



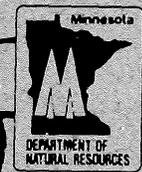
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# DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA



Bear Head Lake  
State Park



November 27, 1989

SB  
492  
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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. These 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 BEAR HEAD LAKE STATE PARK

Bear Head Lake State Park is located in St. Louis County in northeastern Minnesota near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) and approximately 20 miles southwest of Ely. The park was established in 1961 and has a statutory boundary that encompasses 4375 acres. Of these 91.50 acres are privately owned. U.S. Highway 169 and State Highway 1 are the major transportation corridors serving the park area.

The park's landscape is representative of the Border Lakes Region. Very rocky and rolling hills forested with aspen and birch and dominated by numerous lakes and bogs typify this state park. It is the only state park in Minnesota located on the Canadian Shield.

The landforms and soils of the park are the result of glacial processes and bedrock outcrops. Hundreds of millions of years ago volcanoes and ancient sea sediments created the giants ridge granite and Ely greenstone which serves as the bedrock underlying the park.

Today many areas of the park are covered with huge mounds of glacial debris. Some 10,000 years ago the last glacier receded from Minnesota. It left large deposits of sand, gravel and rock debris that are the hills we see in the park today. Depressions between these hills filled with water to become the many lakes and bogs that dot the landscape.

The vegetation of northeastern Minnesota has been slowly changing since the retreat of the last glacier. Tundra occurred during the post glacial period. This was followed by spruce forests which were later succeeded by jack pine, red pine and an increase in birch. About 7,000 years ago white pine appeared in Minnesota. Together with red and jack pines this species remained a large part of the regional vegetation until the time of European settlement.

Between 1880 and 1930 the park area was extensively logged for its rich supply of pine. The combination of logging and wildfire suppression decreased red and

jack pine regeneration and allowed other species to become established.

Today aspen and birch predominate on the uplands with scattered stands of pine remaining in isolated groves. The lowlands are characterized as conifer wetlands and include the following plant communities: black spruce bog, tamarack bog, and white cedar.

The variety of plant communities and numerous lakes and wetland provide habitat for many species of wildlife. The birds of the park can be grouped into four major bird communities: wetland (conifer wetlands and shrub wetlands), deciduous, upland (aspen-birch, aspen-birch-fir), coniferous, upland (pine), and open water (lakes). Important bird species found in the park include: Lincoln's sparrow, ruby-crowned kinglet, boreal chickadee and gray jay (wetland bird community), red-eyed vireo, oven bird, ruffed grouse and broad-winged hawk (deciduous upland bird community), hermit thrush, eastern wood pewee, and blackburnian warbler (coniferous upland bird community), loon, great blue heron, osprey and bald eagle (open water bird community). Mammals inhabiting the park include the timber wolf, moose, white tailed deer, black bear, beaver, porcupine, and snowshoe hare.

Bear Head Lake State Park offers visitors a variety of recreational experiences in a scenic and ecologically diverse setting. Outstanding fishing is available on nine lakes that lie entirely or practically within the park. Miles of trails provide opportunities for hikers, birdwatchers, and snowmobilers to discover the scenic and natural qualities the park has to offer. A variety of camping opportunities from primitive to semi-modern combined with beautiful sand swimming beach and picnic area round out the many recreational options that make this park popular with thousands of visitors a year.

**LEGEND**

**TRAILS**

----- Hiking

— Horseback/Hiking

PRIVATE PROPERTY  
Public Use Prohibited  
(except on designated trails)

