



DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS

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Minnesota Valley Trail State Park



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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 MN VALLEY TRAIL STATE PARK

The Minnesota Valley Trail State Park was established in 1969 to be part of an extensive recreational and wildlife system that will traverse the Minnesota River Valley for 72 miles through six counties between Le Sueur and Fort Snelling. Together with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge over 24,000 acres of floodplain marsh, grassland, woodland eventually will be included in this recreation and wildlife complex.

Eleven thousand years ago the meltwaters of the retreating Wisconsin glacier formed Glacial Lake Agassiz. This massive lake covered an area over 100,000 square miles in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Manitoba. As the lake level rose, a drainage outlet was created at the south end of the lake at the present location of Brown's Valley near the Minnesota-South Dakota border. Through this outlet torrential volumes of meltwater were released creating Glacial River Warren. This enormously powerful river varied between one and seven miles in width and from 75 to 200 feet in depth. When the glacial river retreated, it left a broad valley with a much smaller stream known as the Minnesota River.

The Minnesota River Valley has long been a part of human history. For centuries people have enjoyed the rich natural resources found here. The Dakota people gave the river its name: Wakpa Mini Sota. These people hunted, fished and harvested wild rice from floodplain lakes. Many landmarks bear the names of Dakota leaders whose villages were located along the lower Minnesota River: Black Dog, Shakopee, and Mazomani.

European explorers, fur traders and missionaries traveled the Minnesota River beginning in the 1600's. By the 1860's Europeans had settled along the fertile banks of the Minnesota River opening another chapter in Minnesota's rich agricultural history.

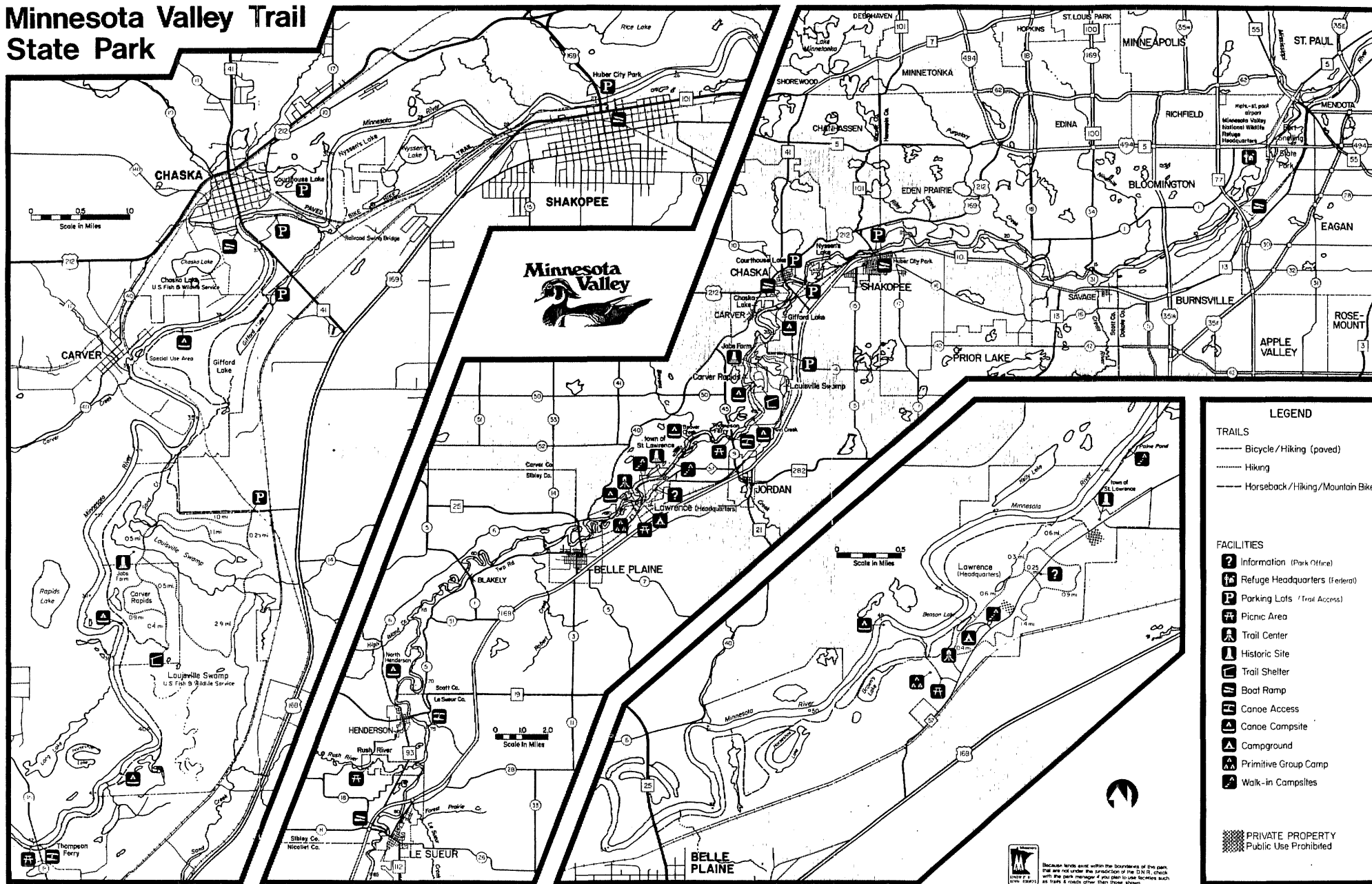
Today the lower Minnesota River Valley is a belt of woodlands, prairie, lakes and marshes that extend across a section of the state that is intensively developed for agriculture and other industries. The lower valley is classified as a northern floodplain forest ecosystem and meanders through the Big Woods, Mississippi Sand Plains, and Southern Oak Barrens landscape regions of Minnesota.

