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- A Summary of the William O'Brien S



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# A Management Plan for William O'Brien State Park

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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This document is a summary of the William O'Brien 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

**William O'Brien**  
**State Park**  
**Management Plan**

Office of Planning  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

November 1981

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# Introduction



## THE PLANNING PROCESS

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 82 state parks, recreation areas, and waysides. Funds for these plans are appropriated biennially by the Legislative Commission of Minnesota Resources (LCMR).

The park planning process consists of six 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 may be 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.
4. The draft plan is revised as the result of the interdepartmental review. The revised plan is made available to the public for a 30 day review period, after which the final public meeting is held.
5. The draft plan is revised according to information received from the public review. The plan is then sent to the Department of Energy, Planning, and Development for a 60 day reviewal period. (This management plan was approved in August 1981.)
6. The plan is implemented by the DNR, Division of Parks and Recreation.

## A SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

### Resource Management

- Develop a planting plan for the park.
- Control oak wilt.
- Convert old fields to native grasslands.
- Develop a fire management plan.
- Restore natural drainage.
- Continue stocking Lake Alice.
- Survey the park for prehistoric and historic artifacts.

### Trails

- Build a multi-purpose, energy-efficient trail center.
- Expand the trail system.
- Develop a bicycle trail link to the county trail system.
- Develop a snowmobile trail link to surrounding grant-in-aid trails.
- Develop a horseback riding trail link to area grant-in-aid trails.

### Camping

- Rehabilitate the lower campground.
- Develop a tenting only, hike-in campground.
- Expand the upper campground.
- Reserve the canoe campground for river users only.

### Picnicking

- Remodel the interpretive building for use as a picnic shelter.
- Build two new picnic shelters.
- Add changing rooms onto the beach toilet building.
- Construct a playground for children from natural materials.

### Administrative/Support Facilities

- Remodel the maintenance area.
- Build a new assistant manager's residence.
- Provide for wood storage and ice coolers at the contact station.
- Remove the existing fuel tanks and convert heating system to natural gas.
- Bury all power lines.
- Pave all park roads and parking lots except the canoe campground lot.

### Interpretive Program

- Provide orientation and interpretive information for park visitors.

## AN OVERVIEW OF WILLIAM O'BRIEN STATE PARK

William O'Brien State Park is located in Washington County just north of Marine on St. Croix. It is 15 miles (24 km) north of Stillwater and 14 miles (22.4 km) south of Taylor's Falls. Trunk Highway 95 (TH 95) bisects the park. Most of the existing development is located in the portion of the park between the highway and the St. Croix River. Located within 30



