

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY



3 0307 00019 6124

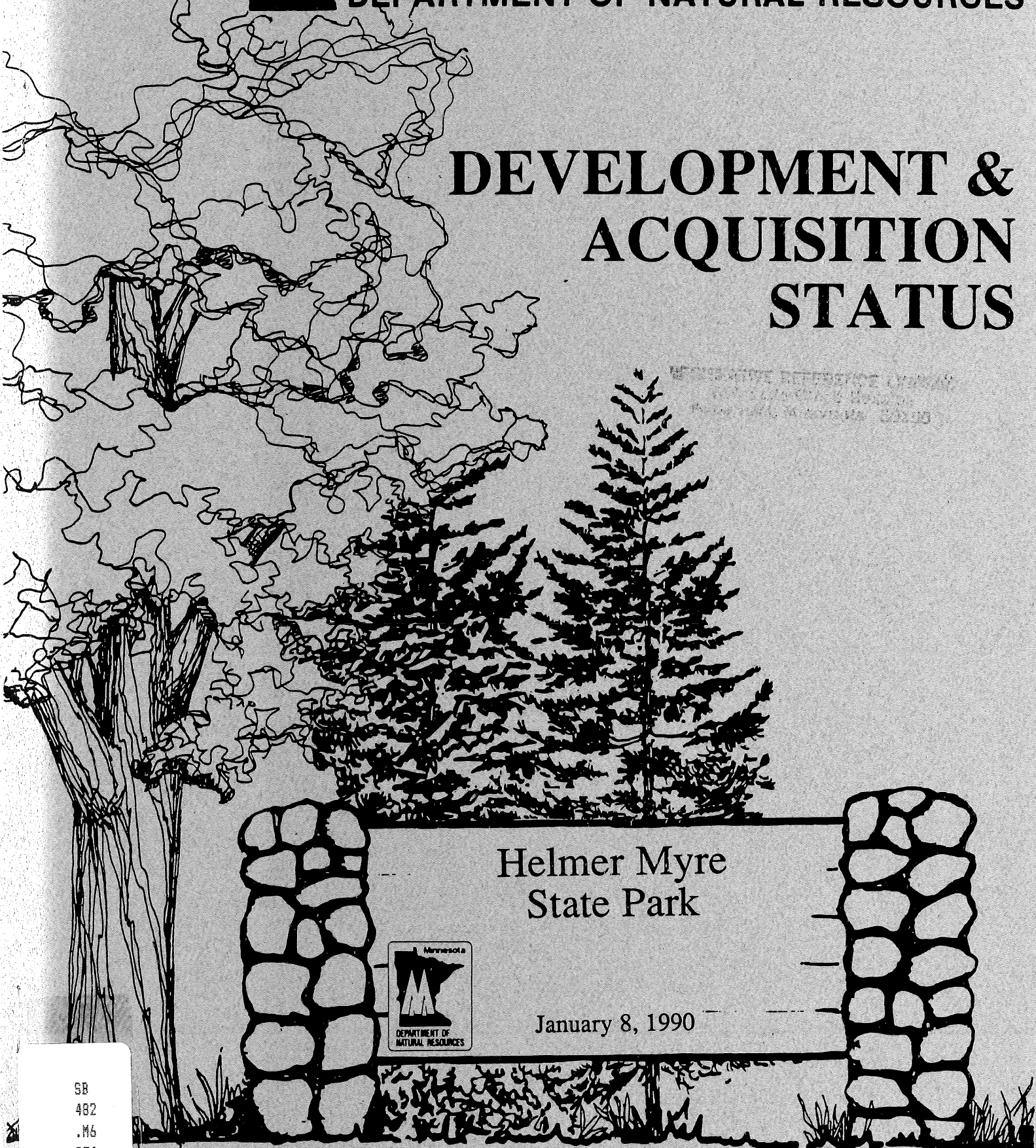
STATE OF

MINNESOTA

900251

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS



Helmer Myre
State Park

January 8, 1990

SB
482
.M6
D34
v.21

Printed on recycled paper.

