



STATE OF

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MINNESOTA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS

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Savanna Portage
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 SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK

Savanna Portage State Park is located in northern Minnesota, seventeen miles northeast of the town of McGregor. The park was established in 1961 and has a statutory boundary that encompasses 15,818 acres. Of these, 955.89 acres are privately owned.

Savanna Portage is situated in an old valley of the Whiteface River. The park's rolling hills, large bogs and numerous lakes are a testament to Minnesota's glacial past. When the last glacier retreated from the area some 10,000 years ago large deposits of sand, gravel, rock and mineral debris were left in the hills we see today. The large bogs and lakes were formed in depressions created by huge ice blocks that broke from the main ice sheet and melted. A ridge the length of the ancient river valley separates two watersheds. The drainage to the west flows south to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River, the other to the east flows northeast to the Atlantic Ocean via Lake Superior and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The Savanna Portage was a vital link between the St. Louis River and the Mississippi River on the canoe route from Lake Superior to the Upper Mississippi. Savanna, meaning open grassland, refers to the expanse of marsh grass on the eastern portion of the trail. This portage was used for centuries by Native Americans before early fur traders discovered the route in the mid 1760's.

Stretching six miles through a labyrinth of marshes, bogs, and tamarack swamps the Savanna Portage was considered by voyagers to be the "worst carrying place in the northwest". Upon reaching the East Savanna River from the St. Louis River canoes had to be pushed forward with poles through a continual series of narrow, short turns for nearly 12 miles at which point the river disappeared among high grass, reeds and wild rice. The canoes were then poled or pushed by hand through the extensive swamps on the east portion of the portage.

When the canoes could go no further, the route continued on a walkway of poles laid lengthwise through the

swamp. After the first three rest points, the ground became higher and portaging the canoes became easier. The six-mile portage took an average of five days to reach the West Savanna River. From there the voyagers traveled by canoe to the Prairie River and finally into Big Sandy Lake and the Upper Mississippi.

Today, the Savanna Portage is marked by guide posts and flags along its entire length. Beginning in the west end of the park the first four miles of portage follows ridges of land providing striking vistas of steep ravines, open valleys and diverse forest vegetation. Leaving the forested hills the trail emerges onto a level plain of brush and wild grasses. For the last mile and a half, the portage follows a wooden catwalk built by park employees through the "notorious bog" to the East Savanna River.

The variety and relative seclusion of plant communities that make up Savanna Portage State Park provide habitat for a wealth of wildlife. Over 175 bird species are known to use the park including the goshawk, northern harrier, eastern greater sandhill crane, turkey vulture, Wilson's phalarope, Forster's tern, saw whet owl, great horned owl, and belted kingfisher. Most species of northern mammals are also found in and around the park. These include the white-tailed deer, black bear, timber wolf, coyote, red fox, raccoon, beaver, river otter, mink, porcupine, spotted and striped skunks and four species of bats.

Savanna Portage State Park offers visitors an array of recreational experiences in an ecologically diverse setting. Nearly 75 miles of trail wind through forested uplands and included bogs providing opportunities for hiking, biking, snowmobiling, cross county skiing and nature study. The lakes and rivers in the park offer excellent fishing for northern pike, walleye pike, small and largemouth bass and panfish. Other popular activities include camping on beautiful Shumway Lake, swimming and picnicking at the pine covered beach area of Loon Lake and interpreting the history of the park area.

Savanna Portage State Park

FACILITIES

- Information / Office
- Telephone
- Historic Site
- Picnic Area
- Shelter
- Swimming
- Boat Ramp
- Fishing Pier
- Parking
- Campground
- Primitive Group Camp
- Backpack Camping
- Trailer Sanitation Station
- Pit Toilet
- Water

TRAILS

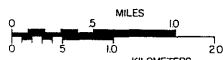
- Savanna Portage Trail
- Hiking
- Overlook
- Mountain Bike / Hiking

N Numbered Trail Intersections

PRIVATE PROPERTY
Public Use Prohibited
(except on designated trails)



