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# DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS



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Nerstrand Woods  
State Park



January 8, 1990

SB  
482  
.M6  
D34  
v.40

Printed on recycled paper.

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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 NERSTRAND WOODS STATE PARK

Nerstrand Woods State Park is located in southeastern Minnesota in Rice County, 1.5 miles west of the Town of Nerstrand on CSAH 40. The park was established in 1945 to protect a remaining portion of Big Woods vegetation which once covered 3,400 square miles of south-central Minnesota. It has a statutory boundary encompassing 1,278.12 acres. Of these, 63 acres are privately owned.

Hundreds of millions of years ago, vast shallow seas extended across North America, including what is now Minnesota. Over time, layers of sediments accumulated on the floors of these ancient seas. Eventually, the weight of water compressed sediment layers into the limestone that underlies the park area.

Beginning about two million years ago immense glaciers advanced periodically across much of Minnesota. When the last glacier retreated from the park area about 125,000 years ago, it left behind a blanket of glacial drift 150 feet thick. This glacial drift was comprised of rock and mineral debris scoured from land to the north and ranged in size from soil particles to large boulders.

The last ice advance to cover parts of Minnesota lasted until about 10,000 years ago. Glaciers of this ice advance did not cover the park. However, the flood of meltwater from this glacial stage dramatically affected the park, cutting deeply into stream beds and exposing bedrock in several areas. Bedrock exposures of Platteville and Galena limestone, Shakopee dolomite and St. Peter sandstone are visible today at hidden Falls, and along Prairie Creek.

Since the last glacier retreated, various soil, climate, microsite conditions and disturbance factors such as fire and flooding have shaped plant community succession. Since settlement times, vegetation succession has been further altered by wild fire suppression, drainage and cultivation.

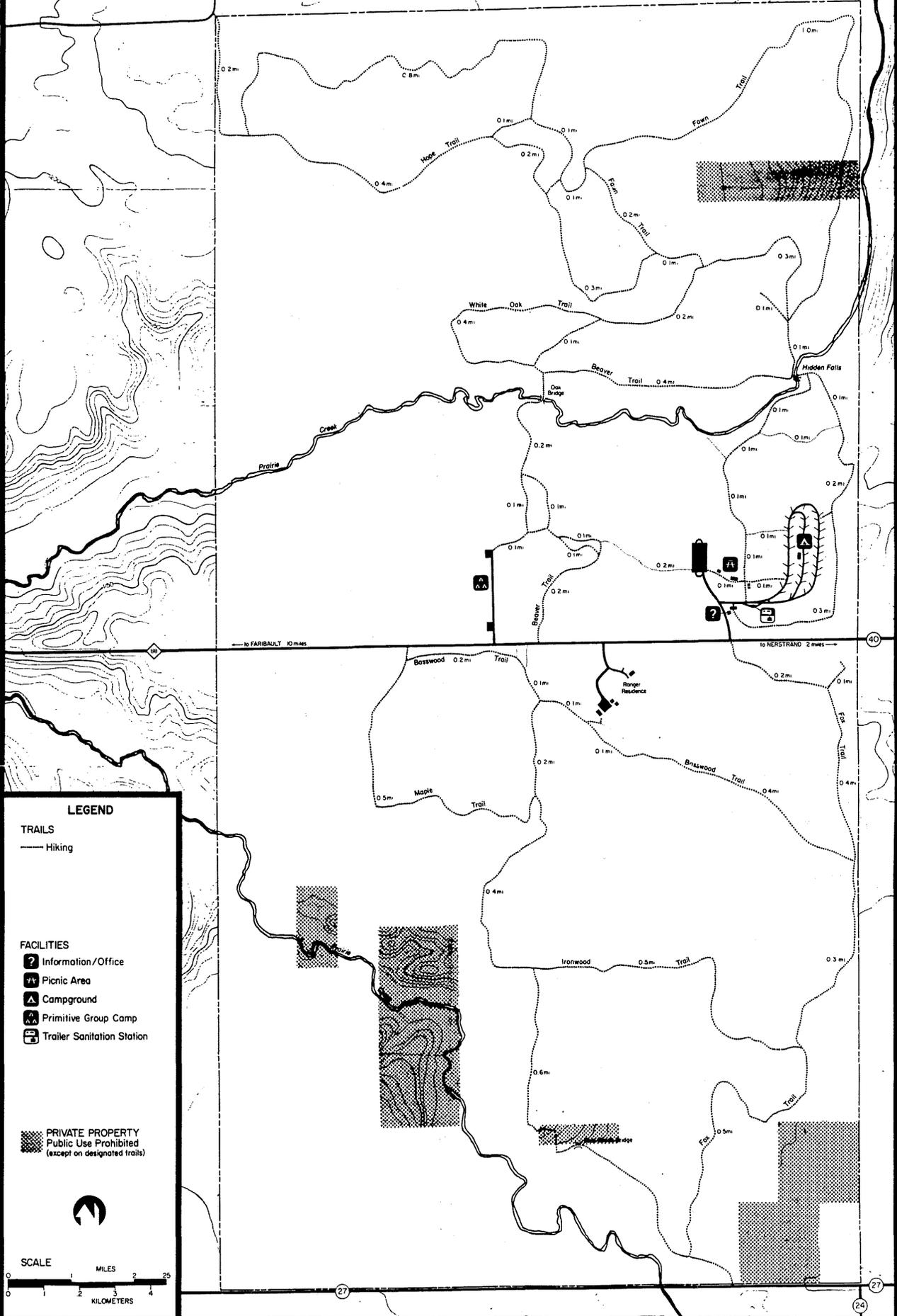
Prior to European settlement, much of south central Minnesota was covered by a forested area known as the Big Woods. This area was protected from prairie fires to the west by the Minnesota River, and bordered by a fire tolerant woods/brushland. Big Woods vegetation was comprised primarily of hardwood species; maple, basswood, oak, elm, ironwood, hickory, ash, and butternut. Today, all of these species are present, with maple-basswood as the dominant forest cover type. In addition, several rare plants are also found in this habitat, including the Minnesota Trout Lily.