This document is made available electronically by the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library as part of an ongoing digital archiving project. <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/lrl.asp>
(Funding for document digitization was provided, in part, by a grant from the Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage Program.)

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 HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

Helmer Myre State Park is located in Freeborn County, three miles southeast of Albert Lea along the north shore of Albert Lea Lake on County Road #38. The statutory boundary encompasses 1648 acres, all of which are state owned. The park's location, less than 100 miles from the Twin Cities Metropolitan area and near the intersection of two Interstate Highways, I-35 and I-90, makes it easily accessible by visitors from within and outside the state.

Approximately 10,000 years ago, as the last major glacial advance ended in Minnesota, the last glacier receded created the hills, shallow lakes and marshlands seen in the park. Important glacial features found here include moraines, a moraine dam lake, and an esker. The esker is located in the northeastern portion of the park. Eskers are winding low ridges with steep sides comprised of water sorted sands and gravels. As glaciers melted, streams formed. These streams carried sand and gravel in suspension through the glacier. As the velocity of the stream diminished, the sand and gravel settled to the streambed. As the glacier retreated this process continued, forming a long ridge that approximates the shape of the ancient stream that created it.

Human use in the area of Helmer Myre State Park dates back to prehistoric times, as evidenced by the abundance of Native American artifacts discovered in and around the park. This leads archaeologists to believe that this area was rich in wild game and native food plants. The Owen Johnson Interpretive Center houses more than 30,000 prehistoric artifacts and is one of the largest collections in the state.

Helmer Myre State Park was established in 1947 in response to local concern that Big Island would be logged off by interested lumber companies. The citizens of Albert Lea organized a campaign to purchase the island for use as a state park. One of those most responsible for the park's establishment was Owen Johnson, a conservationist and life long resident of the area.