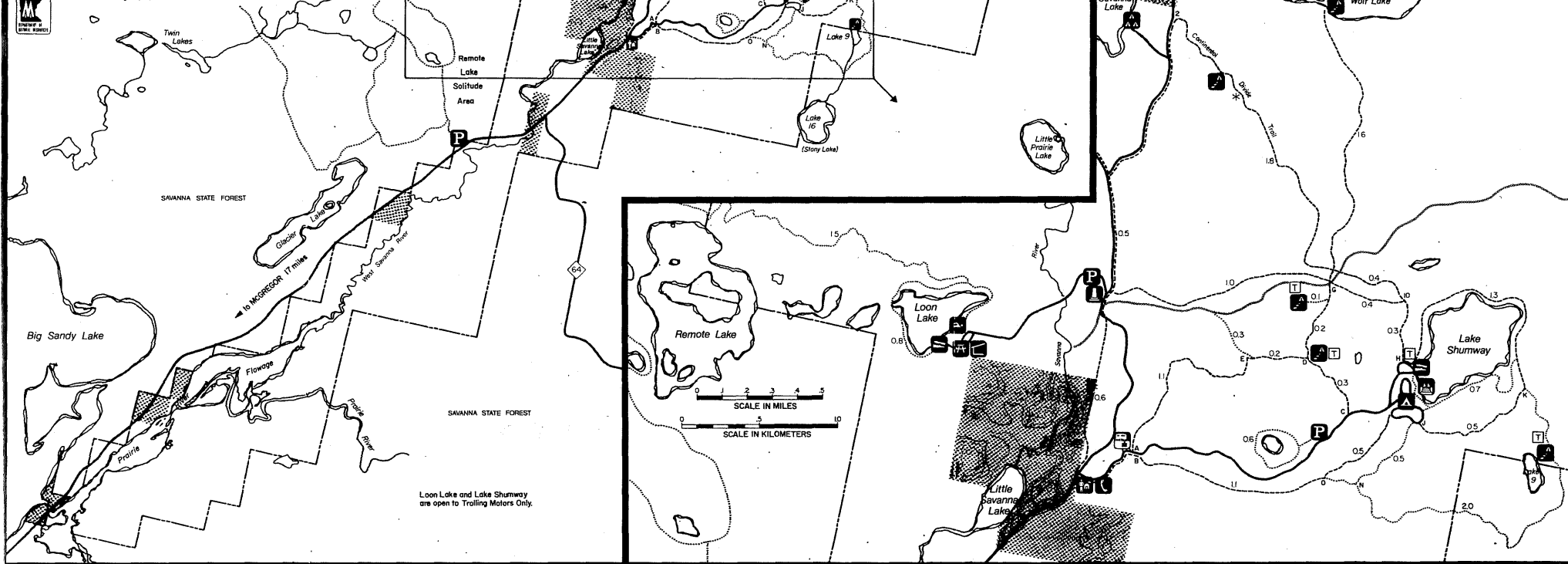
SCALE



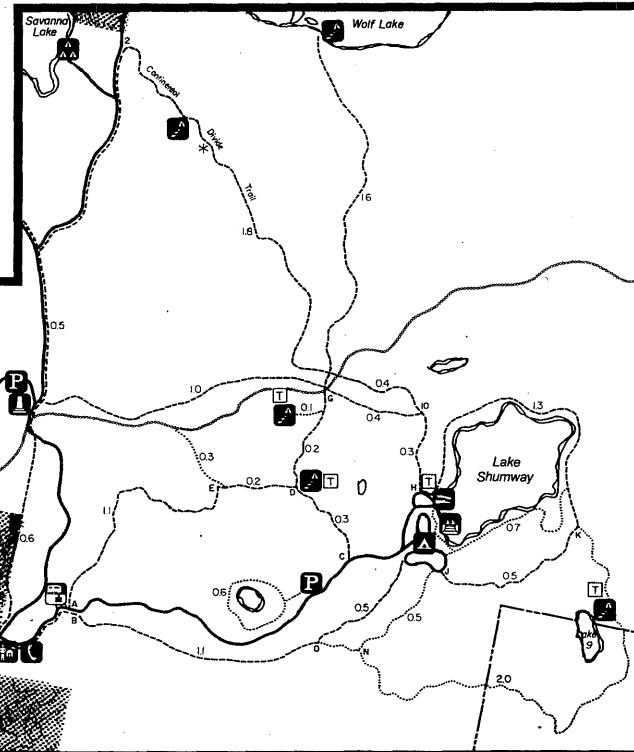
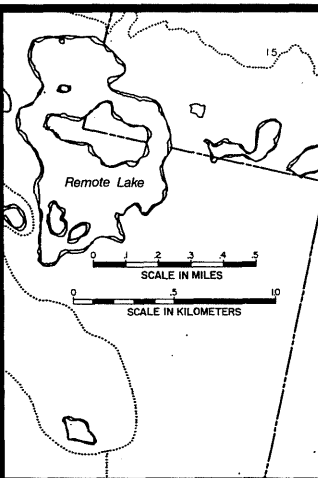
The inset map at lower right is at double this scale.



