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MINNESOTA

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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS

Fort Ridgely  
State Park

January 10, 1990



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# MINNESOTA STATE PARK SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## AN OVERVIEW OF FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK

Fort Ridgely State Park is located in south central Minnesota in Nicollet and Renville Counties, six miles south of the town of Fairfax. Established in 1911 the park was named after the military post which occupied the site in the 1850's and 1860's. Today the park's statutory boundary encompasses 589 acres. Of these 40 acres are privately owned.

Situated on a northern bluff overlooking the Minnesota River Valley, Fort Ridgely State Park is a mosaic of wooded ravines, open meadows, forested uplands and tall grass prairie. Prior to the arrival of the first Europeans Native Americans inhabited the river valley.

The Minnesota River Valley was first explored by Pierre Charles Le Sueur in the late 1600's but the region remained closed to white settlement until 1851 when two treaties were negotiated with the Dakota Indians. Fort Ridgely was built in 1853 to provide protection for the newly settled lands of southern and central Minnesota. It eventually played a decisive role in the Dakota conflict of 1862. The fort was abandoned by the U.S. Government in 1872. Settlers arriving in the area during the mid 1870's built their homes from the stones of the fort buildings. Today, Fort Ridgely is marked only by the exposed foundations of several of the original structures.

The old fort site with five acres of land was purchased by the State of Minnesota in 1896 to create a memorial to those who participated in the Dakota conflict at Fort Ridgely. When additional lands were acquired in 1911, the site was designated as a state park.

The park was developed by a 240 man unit of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the 1930's under the supervision of the National Park Service. The CCC camp that was in the area is now used as the rustic campground. Many of the park buildings, roads, trails, trees and erosion control projects we see today are the result of CCC efforts.

A variety of plant communities inhabit Fort Ridgely's diverse landscape. These include: floodplain forest of willow, cottonwood and elm; big woods forest of maple, basswood and ironwood located in the deep ravines; oak woods and prairie situated on the bluffs; and old fields and meadows of brome, bluegrass and numerous wildflower species.

The diverse range of plant communities found in the park is home to a multitude of wildlife. Many species of birds use the park either as residents or seasonal migrants. These include the bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, great-horned owl, pileated woodpecker, scarlet tanager, indigo bunting, orchard oriole and red-headed woodpecker. Mammals inhabiting the park include white-tailed deer, red and grey fox, mink, raccoon, muskrat, beaver, Virginia opossum and four species of bats. Twelve species of amphibians and reptiles have been found in the park area including the false map turtle and northern prairie skink.

Fort Ridgely State Park offers visitors a variety of recreational experiences in a quiet and picturesque setting. A well developed trail system provides opportunities for horseback riding, hiking and cross-country skiing. Unique to the state park system is Fort Ridgely's 9-hole golf course which is one of the park's major attractions. The Minnesota Historical Society operates an interpretive center at the Fort site which contains exhibits and information about garrison life and the people and events surrounding Fort Ridgely during the 1850's and 1860's. Other popular activities enjoyed in the park include camping, picnicking and birdwatching.

# Fort Ridgely State Park

## LEGEND

### TRAILS

- ..... Hiking
- Horseback/Hiking

### FACILITIES

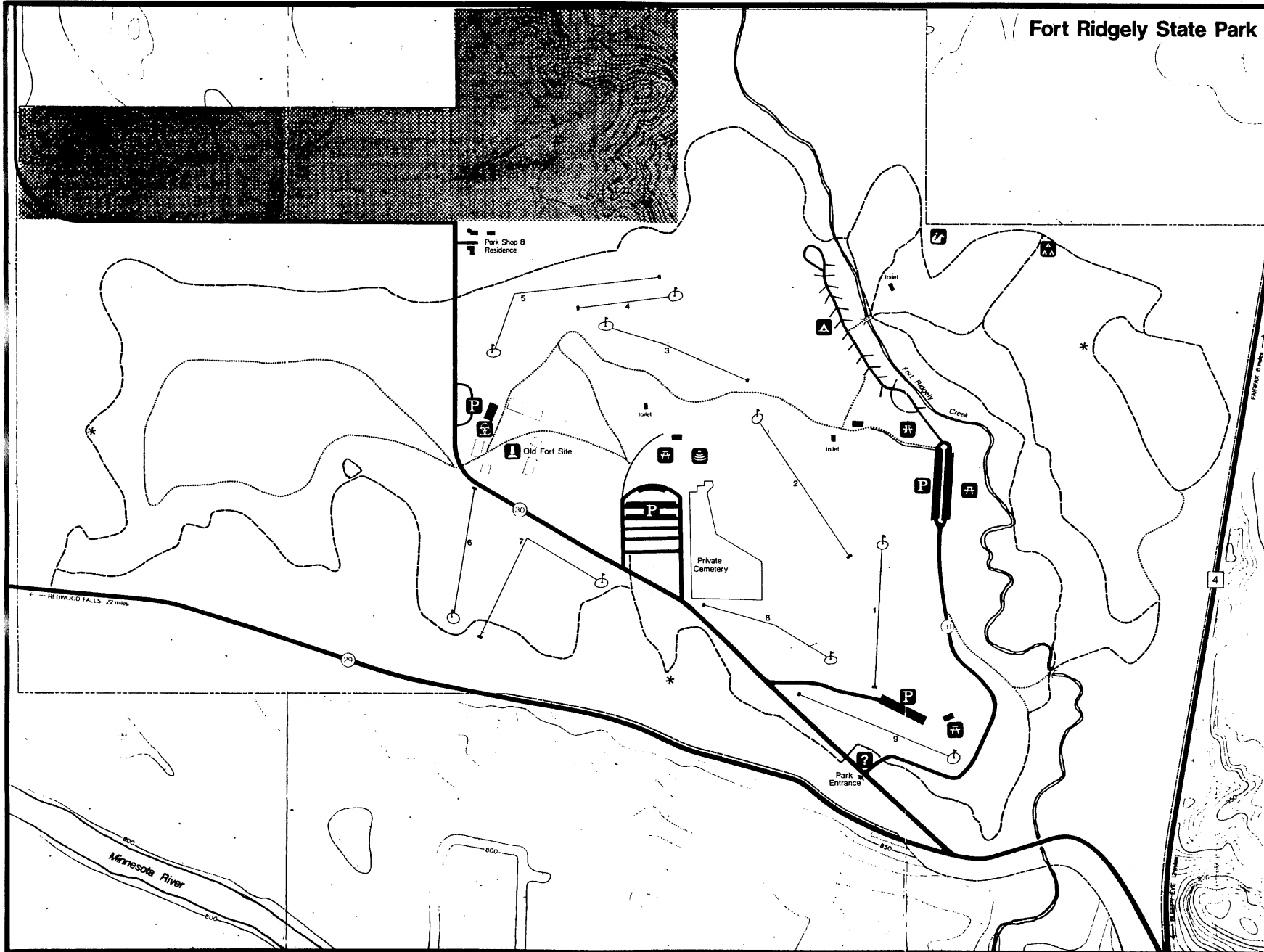
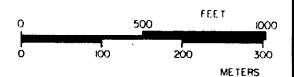
- ? Information
- ⌘ Picnic Area
- Ⓐ Historic Site
- Ⓜ Interpretive Center
- Ⓜ Amphitheater
- ⒶⒶ Group Camp
- Ⓐ Campground
- Ⓐ Horseback Rider's Camp
- P Parking Lot