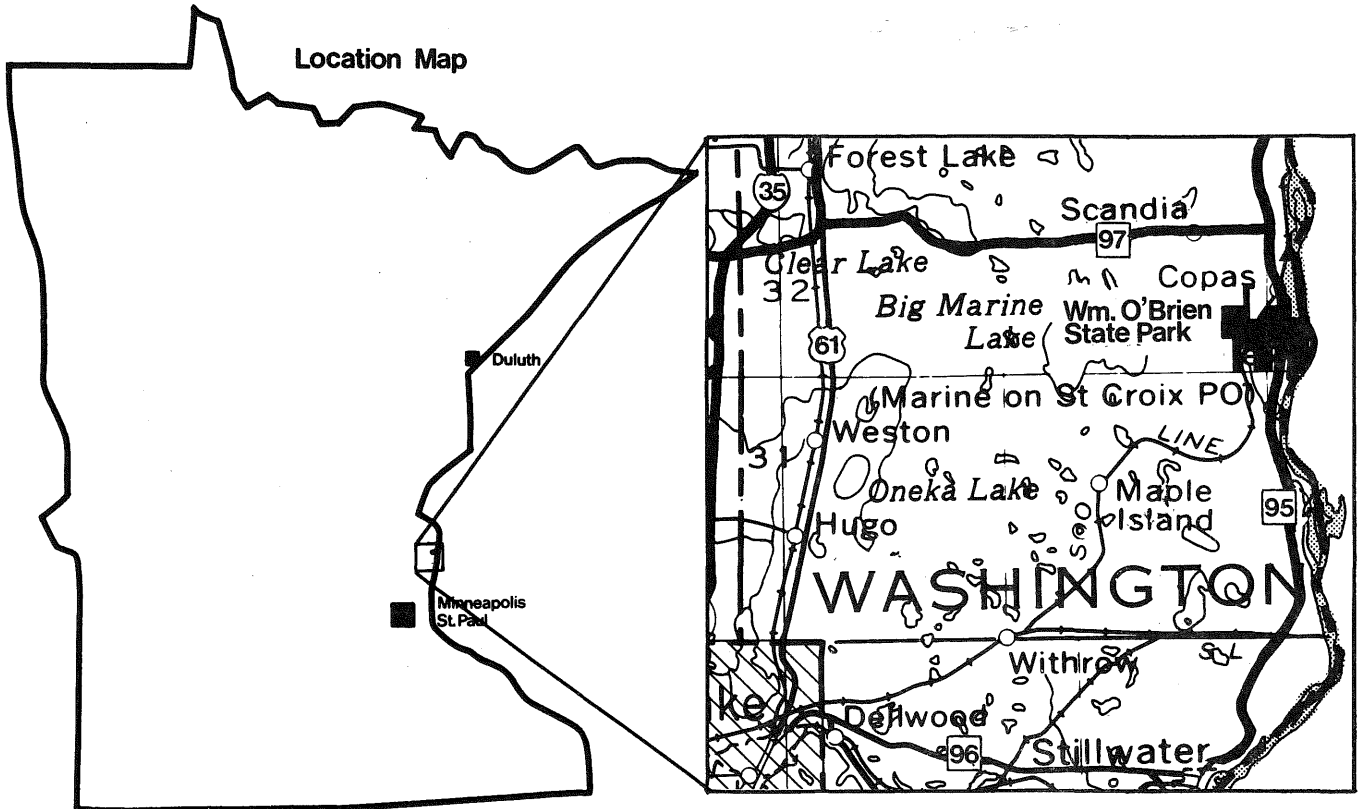
miles (48 km) of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the park offers a variety of recreational opportunities to the outdoor enthusiast that span the seasons from ski touring to canoeing, camping, hiking, and swimming.

Alice O'Brien donated land for a state park in memory of her father. William O'Brien was a pioneer lumberman who settled in the area. The park was later expanded with the addition of Greenberg Island. It was donated in memory of Phillip and Ellen Greenberg by the family S. David Greenberg. Other park lands have since been acquired from willing sellers.

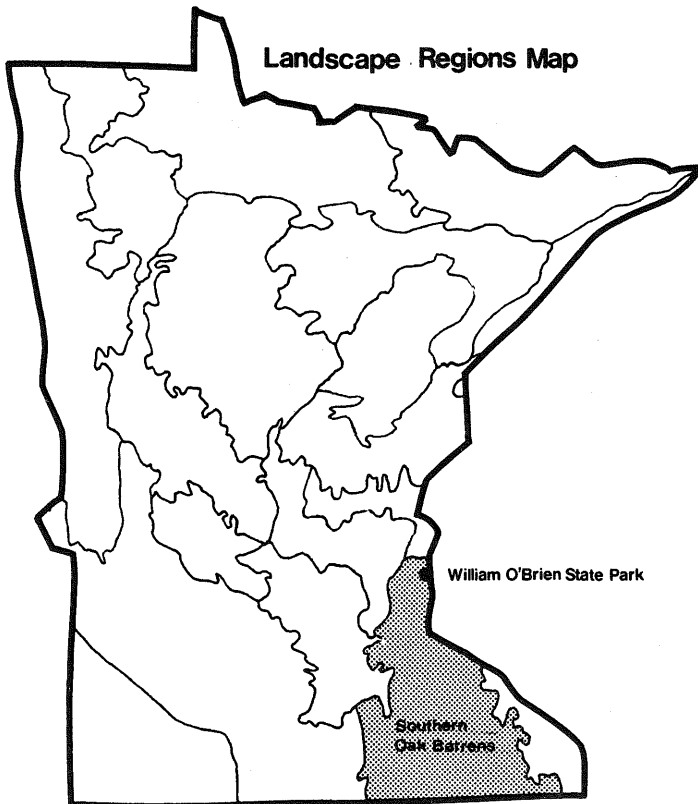
There are 1,343 acres (544 hectares) within the statutory boundary of the park. (The statutory boundary is established by the legislature. It identifies land which has outstanding recreational and resource value. The DNR has authority to acquire land only from within this boundary from willing sellers for park purposes.) The state owns 1,270 acres (514 hectares) within the boundary. Of the 73 privately owned acres (30 hectares), 18.7 acres (8 hectares) are Soo Line Railroad right-of-way and the remaining are privately owned. There is a 280 acre (113 hectare parcel along the western boundary, which is of park quality. It is also recommended that scenic easements be purchased from willing sellers on scenic lands adjacent to the park. (See Ownership/Surrounding Land Use Map, p 29.) A more complete discussion of boundary modifications is included in the comprehensive management plan.

