



STATE OF  
MINNESOTA

900251

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# DEVELOPMENT & ACQUISITION STATUS

Whitewater  
State Park

January 8, 1990



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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 continuous 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 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 WHITEWATER STATE PARK

Whitewater State Park is located in southeastern Minnesota in extreme western Winona County, 7 miles north of St. Charles and 3 miles south of Elba. The park's statutory boundary encompasses 2,700 acres. Of these 1,049.89 acres are privately owned. State Highway 74 bisects the park and provides the park's primary access.

The park is situated in the Blufflands region of Minnesota, a region characterized by rolling uplands, steep wooded valleys with exposed rock bluffs, and flat valley flood plains. Two dominant geologic processes shaped this region's landscape; sedimentation and erosion. The first occurred approximately 500 million years ago when a shallow sea covered much of central North America including southeastern Minnesota. During this time sediment accumulated on this sea floor hundreds of feet thick. Later these sediments turned into rock. When the sea withdrew about 400 million years ago erosion became the dominant geologic process, one that continues today.

Dakota Indians lived in this area of southeastern Minnesota for centuries before European settlement. They lived by hunting, farming and gathering foods. The Indians named this river Whitewater because in the spring it turned milky white as high water eroded the light colored clay deposits of its banks.

In 1851, the area was opened to white settlement. Within decades European settlers drastically altered the landscapes that had served the needs of prehistoric peoples for thousands of years. By clearing the original vegetation and burning, farming and grazing the hillsides the land was exposed to accelerated rates of erosion. By 1900 major floods were frequent.

In 1919, local efforts to protect natural resources spurred the establishment of Whitewater State Park. However, erosion prone land use continued in adjacent areas. Almost overnight, water deposited sediments clogged farmlands closest to the hillsides. Increased flooding led to the abandonment of many area farms and towns. In 1938 the nearby town of Beaver flooded 28 times.

The 1940's saw state and federal conservation officials join local landowners in implementing sweeping conservation measures. Richard Dorner, of the Minnesota Department of Conservation, designed a plan for the revival of the Whitewater River Valley. Grass, shrub and trees were planted on the slopes. Land uses favoring soil conservation were implemented. Burning was banned. Erosion prone lands were purchased and taken out of crop production.

Today this land makes up the 28,000 acre Whitewater Wildlife Management Area adjacent to Whitewater State Park. Together they provide a wide range of outdoor recreational experiences. Hiking and fishing are two of the most popular activities enjoyed by park visitors. The park's high hills provide hikers with scenic vistas and the middle Branch of the Whitewater River provides fishing opportunities for brown, brook and rainbow trout. Existing park facilities include 106 site campground, 4 walk in campsites, modern and primitive group camps, 2 picnic ground, swimming beach, 10 miles of trails, and the new Whitewater Valley Visitor Center with year round interpretive services.

# LEGEND

## TRAILS

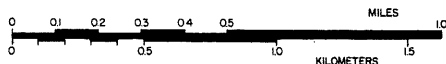
- Hiking
- Hiking/Skiing (easy)
- \* Overlooks

## FACILITIES

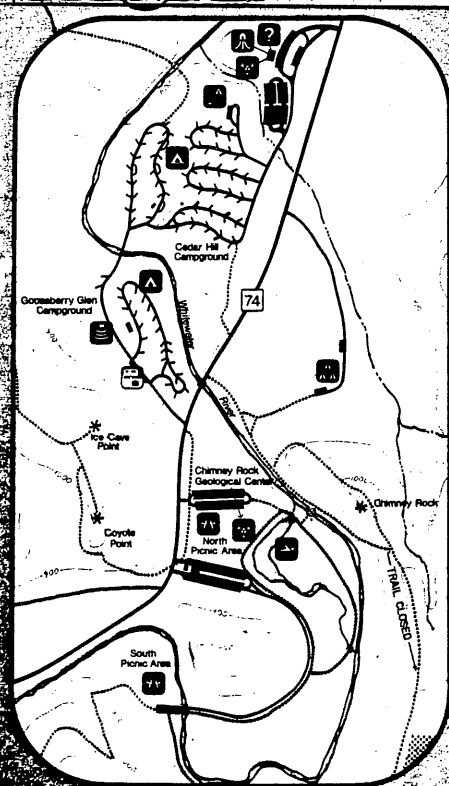
- 2 Information
- ★ Picnic Area
- Swimming
- Interpretive Center
- Amphitheater
- Campground
- Group Camp
- Primitive Group Camp
- Walk-in Camping
- Trailer Sanitation Station
- Trail Center

PRIVATE PROPERTY  
Public Use Prohibited

## SCALE



# Whitewater State Park



## EXISTING FACILITIES

The following is an inventory of the existing physical plant of Whitewater State.

Acres in Statutory Boundary - 2,700  
Acres of Park Administered - 1650.11  
Acres of Privately Owned - 1049.89

### Campsites

Drive in - 106  
Walk in - 4  
Showers  
Modern toilets

### Miles of Trails

Self-guided Interpretive - 2  
Hiking - 10  
Cross Country Ski - 4

### Playgrounds - 1

Beaches - Yes

### Miles of Road

Asphalt - 2  
Gravel - 2

### Open and Enclosed Picnic Shelter

Number of Picnic Tables - 150  
Trailer Dump Station - 1  
Fishing Piers - 1

### Number of Buildings

Over 100 sq.ft. - 26  
Under 100 sq.ft. - 18

### Miles of Posted Boundary - 9

Year Round Visitor Centers

### Park Utilities

Number of Septic Tanks - 8  
Lift Station - 1  
Number of Wells - 8  
Number of Individual  
Water Distribution Systems - 6  
Miles of State Owned Power Line - 3

## PROBLEMS FACING WHITEWATER STATE PARK

There are many public recreational facilities in Whitewater 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 Whitewater's resources. In the past, facilities were developed in areas of ancient encampments. These encampments deserve to be protected and interpreted. Past land uses agriculture and grazing, timber harvest have altered vegetation communities. The on-going resource management program to restore the original park vegetation should be accelerated. This will include actions to manage and maintain the parks woodlands, wildlife and vegetation communities.