The predominant land use of Rice County is agricultural. Only about five-percent of the county land surface is covered by forest. Many wildlife species that prefer wooded areas are attracted to Nerstrand Woods. Additional wildlife habitat is available in the state game refuge that bounds the park on the east, west, and north sides. There are about 1,600 nearly contiguous wooded acres between the park and refuge, providing wildlife an oasis of natural food and cover surrounded by agricultural lands. Of the 1,600 wooded acres, about 1,100 acres lie within the park.

A variety of birds are known to be present in the park. These include the turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, bobwhite quail, rough winged swallow, blue-gray gnatcatcher, bells vireo, indigo bunting and blue-winged warbler. Mammalian inhabitants include white-tailed deer, Virginia opossum, long-tailed weasel, spotted and striped skunks, woodchuck, Franklin ground squirrel and eastern mole. In addition, eleven reptiles and amphibians are known to inhabit the park, including the wood turtle; listed as a threatened species.

From the steep creek valleys and waterfalls of Prairie Creek to its dense hardwood forest, Nerstrand Woods State Park offers visitors a variety of outdoor recreational experiences to choose from. Popular activities include viewing over 130 varieties of wildflowers, fall colors and hidden waterfalls, picnicking, hiking, nature study and cross county skiing.

# Nerstrand Woods State Park



**LEGEND**

**TRAILS**  
 — Hiking

**FACILITIES**  
 ? Information/Office  
 ☐ Picnic Area  
 ▲ Campground  
 ▲ Primitive Group Camp  
 ☐ Trailer Sanitation Station

▨ PRIVATE PROPERTY  
 Public Use Prohibited  
 (except on designated trails)

**SCALE**  
 MILES 0 1 2 2.5  
 KILOMETERS 0 1 2 4

## EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of Nerstrand Woods State Park.

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 1,278.12  
Acres of state land - 1,215.12  
Acres of private land - 63.00

### Campsites

Drive in - 55  
Walk in - 13  
Showers  
Modern toilets  
Campsites with electricity -25

### Miles of Trails

Hiking - 14  
Cross Country Ski - 8  
Snowmobile - 5  
Bridges - 4

Playgrounds - 1

### Miles of Road

Gravel - 1

### Open Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 40  
Trailer Dump Station

### Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 6  
Under 100 sq.ft. - 6  
Miles of Posted Boundary - 8

### Park Utilities

Sewage Lagoon - 1  
Number of Sewage Lift Stations - 1  
Number of Septic Tanks - 4  
Number of Wells - 3  
Number of Individual  
Water Distribution Systems - 2  
Miles of State Owned Power Line - .5

## PROBLEMS FACING NERSTRAND WOODS STATE PARK

There are many public recreational facilities in Nerstrand Woods State Park to maintain. Many are in need of replacement or major rehabilitation. Most were constructed in the 1950's and 60's, and are now in need of rehabilitation. New facilities are needed to meet growing recreational demands.

Natural and cultural resources are also in need of protection and management, to ensure their perpetuation. In the past, facilities may have been developed in areas of cultural significance. These sites must be identified, protected and interpreted.

In order to adequately implement the management and interpretive plan, an inventory of natural and cultural resources is essential. To date, baseline information has been minimal.

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

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN NERSTRAND WOODS STATE PARK**

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Trail improvements.
2. Campground electrical outlets.

## **NERSTRAND WOODS STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS**

### **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

#### **Resource Assessment - \$10,000**

Inventory natural and cultural resources in the park to ensure appropriate management actions.

#### **Use Area Restoration - \$10,000**

Use area tree planting and erosion control.

**Subtotal \$20,000**

### **MAJOR REHABILITATION**

#### **Campground Toilet Building**

#### **Rehabilitation - \$40,000**

Rehabilitate the campground toilet building including fixture replacement and upgrading utilities.

#### **Picnic Shelter Rehabilitation - \$40,000**

Including bridge repair and tuck pointing, utility rehabilitation and fixture replacement.

**Subtotal \$80,000**

### **NEW DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Contact Station/Orientation Center - \$200,000**

New structure would feature a combination interpretive center, park office, and winter trail shelter.

#### **Group Camp Shelter - \$30,000**

New group shelter would provide for group use in inclement weather.

**Subtotal \$230,000**

**TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS \$330,000**

## 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.
- \* Difficulty in implementing effective and consistent resource management.

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

PRIVATE LANDS TO BE ACQUIRED IN NERSTRAND WOODS STATE PARK	
Parcel #	Acres
25	33.00
29	20.00
41	10.00
Total 63 acres	

## PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Nerstrand Woods 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 Nerstrand Woods State Park, and that resource management can be effectively implemented.

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

Nerstrand Woods State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Nerstrand Woods State Park  
development needs **\$340,000**

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