The relationship of William O'Brien 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.

Location Map



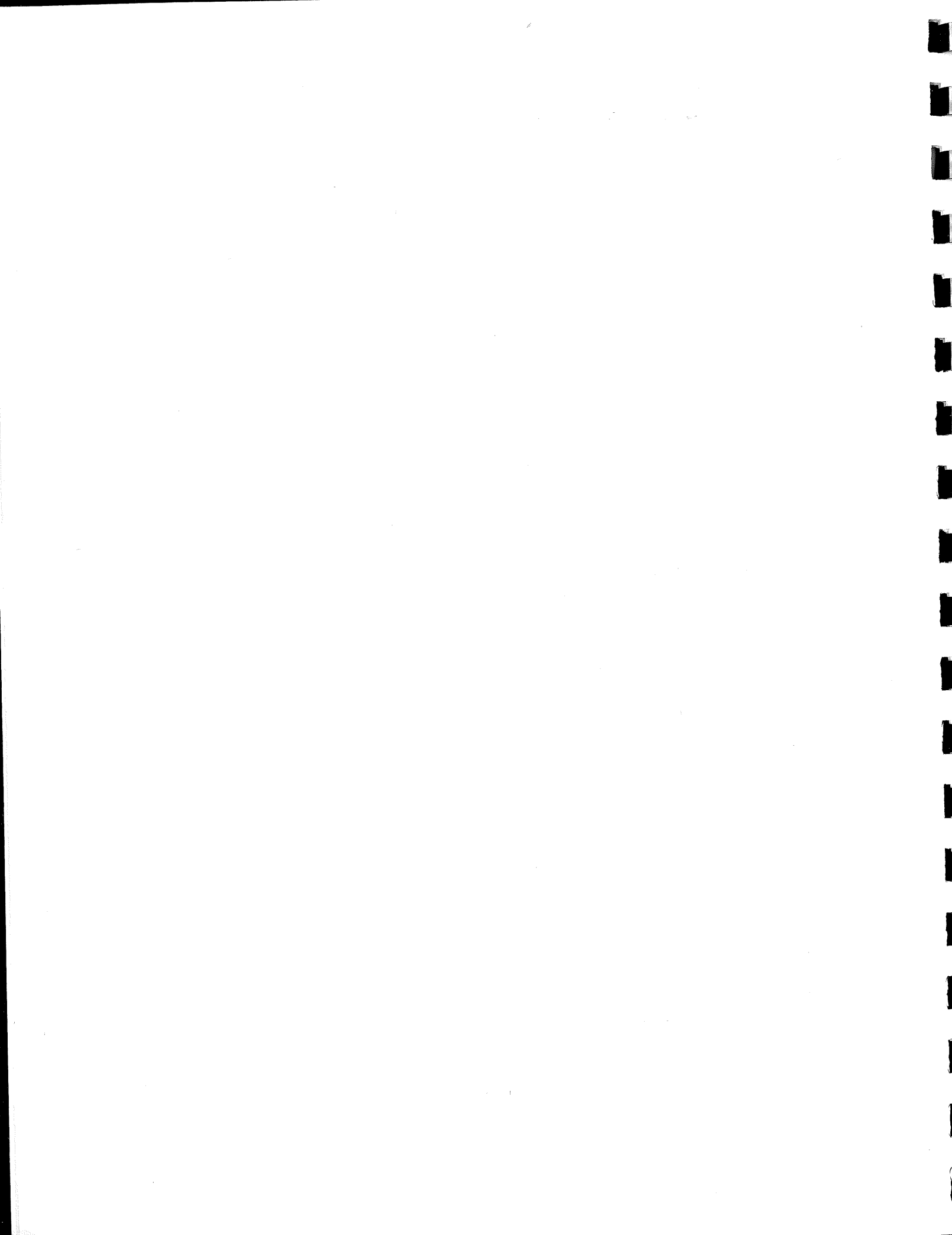
Landscape Regions Map



The landscape region system divides the state into 18 regions. 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 which is valuable in planning Minnesota's state parks.