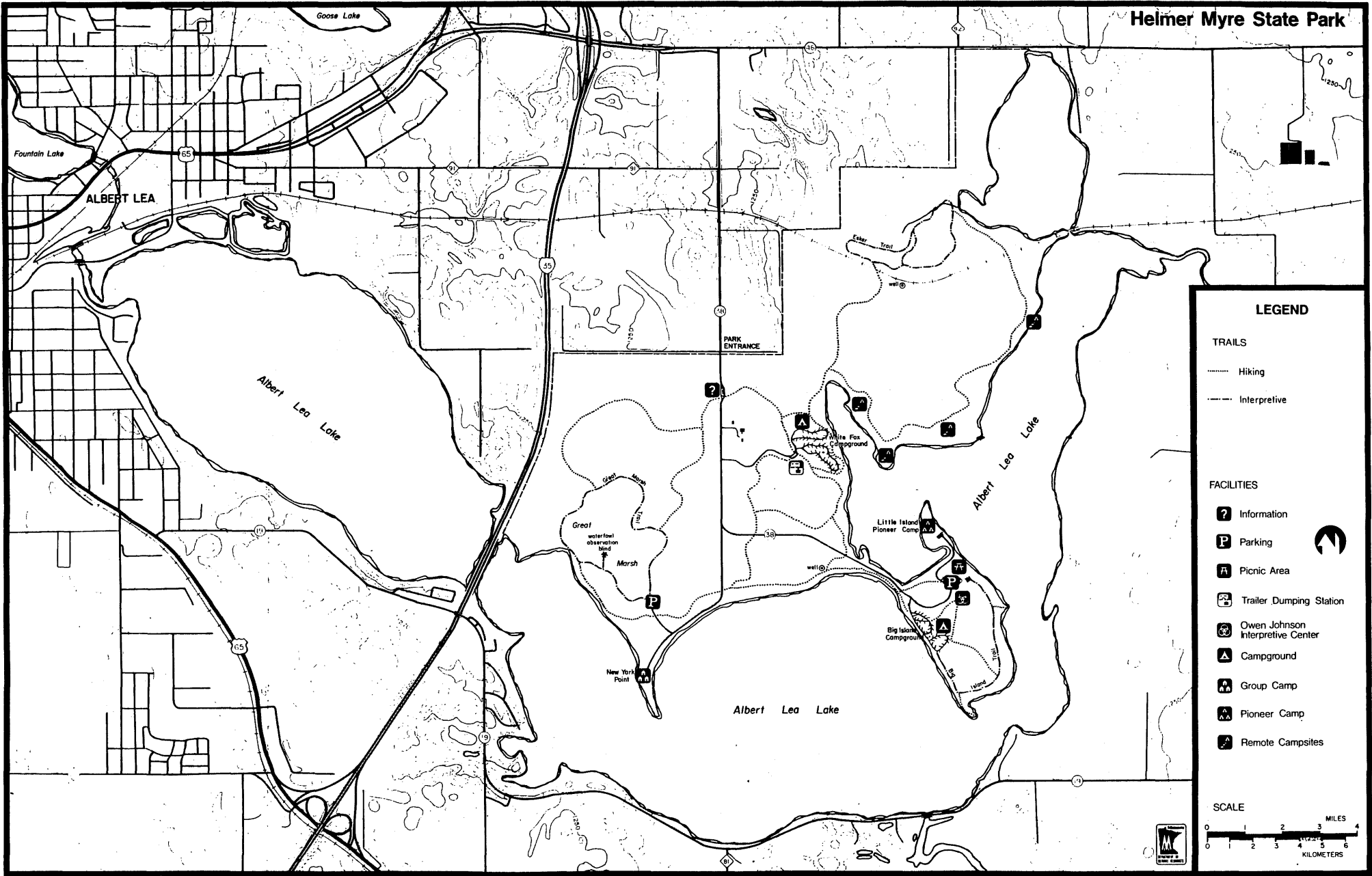
Original park vegetation was dominated by three distinct communities; oak savannah, wetlands, and northern hardwood forest. Oak savannah is characterized by prairie interspersed with oak trees and oak groves. Wetland communities are found throughout the park, occurring in the prairie areas. The variety of wetland plants provide nesting sites, food and cover for many species of wildlife. The northern hardwood forest developed on 116 acre Big Island, as this area was naturally protected from prairie fires. This forest is comprised of maple, basswood, oak, elm, and ironwood.

Today, work is being done to return some of the park's original vegetational pattern through prairie and wetland restoration.

The mixture of woods, prairie and wetlands provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. Helmer Myre is one of the best birding spots in southern Minnesota. Birds of prey, waterfowl, shore and song birds are among the many types of birds seen in the park. Mammal species present include white-tailed deer, raccoon, grey and fox squirrels, muskrats, opossum, red and grey fox and bats. In addition, fish, amphibian, and reptile species are also found in the park.

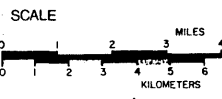
Helmer Myre State Park provides a variety of outdoor experiences for thousand of visitors a year. Popular activities include camping, hiking, canoeing, bird-watching, and picnicking. The year round interpretive program provides environmental education and historical programs to park visitors and school groups.

Heimer Myre State Park



LEGEND

- TRAILS**
- Hiking (dotted line)
 - Interpretive (dashed line)
- FACILITIES**
- Information (question mark icon)
 - Parking (P icon)
 - Picnic Area (A icon)
 - Trailer Dumping Station (TR icon)
 - Owen Johnson Interpretive Center (OJ icon)
 - Campground (A icon)
 - Group Camp (AA icon)
 - Pioneer Camp (AAA icon)
 - Remote Campsites (A icon)



EXISTING FACILITIES

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

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 1648
Acres of state land - 1648