**FACILITIES**

? Information

P Picnic Area

Swimming

Boat Ramp

Campground

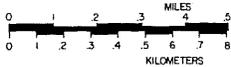
Primitive Group Camp

Backpack Camping

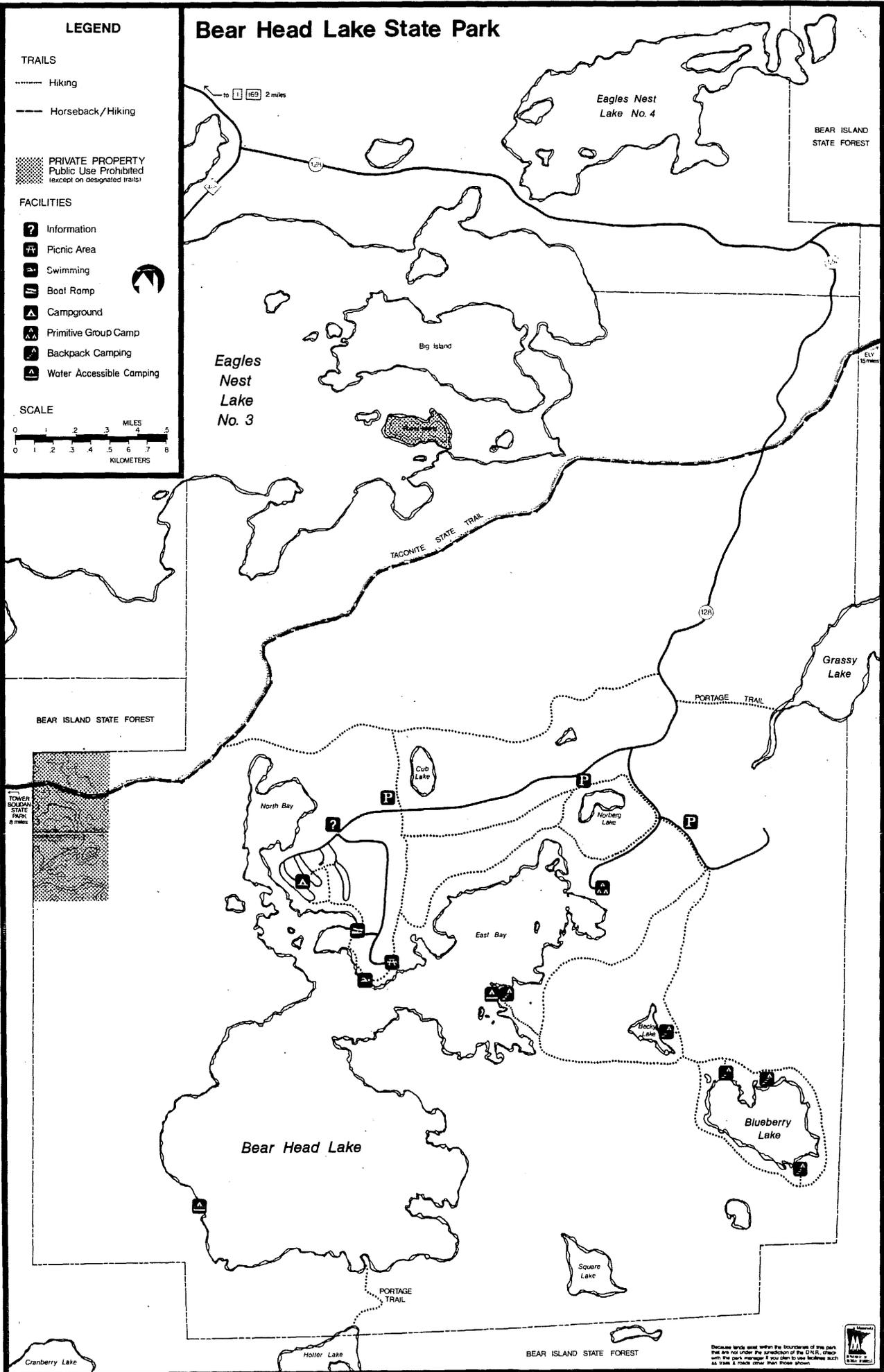
Water Accessible Camping



**SCALE**



# Bear Head Lake State Park



Because lands and within the boundaries of this park that are not under the jurisdiction of the DNR, check with the park manager if you plan to use facilities such as trails & roads other than those shown.



## EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of Bear Head Lake State Park.

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 4,375

Acres of state land - 4,283.50

Acres of private land - 91.50

### Campsites

Drive in - 73

Back Pack - 5

Canoe in - 2

Group camp primitive - 100

Showers

Modern toilets

### Miles of Trails

Hiking - 17

Cross Country Ski - 6

Snowmobile - 1

Beaches - 1

Boat & Canoe Rental

### Miles of Road

Asphalt - 3

Gravel - 3.75

Number of Picnic Tables - 30

Trailer Dump Station

Water Accesses - 2

### Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 8

Under 100 sq.ft. - 10

Miles of Posted Boundary - 10

### Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 5

Number of Wells - 4

Number of Individual

Water Distribution Systems - 1

Water filtration and treatment system - 1

## PROBLEMS FACING BEAR HEAD LAKE STATE PARK

Bear Head is one of the most beautiful parks in the state but also one of the most fragile. The thin rocky soils of the Canadian Shield do not take development well. Much of the emphasis for resource management has been on controlling erosion caused by foot traffic near the lakes and on reclaiming former campsites after use. This emphasis has paid off in that most visitors to the park do not realize the impact of their activities. There are still problems, however, and unless they are addressed the fragile areas will only deteriorate.

There are many public recreational facilities in Bear Head Lake 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 Bear Head Lake's resources. In the past, facilities were developed in areas of ancient encampments. These encampments deserve to be protected and interpreted.

This park use is primarily centered around water recreation. Extensive use of the shoreline over time has created many eroded areas that are in need of rehabilitation.

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

## RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN BEAR HEAD LAKE STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Major rehabilitation of existing campground sanitation building.
2. Main park boat launch rehabilitation.
3. Development of water access on Eagles Nest #3 Lake.

## BEAR HEAD LAKE STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

#### **Campsite Reclamation - \$15,000**

This project involves the use of techniques that scarify the soil or strip away the old gravel layer and replace it with black dirt. Native herb and sod strips are then added and the site is fenced off for a few years to allow healing. A rotation plan for campsites is needed.

#### **Campground Understory Rehabilitation - \$6,000**

Replace trees and shrubs killed by the pressures of living in a campground with native materials from other parts of the park. Spring or fall transplants are best.

#### **Pine Restoration - \$30,000**

Restore original pine vegetation to parks of the park as per the management plan.

#### **Shoreline Erosion Control \$30,000**

Project includes stabilization of existing shoreline by use of rip-rap and timber walls.

**Campground Shoreline Erosion Control \$20,000**  
Construction of a walkway and boat docking area along campground area shoreline.

**Subtotal \$91,000**

### MAJOR REHABILITATION

#### **Office Contact Station Remodel \$275,000**

Replace existing office with combination office/interpretive/trail center facility.

**Subtotal \$200,000**

### NEW DEVELOPMENT

#### **Picnic Shelter \$100,000**

Project includes construction of a new picnic shelter with toilets.

#### **Campground Toilet Building \$100,000**

New campground toilet buildings. The existing facility is too small to serve the existing campground.

#### **Storage Building \$60,000**

This facility would eliminate the outside storage of state equipment and supplies.

#### **Scenic Vista - \$30,000**

Develop a parking lot and trail area overlooking Grassy Lake and surrounding countryside.

#### **Campground Expansion - \$100,000**

Construct an additional home (D-loop) for vehicle camping.

**Subtotal \$390,000**

**TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$766,000**

## 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 reduce 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 reduce potential for public use.

### PRIVATE LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN BEAR HEAD LAKE STATE PARK

Parcel #	Acres
13	11.5
65	40.0
66	40.0

Total 91.5 acres.

## PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Bear Head 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 forest stands. These will ensure that future visitors will be able to experience the diverse nature of Minnesota's 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 Bear Head 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 Bear Head 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.

Bear Head Lake State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Bear Head Lake State Park  
development needs - **\$766,000**

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