William O'Brien is in the Southern Oak Barrens Landscape Region. Biologically, this area is a broad transition zone between the prairie to the west and the deciduous forest to the north and east. Originally, dominant vegetation was prairie with occasional groves and scattered individual oak trees, an ecological type known as savanna.

# Classification



## 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.

### Criteria for a Recreational State Park Designation

DNR policy identifies four criteria based on ORA which a park must substantially meet to qualify for classification as a recreational state park. William O'Brien State Park meets these criteria.

"Possess natural resources, or artificial resources in a natural setting, with outstanding outdoor recreation potential.

"Provide outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities that will attract visitors from beyond the local area.

"Contain resources which permit intensive recreational use by large numbers of people and be of a size sufficient to provide for effective management and protection of the natural and/or artificial outdoor recreational resources, so that they will be available for both present and future generations.

"Be located in areas where they appropriately accommodate the outdoor recreational needs of the state population, provided that they complement but are not in place of recreational service normally offered by local or regional units of government or the private sector."

### Recommended Classification

William O'Brien is recommended for classification as a recreational state park because it meets the ORA criteria. This classification, however, is recommended with the qualification that large portions of the park be managed to maintain their natural character.

### GOAL FOR THE PARK

The goal for William O'Brien State Park follows the overall goal for recreational state parks as stated in the DNR policy.

"It is the goal of the Department of Natural Resources in recreational state parks to:

"Provide lands and waters which offer a broad selection of outdoor recreational activities in a natural setting and which may be used by large numbers of people."

# Park Resources





## PARK RESOURCES

### Soils

The soils of William O'Brien State Park were formed on outwash plains or stream terraces of the St. Croix River. The parent material is generally fine to gravelly coarse sand. The loamy top soil which lies over the sand was formed under deciduous hardwoods and prairie grasses. There are several rock outcrops, most often occurring along the river. The comprehensive management plan includes a map of park soils and a chart which identifies the suitability of each soil type for development. These characteristics have been considered in determining the location of all new park development.

### Vegetation and Wildlife

The vegetation in William O'Brien State Park is primarily forested with oak on the uplands and hardwoods along the river. Vast areas of grasslands and wet meadow occur adjacent to the oak woods (see map, p 27). Conifers visually dominate the park entrance area. They were planted along TH 95 which is the primary park access road.

All vegetation management recommendations will improve habitat and as a result benefit park wildlife. Specie lists of park flora and fauna are included in the comprehensive management plan.

### Surface Water

The St. Croix River is part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Program. The section which flows through the park is administered jointly by the National Park Service and the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. It is a very popular recreational river with water quality high enough for whole body contact.

Lake Alice was created by impounding a small creek which ran parallel to the valley wall and emptied into the river. A

swimming beach has been developed on this lake. No management is required as this time other than flood proofing park facilities which are located within the 100 year floodplain.

#### Ground Water

Sandstone bedrock underlies the park. It is an abundant aquifer. There are five wells in the park. All have an adequate water supply of good quality. No management is required at this time.

#### Fisheries

Fishing is good both in Lake Alice and the St. Croix River with a wide variety of game fish species. Several rough fish species are also present. The DNR, Section of Fisheries stocks Lake Alice. It is recommended that current stocking procedures be continued.

#### Archeology/History

The Archaeological Site File in the State Historic Preservation Office describes two sites within or near the boundary of the park. One site, near the city of Copas, once consisted of 27 burial mounds. Today only a few remain. The other site is a habitation site on Greenburg Island. It also extends across the river on the shoreline.

The history of the area from the 1650s is rich and varied. The area was used extensively by trappers, traders, and loggers. In the 1850s European immigration began. Marine on St. Croix was an entry point for thousands of immigrants arriving in Minnesota by steamboat. Many small communities along the St. Croix did not fulfill the promise of their early years and disappeared as the pine forests of the valley were exhausted.

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

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Action	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total
1 Develop a planting plan for the park.						
1a Regenerate white pine.	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 6,000
1b Regenerate tamarack.		3,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	11,000
1c Rehabilitate vegetation in high use areas.	Covered in cost of other actions					
2 Control the spread of oak wilt.	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	5,000
3 Reduce visual dominance of conifer plantings.	3,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	11,000
4 Maintain large, undisturbed forested areas.	No cost					
5 Maintain the maximum abundance of dead, standing and downed trees.	No cost					
6 Convert brome grass dominated old fields to other native grasses.	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	30,000
7 Plant clumps of native trees and shrubs in old field grasslands.			3,000		3,000	6,000
8 Develop fire management plan.	No cost					
9 Maintain converted grasslands with fire management.	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,000	
10 Restore natural drainage.	1,500				1,500	
11 Survey all development sites for archaeological or historic significance before construction	1,000					1,000



Physical  
Development  
and  
Recreation  
Management



## EXISTING DEVELOPMENT (see map, p 31)

### Picnicking

There is a picnic area with approximately 200 tables and an enclosed shelter which is also the interpretive center. A private concessionaire operates a snack stand near the swimming beach in the summer.

