

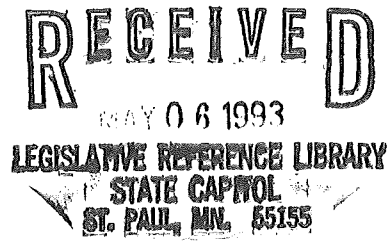
**SELF-EVALUATION AND TRANSITION PLAN  
OF ACCESSIBILITY OF  
PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES  
FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**(As Required by Section 504 of  
the Rehabilitation Act of 1973)**

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

**St. Paul, Minnesota  
December, 1992**

Contents



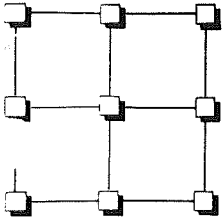
**Letter from MN Council on Disability**

**Introduction** ..... 1

**Evaluation by Area** ..... 2

- **Administration Activities** ..... 2
- **Employment Practices** ..... 4
- **Programs** ..... 6
  - Public Information ..... 7
  - Special Events ..... 8
  - Public Meetings ..... 9
  - Interpretive Programs ..... 10
  - Education Classes ..... 11
- **Facilities and Transition Initiatives** ..... 12
  - Buildings ..... 13
  - Recreation Facilities ..... 14
    - Picnic Areas ..... 14
    - Campgrounds ..... 14
    - Recreation Trails ..... 14
    - Outdoor Amphitheaters ..... 15
    - Play Areas ..... 16
    - Scenic Overlooks ..... 16
    - Swimming Facilities ..... 16
    - Water Access/Docks ..... 17
    - Fishing Piers ..... 17
    - Hunting Blinds ..... 18

**Summary** ..... 18



## MINNESOTA STATE COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

145 Metro Square Building • 7th Place and Jackson Street • Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101  
(612) 296-6785 or Toll-free 1-800-652-9747 Statewide (VOICE AND TDD), FAX (612) 296-5935

December 9, 1992

Roger A. Liska  
504 Coordinator  
MN Department of Natural Resources  
500 Lafayette Rd  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4029

Dear Mr. Liska:

I have reviewed your Department's Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, dated December, 1992. The document appears to be thoughtful and complete in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities. It also appears to fulfil the Department's compliance responsibilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As the Accessibility Advocate for the Minnesota State Council on Disability, I am very pleased with the final results of your effort and commitment.

Although the Department's programs are available to all persons without discrimination based on disability, much more should be done to improve the overall accessibility of facilities, particularly those buildings that serve large numbers of people. As you are aware, the Legislature's Access '92 appropriation recently made \$20 million available to increase the accessibility of state-owned buildings. Of the \$5 million distributed to date, \$1 million has been allocated to your Department. I encourage you to work closely with the Department of Administration to obtain an additional allocation from the Access '92 monies yet to be distributed.

Once again, it was a pleasure working with you.

Sincerely,

Margot Imdieke  
Accessibility Advocate

c. Raymond B. Hitchcock  
State Liaison Officer to the National Park Service

Joseph Hiller  
Grant Program Coordinator

## Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources evaluated its facilities, programs, and administrative policies to determine how accessible they are to persons with disabilities. This evaluation was done for three reasons: to comply with federal laws that forbid recipients of federal grants from discriminating based on handicap; to determine which of the Department's activities are now accessible and which are not; and to determine what steps need to be taken to ensure that all persons may benefit from the services and facilities provided by this state agency.

As a recipient of federal funds, the Department of Natural Resources must comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 states that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual ... shall, solely by reason of his handicap be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance...". The law describes a handicapped person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities. Recipient agencies must provide their programs, activities and services in such a manner that, when viewed in their entirety, they are accessible to persons with these disabilities. Where structural changes to facilities are needed to achieve program accessibility, each recipient of federal funds must develop a transition plan setting forth the steps necessary to complete such changes.

To help recipients of federal funds comply with Section 504, the US Department of the Interior issued guidelines describing how to evaluate the level of accessibility provided, how to determine if this level is sufficient, and what remedial steps must be taken if it is not. Those guidelines were published under 43 CFR 17 Subpart B and were used for this evaluation. The guidelines require recipient's to evaluate their activities in each of four areas: Administration; Employment Practices; Programs; and Facilities.

The remainder of this document describes each area including the guidelines for evaluating its accessibility, the methodology that the Department used, and the evaluation results. The facilities evaluation section also includes any transition initiatives needed to assure equal access to the Department's activities. In this way, the Transition Plan was incorporated into the Self-Evaluation Plan.

This Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan was prepared with assistance from the Minnesota Council on Disability and the Minnesota Department of Administration, with funding provided by the Minnesota Legislature's Access '92 appropriation.

## Evaluation by Area

### ■ Administrative Activities

#### 1. Guideline Requirements

Each recipient organization must designate a responsible employee to ensure continuing compliance with Section 504, adopt a grievance procedure, and notify the public that it does not discriminate on the basis of handicap.

#### 2. Method Used to Evaluate Compliance

Checklist provided by federal guidelines.

#### 3. Evaluation Results: Checklist for Administrative Activities

REQUIREMENT	STANDARD	COMMENT
1. DESIGNATION OF RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYEE	Recipients employing fifteen or more employees must designate a Section 504 Coordinator (43 CF 17.206 (a)).	In compliance Roger A. Liska MN Dept. of Natural Resources Bureau of Engineering
2. ADOPTION OF GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES	Recipients employing fifteen or more employees must establish grievance procedures that provide for the submission and resolution of complaints from employees and program beneficiaries (43 CF 17. 206 (b)).	In compliance  Through bargaining unit agreements  Department's Affirmative Action Program.
3. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS	3a. Any recipient employing fifteen or more employees must take initial and continuing steps to notify beneficiaries and employees that it does not discriminate on the basis of handicap. All such notifications must be effective for those with impaired vision, hearing and learning abilities (43 CF 17.207 (a)).  3b. Recruitment materials or publication containing general information that is made available to program participants, beneficiaries, applicants and employees must contain an appropriate non-discrimination statement (43 CF 17.207 (b)).	In compliance  Employment announcements, applications, stationery, recreation brochures.          In compliance

4. ASSURANCES REQUIRED	A recipient must provide assurance that its program operates in compliance with Section 504 (43 CF 17.204).	In compliance Grant Program Agreements, General Provisions.
5. SELF-EVALUATION	<p>5a. Recipients must consult with handicapped persons /organizations.</p> <p>5b. The self-evaluation must cover programs, policies, practices, problems identified and remedial steps taken.</p> <p>5c. Recipients employing fifteen or more persons must maintain on file the self evaluation for three years after its completion (43 CF 17.205(c)).</p>	<p>In compliance MN Council on Disability</p> <p>In compliance</p> <p>In compliance MN Dept. of Natural Resources Bureau of Engineering</p>
6. TRANSITION PLAN	<p>A transition plan is required when structural changes to facilities are required, and it must include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification of physical obstacles in facilities.</li> <li>2. Identification of methods used to achieve accessibility.</li> <li>3. Schedule for achieving accessibility.</li> <li>4. Identification of responsible official</li> </ol>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>Transition Plan submitted with Self-Evaluation.</p>

■ **Employment Practices**

1. **Guideline Requirements**

Section 504 prohibits discrimination in all employment actions, decisions, policies, and practices.

2. **Method Used to Evaluate Compliance**

Checklist provided by federal guidelines.

3. **Evaluation Results: Checklist for Employment Practices**

REQUIREMENT	STANDARD	COMMENT
<b>1. RECRUITMENT</b>		
Job Announcements	The announcement process encompasses the following elements: - Nondiscrimination statement on announcements; - Announcements must be posted in accessible areas; - Announcements must be effectively announced to individuals who have disabilities that impair their ability to communicate.	In compliance  Announcements sent to MN state Council on Disability
Interviews	Interviews must address the applicant's qualifications for the position. Recipients must not make inquiries about an applicant's handicap and its severity.	Interviewers receive training that emphasizes this.
<b>2. PERSONNEL ACTIONS</b>		
Recruitment	The criteria for processing personnel actions must not limit the eligibility of qualified handicapped employees.	In compliance
Selection		
Promotion		
Hiring		
Upgrading, etc.		