Campsites

Drive in - 100
Back Pack - 4
Showers
Modern toilets
Campsites with electricity - 32

Miles of Trails

Self-guided Interpretive - 3
Hiking - 16
Cross Country Ski - 8
Snowmobile - 7

Miles of Road

Asphalt - 2
Gravel - 2

Enclosed Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 45
Trailer Dump Station - 1
Year round Visitor Center
Canoe Rental

Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 14
Under 100 sq.ft. - 8

Miles of Posted Boundary - 14

Park Utilities

Sewage Lagoon - 1
Number of Sewage Lift Stations - 2
Number of Septic Tanks - 6
Number of Wells - 8
Number of Individual
Water Distribution Systems - 6
Miles of State Owned Power Line - .5

PROBLEMS FACING HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

There are many public recreational facilities in Helmer Myre to maintain. Many are in need of replacement or major rehabilitation. Most were constructed in the 1950's, and are now in need of rehabilitation. New facilities are needed to meet growing recreational demands. The demand for water-based recreation opportunities is steadily increasing. Currently, these opportunities are not being provided by the park.

In order to perpetuate Helmer Myre's resources, they must be protected and managed. In the past, facilities may have been developed in areas of cultural significance. These areas must be protected and interpreted. There has been an increase in both the types of recreational uses in the park, and the intensity of these uses. These changes in use patterns must be addressed to ensure that the park continues to provide quality recreational experiences while preserving the park's resources.

The growing demand for interpretive programs and services highlights the need to upgrade and modernize the interpretive center, and provide year-round parking for visitors. Built in 1977, the building has no office, workshop or storage areas.

A major concern is the restoration of old farm fields to native prairie grasses and oak savannah. This restoration would greatly enhance the habitat potential of the park, and show how this area looked prior to European settlement.

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

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Construction of new contact station.
2. Improvements to park entrance road.
3. Construction of new park shop.
4. Began restoration of 30 acres of prairie.
5. Reestablished 18 wetlands.

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Cultural Resources Inventory - \$35,000

Inventory and analysis of cultural sites and archaeological research in use areas and potential use areas, to aid management in providing opportunities while protecting resources.

Problem Species Management - \$40,000

Manage aggressive exotic and problem species such as European buckthorn, Siberian elm and boxelder to maintain the natural composition of the oak savannah.

Restoration of Old Farm Fields - \$10,000

Initiate prairie restoration on several old fields, including the planting of native grasses and forbs.

Subtotal \$85,000

MAJOR REHABILITATION

Road and Parking Lot Improvements - \$130,000

Grading, adding base and paving the access road and the parking lot on Big Island, and paving the road to the group camp.

Group Camp Rehabilitation - \$100,000

General rehabilitation of group camp buildings and site, including upgrading of camp utilities and installation of a sewer connection.

Subtotal \$230,000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Accessible Trail - \$15,000

Construct a handicapped accessible self-guided interpretive trail on Big Island.

Addition to Interpretive Center - \$100,000

Construct an addition to the existing building to increase programming, workshop, storage and office space.

Service Court Improvements - \$80,000

Construct a warehouse to provide inside storage for state equipment and supplies, pave the driveway and lot, and landscape the existing service court.

Bury Electric Lines - \$90,000

Bury existing overhead electrical lines throughout the park to improve aesthetic qualities and provide for a more natural setting.

Access to the Esker - \$100,000

Provide road access to the vicinity of the esker, construct a parking lot and interpretive signs.

Subtotal \$385,000

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS \$700,000

PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Helmer Myre State Park? These projects will ensure the preservation of unique resources and facilities for future generations. Active management will be required to maintain and regenerate oak savannah and prairie habitats. These will ensure that future visitors will be able to experience the transitional zone mixture of prairie, oak savannah and maple basswood forest.

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 service while giving the visitor a greater opportunity to learn about Minnesota's natural and cultural resources.

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

Helmer Myre State Park
development needs **\$700,000**

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