### Camping

The lower campground near the St. Croix River has 60 sites and the upper or west campground has 65 sites. There is a group camp near the St. Croix River which can accommodate up to 50 people and often serves as a canoe campground. There is a larger, 75 person capacity, group camp in the western portion of the park for organized groups such as the Boy Scouts.

### Trails

A system of 11.5 miles (18.4 km) of trails has been developed for ski touring and hiking. The city of Marine on St. Croix has developed a bicycle path to the park paralleling TH 95.

### Water Activities

A swimming beach has been developed on Lake Alice. A concrete ramp provides access to the St. Croix River for boating, canoeing, and fishing. During the summer months a private concessionaire rents canoes at the access area.

### Administrative Facilities

Administrative development in the park includes a contact station, the shop maintenance area, and residence for the park's manager and assistant manager. The manager's residence has been fitted for solar heating in a cooperative venture with Honeywell and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

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

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT (see map, p 33)

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 LCMR.

Action	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total
<u>Trails</u>						
1 Build an energy efficient trail center.	\$300,000					\$300,000
2 Remove the existing winter parking lot.			\$ 700			700
3 Expand the ski touring and hiking trail system.		\$ 3,000				3,000
4 Extend the bicycle trail to connect with the county trail.				\$15,000		15,000
5 Develop the trail interpretive program.		5,000				5,000
6 Connect the park snowmobile trail to nearby grant-in-aid trails.	Grant-in-aid Program					
7 Connect the horseback riding trail to nearby grant-in-aid trails.	Grant-in-aid Program					
<u>Camping</u>						
1 Rehabilitate the lower campground.	100,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	\$103,000	
2 Develop a hike-in campground.	6,000	2,500			8,500	
3 Expand the upper campground.	10,000	1,000		1,000		12,000





Action	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total
4 Reserve the canoe campground for river users only. (After the National Park Service develops additional canoe campsites outside the park, this campground should be converted to a group camp.)	\$ 500					\$ 500
<u>Picnicking</u>						
1 Remodel the existing interpretive building for use as picnic shelter only.			\$ 60,000			60,000
2 Develop two new picnic shelters.		\$ 60,000		\$ 60,000		120,000
3 Build changing facilities onto the toilet building near the swimming beach.				30,000		30,000
4 Build natural play area for children in the picnic ground.		5,000				5,000
<u>Administrative/Support Facilities</u>						
1 Remodel the maintenance area.	100,000			100,000		
2 Build a new assistant manager's residence.		115,000				115,000
3 Build an addition to contact station to provide for ice coolers and wood storage and landscape the area.	1,000				\$ 1,000	
4 Remove the existing fuel tanks and convert the heating system to natural gas.	1,000					1,000
5 Bury all power lines.	5,000					5,000
6 Pave park roads, service court, campground loops, and parking lots.	100,000				100,000	
<u>Interpretive Program</u>						
1 Provide orientation and interpretive materials for park visitors.	500		500		500	1,500