The diverse plant communities found in the river valley provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. Extensive wetlands attract hundreds of thousands of waterfowl during spectacular annual migrations. Floodplain lakes and marshes, wooded valleys and uplands, and prairie bluffs are home to many breeding and resident birds including the Bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, great-horned owl, pileated woodpecker, great-blue heron, barred owl, and numerous song bird species. Many mammals also inhabit the valley including the white-tailed deer, red and gray fox, coyotes, raccoon, mink, beaver, muskrat, gray and fox squirrels, and chipmunks.

MN Valley Trail State Park offers visitors an opportunity to experience outdoor recreation along the scenic and peaceful Minnesota River within minutes of the Twin City metro area. Popular activities include nature study, hiking, canoeing, horseback riding, camping, fishing, biking/mountain biking and snowmobiling. Other non-traditional uses that have occurred on portions of the trail include special events such as field dog trials.

When completed, nearly 75 miles of trails will stretch from Fort Snelling to Le Sueur. Currently, only the portion of the trail system from Belle Plain to Chaska and Shakopee is completed. As the park is completed, evaluations of appropriate recreational uses and resource management will continue to be made.

Minnesota Valley Trail State Park



EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of MN Valley Trail State Park.

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 8,000

Acres of state land - 6,527.82

Acres of private land - 1,472.18

Campsites

Drive in - 25

Walk in - 8

Back Pack - 8

Canoe in - 8

Horse

Miles of Trails

Hiking - 46

Horse - 26

Bicycle - 39

Cross Country Ski - 12

Snowmobile - 34

Playgrounds - 1

Miles of Road

Gravel - 4

Open and Enclosed Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 80

Water Accesses - 4

Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 7

Under 100 sq.ft. - 22

Miles of Posted Boundary - 75

Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 3

Number of Wells - 10

Number of Individual

Water Distribution Systems - 3

PROBLEMS FACING MN VALLEY TRAIL STATE PARK

There are many public recreational facilities in MN Valley Trail State Park to maintain. Many are in need of replacement or major rehabilitation. Most were constructed in the 1960's, and are now in need of rehabilitation. Many new facilities are needed to meet growing recreational demands.

The park's natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management to perpetuate MN Valley Trail's resources. In the past, facilities were developed in prehistoric and historic use areas. These areas deserve to be protected and interpreted.

Perhaps the most apparent problems facing the Minnesota Valley State Park are the lack of adequate facilities for visitor and staff. For example, currently the primary visitor contact area is housed in the office/shop area. The facility has no running water, and no indoor restroom facilities. Moreover, the building needs remodeling to add more shop space so that equipment can be repaired inside during the winter. Several of the other facilities are in need of replacement or major rehabilitation as well.

In addition, the park needs a new visitor orientation/contact station at the headquarters area. This will be a place to inform people about the Valley facilities and opportunities and will include office space and a work area for park staff.