<p><b>3. LEAVE ADMINISTRATION</b></p> <p>Leave of absence Sick/Annual Return from leave of absence</p>	<p>Policies for granting leave must not adversely affect qualified handicapped employees.</p>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>No leave of absence request shall be unreasonably denied for any employee. All leave eligible employees shall be granted the use of vacation and sick leave.</p>
<p><b>4. TRAINING</b></p> <p>Internships Apprenticeships On-the-job training, etc.</p>	<p>Training programs must be administered in a manner that allows equal participation by qualified handicapped employees.</p>	<p>In compliance</p>
<p><b>5. TESTING</b></p>	<p>Tests and other criterion must measure essential job requirements only.</p> <p>Tests must be job-related and nondiscriminatory towards persons with impaired communications abilities.</p>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>Applicants are given opportunity to ask for special testing procedures.</p>
<p><b>6. MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS &amp; QUESTIONNAIRES</b></p>	<p>Pre-employment medical examinations are permissible only after conditional employment offers.</p> <p>Medical history questionnaires must not request information as to the nature and severity of an applicant's handicap.</p>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>Medical history questionnaires are not used unless part of pre-employment medical exams.</p>
<p><b>7. SOCIAL RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>Social/recreational programs sponsored by the recipient must be accessible to handicapped employees.</p>	<p>In compliance</p>
<p><b>8. FRINGE BENEFITS</b></p>	<p>Handicapped employees must be given the same employee benefits as non-handicapped employees.</p>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>Eligibility is based on appointment status and collective bargaining agreements. Employees are treated equally without regard to disability.</p>
<p><b>9. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS</b></p>	<p>Terms and practices of collective bargaining agreements must not contain provisions that limit the participation of qualified handicapped employees.</p>	<p>In compliance</p>
<p><b>10. WAGE AND SALARY ADMINISTRATION</b></p>	<p>Employees with disabilities must not be offered different rates solely on the basis of handicap.</p>	<p>In compliance</p> <p>Salary administration equal for all employees based on job/classification title.</p>



## ■ Programs

### 1. Guideline Requirements

Each program, when viewed in its entirety, must be accessible to persons with mobility, visual, hearing, or learning impairments. A program is any organized activity provided by the Department to serve the public. Programs include a variety of opportunities where the Department provides structured, organized support. Examples of programs are: annual one-day events such as the "Take a Kid Fishing Day"; regularly scheduled education classes such as "Firearm Safety"; and on-going but less structured opportunities such as self-guided tours of nature exhibits and hiking trails. Providing access to programs requires not only that the facilities such as parking lots, walkways and buildings are accessible. Any other attributes needed for all persons to benefit from the program in a non-segregated manner must be accessible too. These other attributes include brochures, displays, specially adapted hunting and fishing regulations, learning materials, and personnel who are knowledgeable about the special needs of persons with disabilities and competent in providing services to them. This section evaluates the attributes needed for program accessibility. The accessibility of the facilities on which these programs rely is evaluated in the following section under "Facilities".

The Minnesota Human Rights Act (M.S. 363) also prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and requires that public agencies provide program access through: "(1) the use of auxiliary aids and services to ensure full and equal benefit from goods, services and privileges; and (2) the absence of criteria or methods of administration that ... have the effect of discriminating against disabled persons."

### 2. Method Used to Evaluate Compliance

The Department provides five categories of programs throughout the state: Public Information; Special Events; Public Meetings; Interpretive Programs; and Education Classes. An evaluation form was prepared for each of the five program categories. Each form lists the specific programs provided within the category, and the methods used to ensure that persons with each type of disability are afforded access to them.

### 3. Evaluation Results for Program Accessibility:

**Program Accessibility: Public Information**

Programs:      Recreation Brochures      Film Library      Trapping Regulations  
                   Hunting Regulations      Fishing Regulations  
                   School Presentations      Department Library

Description:      Public Information includes all outreach efforts to inform the public about the Department's activities, programs, services, and regulations. These include standard printed materials such as brochures describing recreation opportunities, hunting and fishing regulations, and media broadcasts notifying the public of special events.

Impairment	Method of providing access and remedial actions needed
Learning	The Department developed guidelines for new publications to ensure that materials are clearly written using readily understood language. Department employees are available at central office and regional headquarters to explain and interpret material.
Mobility	<p>Materials are generally provided at Department's central and regional offices. These buildings are designed to be accessible to persons with mobility impairments. Publications, announcements and brochures can be ordered by mail using the Department's toll-free telephone number.</p> <p>Access to information kiosks in unattended recreation sites such as forest campgrounds can be improved. Future kiosk installments should be reachable by visitors confined to wheelchairs and should be located on level, stable ground.</p>
Visual	Most sources of public information are staffed by personnel who can provide the information orally if requested. Printed materials are available in alternative formats including large type.
Hearing	<p>The Department provides a TDD at the central office that can be accessed from throughout the state using a toll-free number.</p> <p>Minnesota provides a statewide "Relay Service" with operators available 24 hours per day to provide a linkage between persons using TDD's and hearing people.</p> <p>The Department's film library makes available a large collection of films, video tapes, and slide presentations to schools and organized resource interest groups. The most frequently requested items will be available with open caption or with a companion transcript. The Department will provide an alternative format or an interpreter for any of its listings if notified in advance. Most titles are donated to the Department by private groups. The Department will request that all future donations to the film library be captioned.</p>

**Program Accessibility: Special Events**

Programs: Earth Day Bass/Walleye Openers  
Canoe Day Lt. Governor's Bike Ride  
Take-A-Kid-Fishing Wildlife Stamp Contests

Description: Special events include structured, periodic opportunities sponsored by the Department to enhance the long-term stewardship of the state's resources and outdoor recreation.