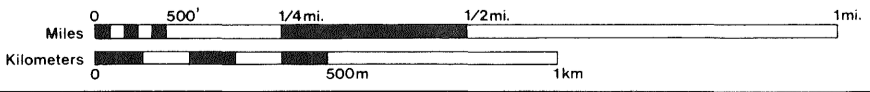
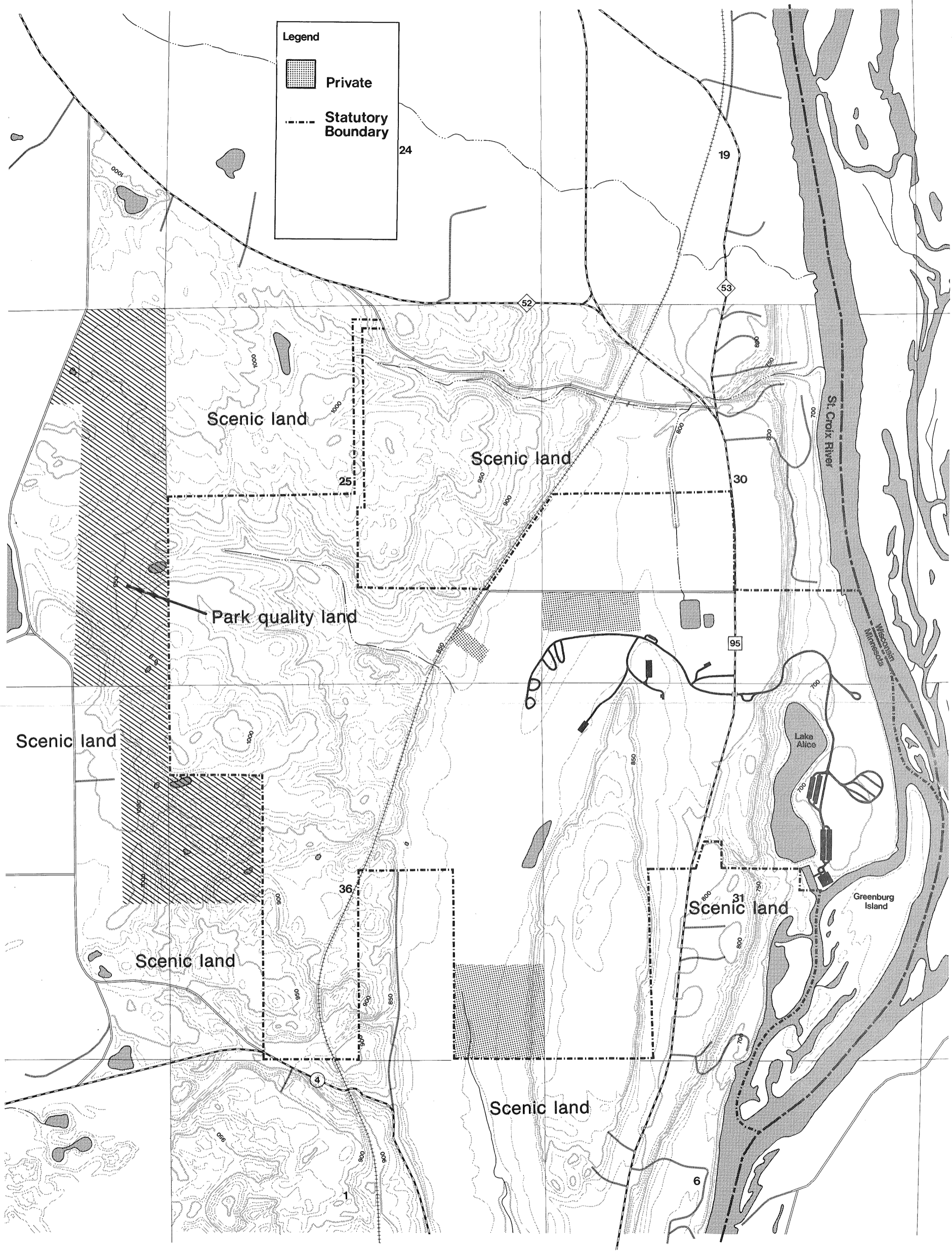