Over 8 miles of the 10 miles of trails that allow visitors to enjoy the park are in need of complete rebuilding. Steps and railings constructed during the CCC/WPA era are in need of replacement. New trails are also needed. The new visitor center with its trail center needs to be connected to the trail system. Additional ski trails are needed to expand winter recreational opportunities. The Whitewater River also needs extensive bank stabilization to protect the water quality; fisheries resource; and physical structures such as buildings, bridges, roads, campsites and trails.

Minnesota State Aid Highway 74 bisects the park. This leads to safety and enforcement problems. In addition the sight, sound and smell of the highway greatly reduces the aesthetic quality of visitor experiences. An alternate route for highway 74 which should be considered is Winona County 39 which bypasses the park on the east .

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

## RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN WHITEWATER STATE PARK

Major development projects over the past few years have included:

1. Major visitor center completed (1989).
2. Relocation of campsites from flood plain to Upper Cedar Hills with toilet shower building (1989).
3. New sanitation building constructed in the group center (1984).
4. Develop .2 miles of major hiking trail to Chimney Rock (1977).

## WHITEWATER STATE PARK CAPITAL NEEDS

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

#### **Vegetative Management - \$25,000**

Prairie restoration and planting in park use areas.

#### **Erosion Control - \$97,000**

Stabilize bank along Whitewater River to protect Chimney Rock hiking trail, and protect trout stream fisheries resource.

#### **Meadow Restoration - \$28,000**

Manage the lowland meadow area along the Whitewater River to restore the native open meadow native plant species and eliminate non-native problem species.

**Subtotal \$150,000**

### MAJOR REHABILITATION

#### **Trail Rehabilitation - \$500,000**

Complete rehabilitation of existing trails including new steps, hand rails, and erosion repair.

#### **Elba Fire Tower Rehabilitation - \$17,500**

Replace broken steps and glass, repair damaged structural components. Screen-in entire structure to enhance safety.

#### **Group Camp Rehabilitation - \$57,000**

Improve existing group camp buildings and grounds. Project will include new picnic tables, fire rings, landscaping, and replacing an underground power line to the group center.

#### **Winterize Four Cabins - \$50,000**

Winterize four group camp cabins to allow school group use for environmental education.

#### **Campground Rehabilitation - \$30,000**

Improve drainage, lengthen existing camp spurs, plant trees and control erosion.

#### **Boundary Fence Repair - \$23,000**

Repair fences between park and private lands.

#### **Road and Parking Lot Rehabilitation - \$20,000**

Includes repair of existing parking lots and roads by paving where needed and improving base on gravel roads.

#### **Campground Toilet Building Rehabilitation - \$40,000**

Improvements to include new fixtures, partitions, wall and floor finishes and building winterization.

#### **Pave Roads and Parking Lots - \$92,000**

Pave roads and parking lots at new visitors center and at Gooseberry Glen Campground.

#### **New Picnic Tables and Fire Grills - \$20,000**

Provide new picnic tables and install fire grills in the picnic ground.

#### **Chimney Rock Geological Center Display Rehabilitation - \$5,000**

Repair damage to displays done by insects, weather and vandals.

**Subtotal \$854,500**

## LAND ACQUISITION

### NEW DEVELOPMENT

#### **Develop Wildlife Habitat - \$65,000**

Landscape the area near the visitor center/office/trail center complex to attract wildlife.

#### **Firewood Storage - \$12,000**

Construct a storage building for bundled firewood.

#### **Screen utilities - \$5,000**

Construct a screen that will hide the air-conditioner and other utilities from the view of visitors at the visitor center complex.

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

To provide for inside storage of state equipment.

#### **New Picnic Shelter \$35,000**

Develop a shelter in the picnic area to accommodate family reunions and other groups during inclement weather.

#### **New Trails \$30,000**

Trails needed to create loop system using present trails and to increase interpretive opportunities. The greatest need is to expand the cross county ski trail system.

#### **New Play Area \$23,000**

Install a timber creative play lot in the campground.

#### **Shore Fishing Access \$5,000**

To provide fishing opportunities on the Whitewater River for handicapped.

#### **Beach Access \$10,000**

Handicapped accessibility to beach.

**Subtotal \$245,000**

**TOTAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - \$1,249,500**

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 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 WHITEWATER STATE PARK**

Parcel #	Acres
4a	91.90
5	33.80
6	160.00
8	55.75
9	578.14
10a	101.38
13	15.00
14	5.02
15	8.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,049.89 acres.</b>



## PARK POTENTIAL

What efforts will the completion of resource management, rehabilitation and new development projects have on Whitewater State Park? These projects along with the acquisition of private lands within the park will carry on the legacy of Richard J. Dorer to protect the Whitewater Valley and assure the preservation of these unique resources and facilities for future generations.

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.

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

Whitewater State Park acquisition costs will be determined by appraisals.

Whitewater State Park development needs - **\$1,249,500**

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