- \* Overlooks

- PRIVATE PROPERTY  
Public Use Prohibited

### SCALE



## EXISTING FACILITIES

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

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 584.00

Acres of state land - 504.00

Acres of private land - 80.00

### Campsites

Drive in - 39

Back Pack - 4

Horse

Showers

Modern toilets

Campsites with electricity - 8

Group Camp

### Miles of Trails

Self-guided Interpretive - 1.0

Hiking - 10.0

Horse - 7.00

Cross Country Ski - 3

Snowmobile - 7

### Miles of Road

Gravel - 1.0

### Open and Enclosed Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 67

Playgrounds - 1

### Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 12

Under 100 sq.ft. - 8

Miles of Posted Boundary - 6

### Seasonal Visitor Center

### Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 6

Number of Wells - 3

Number of Individual

Water Distribution Systems - 4

Miles of State Owned Power Line - .8

## PROBLEMS FACING FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK

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

The parks natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management to perpetuate Fort Ridgely resources. In the past, facilities were developed in prehistoric and historic use areas. These areas must be identified, protected and interpreted.

A park wide resource assessment needs to be completed. Sand and gravel mining adjacent to the park boundaries has and will continue to threaten the park's natural, cultural, and scenic resources.

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

## RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Repairs to the existing amphitheater.
2. Installation of artificial golf greens.
3. Construction of storage buildings at the service area.

## **FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS**

### **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

#### **Savanna/Prairie Restoration - \$20,000**

This project involves the restoration of savannas and prairies that are being lost due to shrub and tree invasion. Brush and trees would be removed and suitable prairie flower and grass species would be planted.

#### **Resource Inventory - \$15,000**

Complete a resource inventory of the cultural and natural resources of the park, to enable their protection, management, and interpretation.

#### **Establishment of Oak Savanna - \$15,000**

Plant oak and prairie species to reestablish oak savanna and prairie communities that have been destroyed.

**Subtotal \$50,000**

### **MAJOR REHABILITATION**

#### **Remodel Chalet Building - \$30,000**

Remodel existing chalet to improve efficiency of use.

#### **WPA Building Rehabilitation - \$100,000**

Project involves complete rehabilitation of existing CCC/WPA buildings. This will include tuck pointing stone work, roof repair, interior improvements and replacement of fixtures and associated utilities.

**Subtotal \$130,000**

### **NEW DEVELOPMENT**

#### **New Office Contact Station - \$160,000**

This facility will incorporate visitor orientation, campground registration, golf registration and office needs into a single facility.

#### **Campground Toilet Building - \$120,000**

Construct new campground toilet midway between two existing campgrounds. This facility will provide showers for all campers.

#### **New Entrance Road - \$75,000**

Construct new road near existing picnic area, through golf course to connect campground with main use areas.

#### **Pave Existing Park Road - \$50,000**

Project will eliminate dust problems and high maintenance costs.

#### **Campground Improvements - \$50,000**

Project will include improving drainage, graveling spurs, installing picnic tables and fire rings, building a trailer dump station, and landscaping.

#### **Golf Course Improvements - \$25,000**

Project will include irrigation to all tees, tee markers, tree planting and other landscaping.

#### **Shop Area Improvements - \$40,000**

Project includes paving service area and storage building rehabilitation.

**Subtotal \$520,000**

### **TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$700,000**

## LAND ACQUISITION

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

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

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

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

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

### PRIVATE LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK

Parcel #	Acres
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1	80.00
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Total 80.00 acres	
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## PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Fort Ridgely State Park? These projects along with the acquisition of private lands within the park will assure the preservation of these unique resources and facilities for future generations. Active management will be required to maintain and regenerate existing plant communities. These will ensure that future visitors will be able to experience the diverse nature of Minnesota's prairies and forests.

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

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

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

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

### SUMMARY

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

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

Fort Ridgely State Park  
development needs - **\$700,000**

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