# Maps



**Legend**

-  Private
-  Statutory Boundary

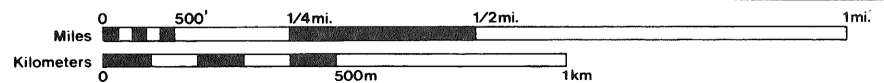


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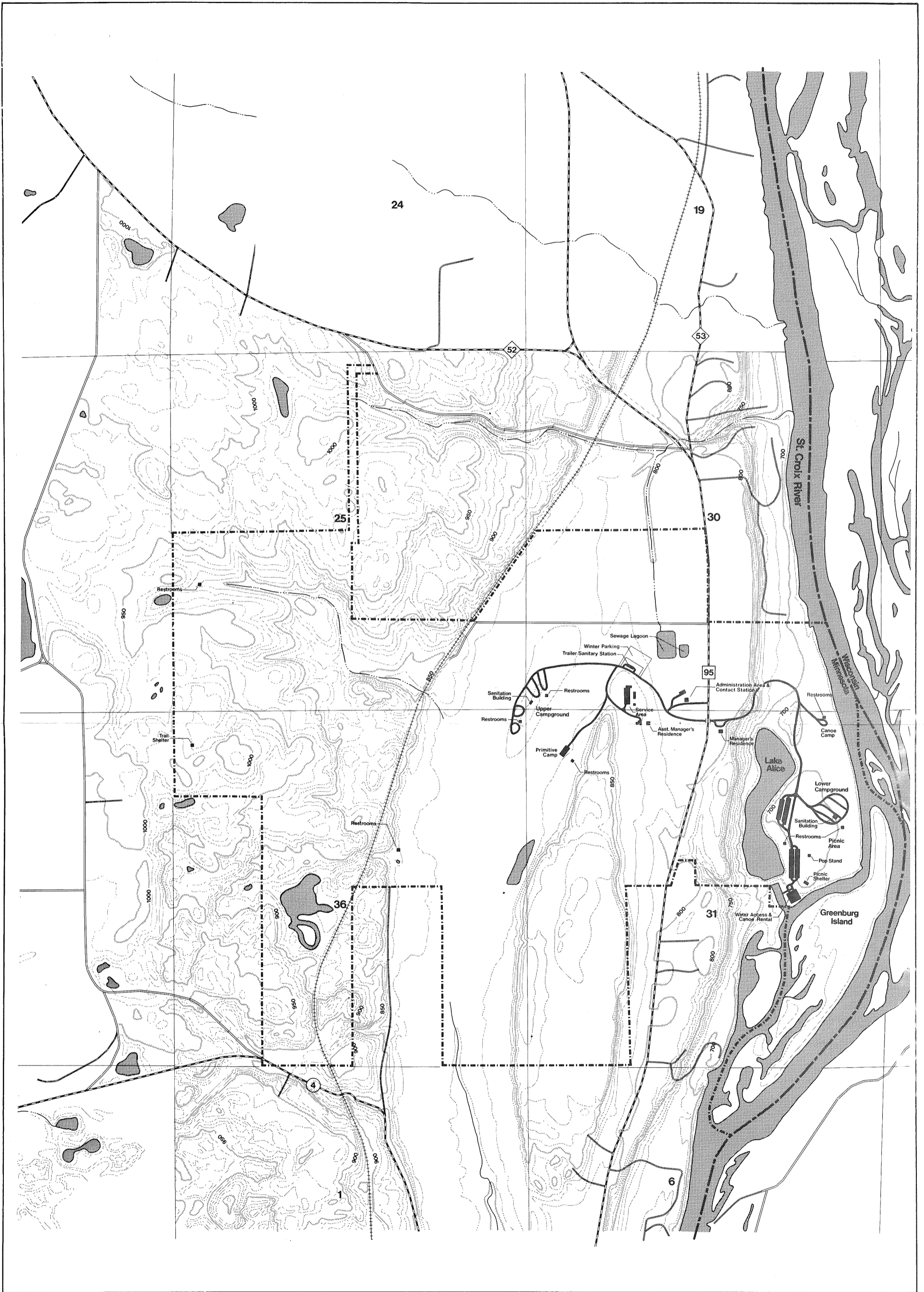
Legend  
See Page 17

OA	Oak Forest
DW	Dec. Wet. Forest
MNW	Mix. Wet. Forest
LS	Lowland Shrub
WM	Wet Meadow
GR	Grassland
CG	Cedar Glade
RB	River Bottom Forest
NH	Northern Hardwoods
FP	Floodplain Forest
CP	Conifer Plantings
BE	Box Elder
AG	Agricultural Land
S	Sand