The park's natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management. Despite its many years of intensive use, the Minnesota River Valley offers tremendous wealth of resources, all needing attention.

The Minnesota Valley does not have a culture resource inventory or management objectives. This needs to be done before development is completed or before an interpretive plan can be put in place. The Valley has many historic structures and archaeological sites that have not been inventoried or evaluated for national register status. The opportunities for preservation and interpretation include excellent examples of historic natural landscapes, prehistoric and historic Kaota village sites, fur trade posts, standing structures of the 1850's - 1900's, ferry crossings, a railroad swing bridge, ruins of brick kilns and other early industry as well as abandoned town sites and pioneer homesteads. In addition, the Valley is known to have numerous burial mounds and other culturally significant sites that require long term protection.

Past efforts in natural resource management have concentrated on oak savanna restoration through prescribed burns and native grass plantings. Special public hunts have been held to reduce unnaturally high deer populations. Past inventories of natural resources have been primarily limited to federal lands including Long Meadow Lake and Louisville Swamp (Warner 1979). Future needs include a plant/ resource inventory for several state units (Rush River, Blakely Unit and the Lawrence unit) and the development of updated resource management objectives. Without active resource management, it is possible that some of the natural diversity of the park will be lost.

Whether these natural and cultural resources will be preserved or interpreted in the future depends upon acting now to inventory, evaluate and develop site-specific resource prescriptions. Without these evaluations, future facility and trail development will be impaired as unknown resources may be jeopardized.

The immediate needs for interpretation and public information are in the area of signing and self-guided interpretation. As the trail system is acquired and developed so should a system of public orientation and information be developed and implemented. Trail maps, orientation, recreational information and natural and cultural interpretation are all services visitors need and expect in order to use and enjoy the trail and recreational areas. This system of information and interpretation needs to be integrated between the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Trails and Waterways Unit and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

In addition, the park needs to develop visitor orientation and interpretation at the Lawrence headquarters, Carver Rapids, and the other recreation areas. A self-guiding driving tour of the Minnesota Valley would greatly enhance public understanding and use of the Valley and management units. One of the biggest problems the Minnesota Valley faces is a lack of public understanding about the value of the resources and the opportunities available for education and recreation.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN MN VALLEY TRAIL STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Construction of trail center.
2. Trail improvements.

MN VALLEY TRAIL STATE PARK CAPI- TAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Old Field Restoration - \$20,000

Convert high priority old fields in Lawrence unit to native prairie.

Archaeological Investigation - \$50,000

Conduct extensive survey of the park, including proposed development sites.

Botanical Inventory - \$30,000

Conduct thorough study of Rush River, "Wild 80" and Lawrence units and Carver Rapids Wayside area.

Subtotal \$100,000

MAJOR REHABILITATION

Office and Service Area Rehabilitation - \$50,000

Remodel office and service area to include additional office space, storage and shop facilities.

Subtotal \$50,000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Contact Station/Orientation Center - \$350,000

Construct new facility to orient visitors and interpret natural and cultural resources.

Self-Interpretive/Visitor Center Information - \$20,000

Develop self interpretive trails, signing and information.

Subtotal \$370,000

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$520,000

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 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 extensive 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 MN VALLEY TRAIL STATE PARK

Parcel #	Acres
3	2.50
6	1.83
7	12.00
9	68.78
20a	14.00
31	9.50
33,35,70	80.00
37,38,40	8.00
39	45.00
40a	50.00
41	21.80
43	24.42
45a,69,34	20.00
69-1	12.00
69-2	8.00
69-3	4.00
70a	12.00
138j	29.79
141j	181.15
142j	28.50
147j	200.00
147j-1	6.93
150j	6.50
151j	157.12
155	261.21
156c	16.82
156e+4	11.97
156h	9.30
159	43.47
159	2.00
SL13-1	7.85
SL13-2	4.24
SL16	2.50
SL55	4.00
SL66	25.00
SL72	35.00

Total 1,472.18 acres.

PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on MN Valley Trail 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 grasslands and floodplain forests, and wetlands.. These will ensure that future visitors will be able to experience the diverse nature of Minnesota's natural resources.

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 MN Valley Trail 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 MN Valley Trail 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.

MN Valley Trail State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

MN Valley Trail State Park
development costs - **\$520,000**

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