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



Please Don't Erase Traces of Minnesota's Past
Archeological and historical sites hold clues to understanding Minnesota's past. If disturbed a part of our heritage will be lost forever. Savanna Portage State Park holds historic sites and artifacts that are protected by State and Federal laws. If you discover such remains please leave them undisturbed. Report your discoveries to State Park personnel.



Loon Lake and Lake Shumway are open to Trailing Motors Only.

EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of Savanna Portage State Park.

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 15,818

Acres of state land - 14,862.11

Acres of private land - 955.89

Campsites

Drive in - 59

Back Pack - 6

Showers

Modern toilets

Campsites with electricity - 18

Miles of Trails

Hiking - 17

Bicycle - 10

Cross Country Ski - 32

Snowmobile - 60

Playgrounds - 1

Beaches - 1

Boat & Canoe Rental

Miles of Road

Gravel - 9

Open Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 40

Trailer Dump Station

Water Accesses - 2

Fishing Piers - 1

Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 10

Under 100 sq.ft. - 18

Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 7

Number of Wells - 5

Number of Individual

Water Distribution Systems - 3

Miles of Posted Boundary - 50

PROBLEMS FACING SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK

There are many public recreational facilities in Savanna Portage 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 Savanna Portage's resources. In the past, facilities may have been developed in areas of cultural significance. These areas must be protected and deserve to be interpreted. Of special importance is the Savanna Portage and its important cultural resources.

The park's trail system is in need of major rehabilitation. New alignments are needed to bypass sensitive archaeological sites and wet areas.

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

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK

Little new development has taken place in Savanna Portage in recent years.

SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Re-Establish Native Plant Communities - \$30,000

Major work is needed to re-establish open savanna and hardwood areas.

Subtotal \$30,000

MAJOR REHABILITATION

Remodel Station for

Interpretive Displays - \$150,000

Remodel existing contact station to serve as interpretive/trail center. This remodel will include an addition to the building.

General Building Rehabilitation - \$50,000

Rehabilitation to include building restoration including new fixtures, and utility replacement.

Subtotal \$200,000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Pave Park Roads - \$690,000

Existing gravel roads are in need of base and grading. Pavement will greatly reduce dust problems and maintenance costs.

Trail Re-routing - \$30,000

Re-route ski and snowmobile trails to avoid archaeologically sensitive areas and swamps.

Bury Powerlines - \$28,000

Bury overhead powerlines to restore areas to natural condition and eliminate spraying.

Park Office Walkways - \$26,000

Improve office walkways and traffic islands to facilitate handicapped accessibility.

Boundary Posting - \$10,000

Post boundaries to reduce trespass and hunting problems.

Subtotal \$819,000

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS \$1,014,000

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 SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK

Parcel #	Acres	Parcel #	Acres
4	11.00	31	52.40
6	12.25	32	9.10
7	2.00	33	16.18
8	10.00	34	1.50
9	16.40	35	6.14
11	80.00	36	11.08
12(a-f)	200.00	37	6.33
15	1.00	38	9.37
19	80.00	39	2.60
20	80.00	40	0.86
21	45.99	41	11.00
22a	24.00	42	1.00
22b	24.00	43	6.43
23	203.00	44	0.17
29	32.00	45	0.20

Total 955.89 acres.

PARK POTENTIAL

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

Some improvements will not only increase park use but will greatly increase the quality of the visitor's 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.

The acquisition of private lands within the park will assure that private and commercial development do not detract from the natural beauty of Savanna Portage 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 Savanna Portage 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.

Savanna Portage State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Savanna Portage State Park
development needs **\$1,014,000**

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