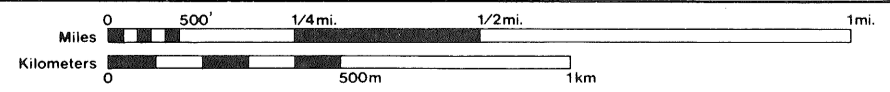








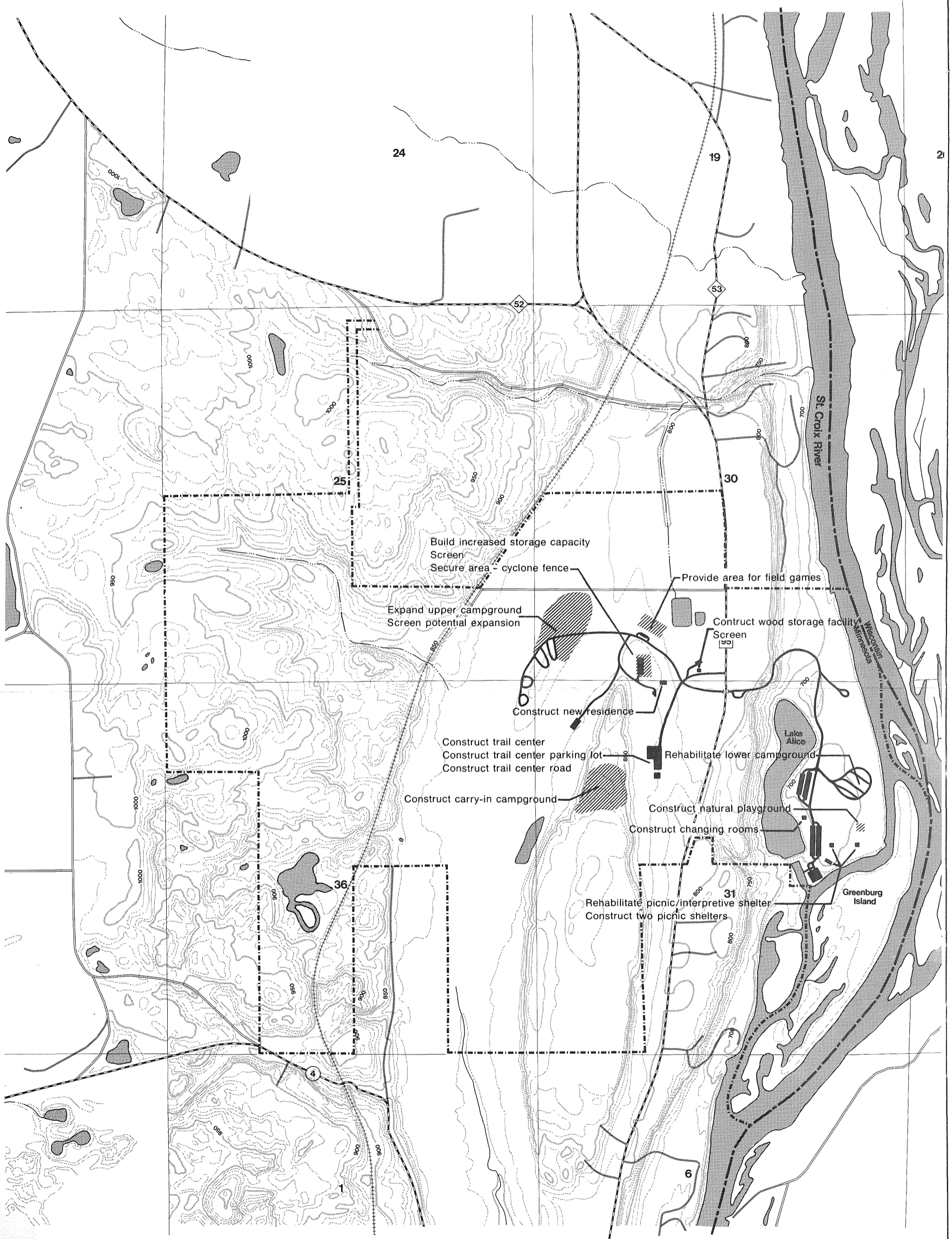
31



**William O'Brien State Park**

**Existing Development**





24

19

21

52

53

25

30

Build increased storage capacity  
Screen  
Secure area - cyclone fence

Provide area for field games

Expand upper campground  
Screen potential expansion

Construct wood storage facility  
Screen

Construct new residence

Construct trail center  
Construct trail center parking lot  
Construct trail center road

Rehabilitate lower campground

Construct carry-in campground

Construct natural playground

Construct changing rooms

36

Rehabilitate picnic/interpretive shelter  
Construct two picnic shelters

31

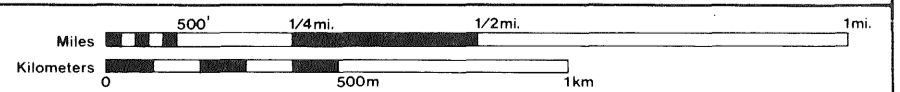
Greenburg Island

Lake Alice

4

6

33



**William O'Brien State Park**

**Proposed Development**



**Legend**

- Cross-Country Ski/Hiking Trail (Existing)
- - - Proposed Trail (Ski/Hiking)
- < One-Way Trail
- ..... Bike Trail (Proposed)
- ..... Bike Trail (Existing)

