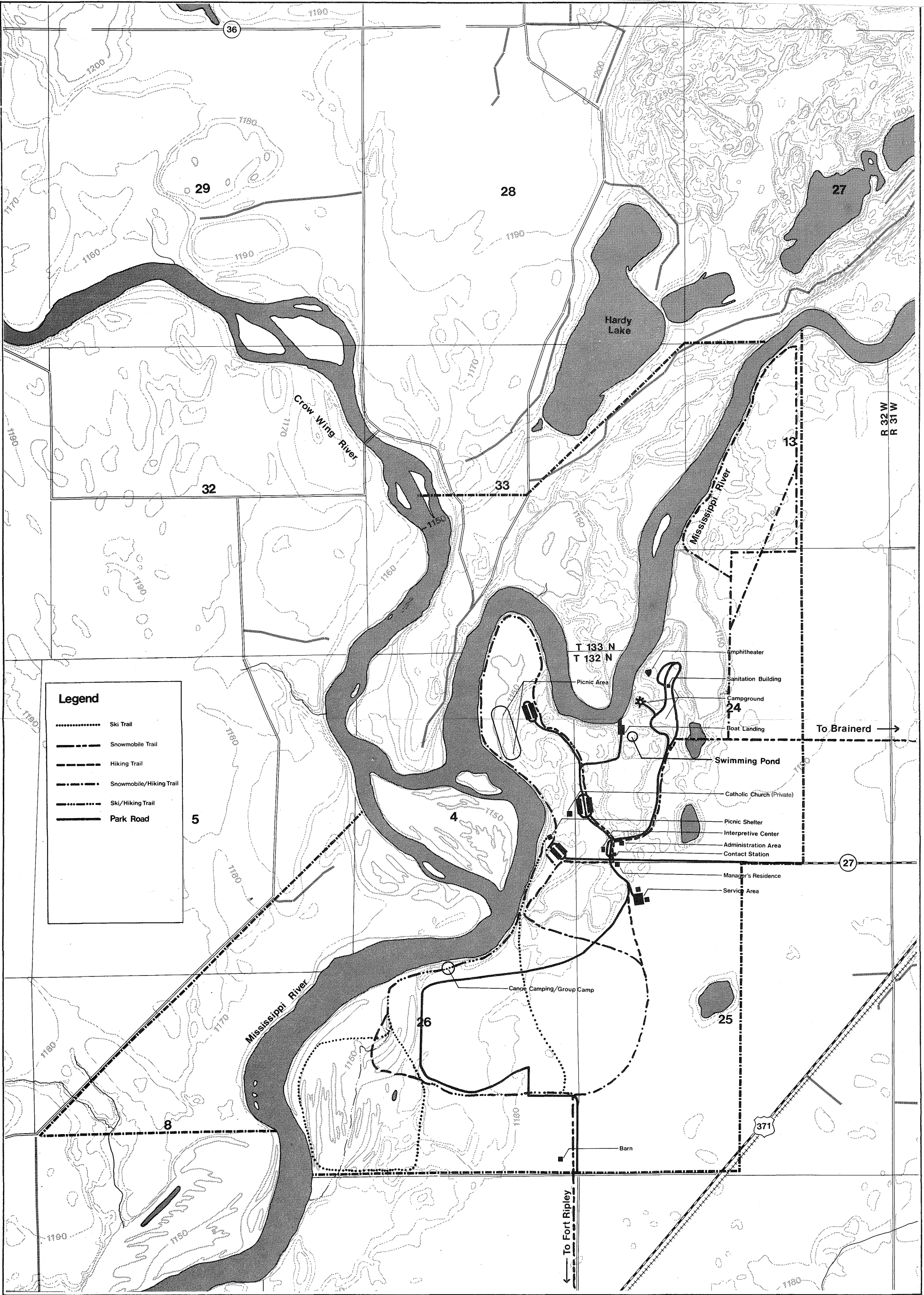






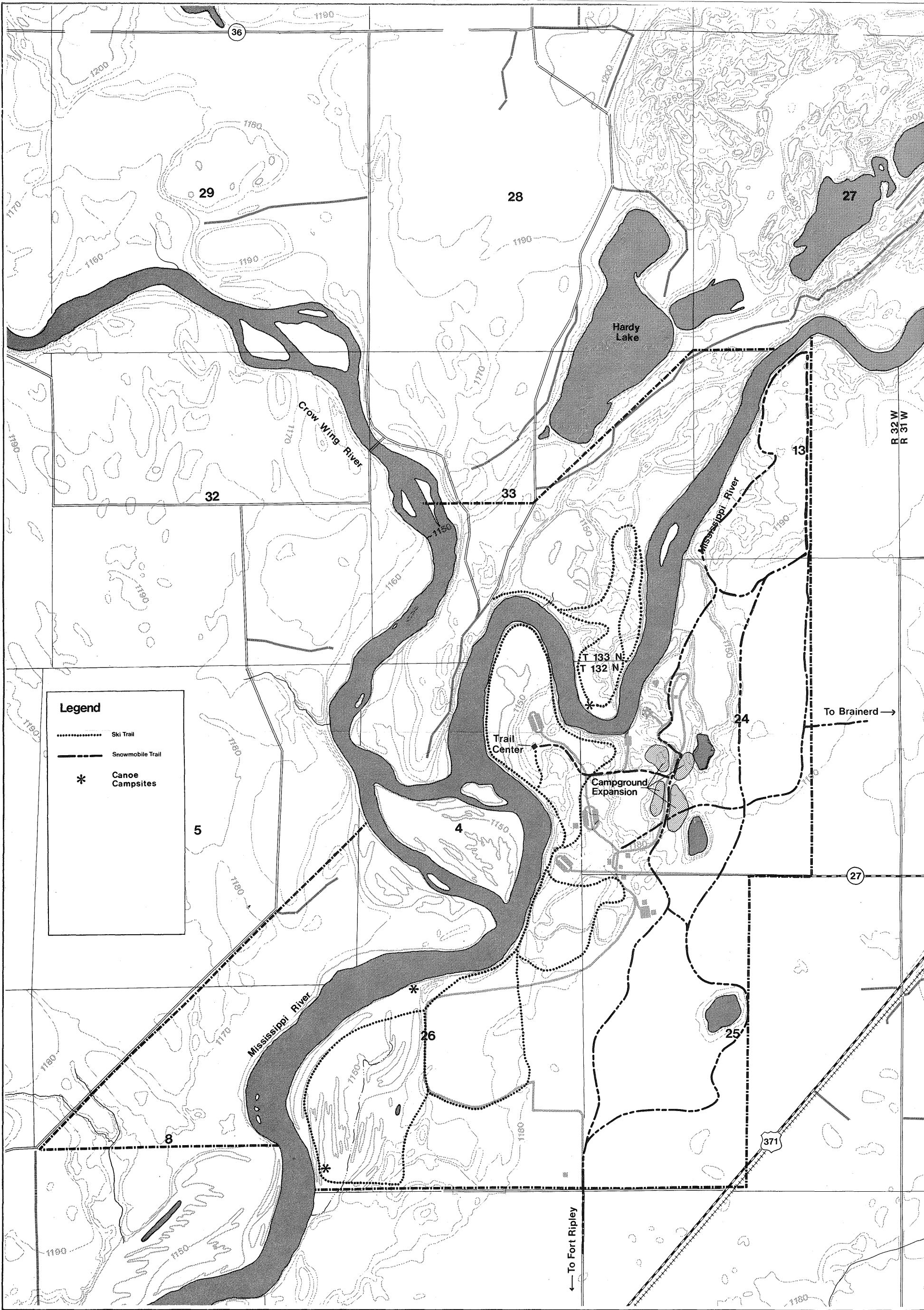
Crow Wing State Park

Historical Resources & Historic Site Sub-unit



Crow Wing State Park

Existing Development



Legend

- Ski Trail
- Snowmobile Trail
- * Canoe Campsites