Impairment	Method of providing access and remedial actions needed
Learning	Department staff are available to explain and interpret material. Materials and exhibits are clearly written, using simple language.
Mobility	The Department holds events at sites that are accessible to persons with mobility impairments.
Visual	Special events are normally staffed or supervised by personnel who can provide the information orally if requested. Printed materials are available in alternative formats including large type. The Department will provide a guide when notified in advance.
Hearing	Department provides a TDD at the central office that can be accessed from throughout the state using a toll-free number.  Minnesota provides a statewide "Relay Service" with operators available 24 hours per day to provide a linkage between persons using TDD's and hearing people.

**Program Accessibility: Public Meetings**

**Programs:**      Public Hearings                      Press Conferences              Information Meetings

**Description:**      Public meetings include public hearings where the Department invites the public to express concerns, offer testimony, question Department officials, and learn about the Department's activities. Meetings are held at Department offices and throughout the state in community buildings, churches, schools, etc.

Impairment	Method of providing access and remedial actions needed
Learning	Materials are clearly written, using simple language. Central office and regional headquarters have staff available to explain and interpret material.
Mobility	Meetings held at Department offices are accessible to persons with mobility impairments. The Department holds public meetings at sites that are accessible to persons with mobility impairments.
Visual	Department staff are normally in attendance and available to help persons with visual impairments. Printed materials are available in alternative formats including large type.
Hearing	Department will provide an interpreter when notified in advance.  Information about Department meetings is available using TDD at the central office and by the "Relay Service".

**Program Accessibility: Interpretive Programs**

Programs: State Fair Lifestyles and Landscapes  
 State Park Interpretation Interpretive Trails

Description: Interpretive programs include structured opportunities for the public to learn about nature, history, resource stewardship, and natural resource issues. They can be passive, self-guided opportunities such as nature trails or active, directed presentations to groups.

Impairment	Method of providing access and remedial actions needed
Learning	<p>Exhibits, displays, and materials are clearly written, using simple language. The Department developed guidelines for new publications to ensure that materials are clearly written using readily understood language.</p> <p>State park interpretive programs often have a park naturalist available to explain and interpret materials at the interpretive site. All state parks have personnel available during normal operating hours to answer questions. Many state fair exhibits use inter-active audio-visual displays for people of all ages and learning abilities.</p>
Mobility	<p>State park interpretive centers and the state fair exhibit hall are designed for access to the persons with mobility impairments. Five of the 26 outdoor amphitheaters and assembly areas used for interpretive presentations are now accessible. The Department provides over 1,000 miles of trails of which approximately 300 miles are accessible. Two notable examples of accessible interpretive trails are the Mystery Cave tour in Fillmore county and the St. Croix River overlook trail at Interstate Park in Chisago county. Trails are often - but not always - marked by level of accessibility. Visitors planning a visit to a state park can call ahead and learn about the amount of accessible trails at particular parks. Often the park manager can refer the caller to a nearby park having more accessible trail opportunities.</p>
Visual	<p>Exhibits, displays, and interpretive brochures employ easily recognized print. Printed materials are available in alternative formats including large type. State park interpretive programs often have a park naturalist available to explain and interpret materials at the interpretive site. All state parks have personnel available during normal operating hours to answer questions.</p>
Hearing	<p>Department will provide an interpreter at all interpretive programs when notified in advance.</p> <p>To learn about the availability of interpretive programs, persons can call the Department's TDD at the central office or use the state's "Relay Service" to contact Department personnel at the information office.</p>

**Program Accessibility: Education Classes**

Programs:      Firearm Safety                      Snowmobile Safety      Bow Hunter Safety  
                    Hunter Education                      ATV Safety

Description:      Education Classes are normally conducted statewide by trained volunteers or department staff.

Impairment	Method of providing access and remedial actions needed
Learning	Class materials are clearly written, using simple language. Instructor available to explain and interpret material.
Mobility	Nearly all classes are conducted at accessible locations. If a person with a disability registers for a class at an inaccessible location, the department will either move the class to an accessible location or direct the applicant to a nearby location that is accessible. The Department will provide a personal tutor to assist persons with disabilities when notified in advance.
Visual	Class materials, displays, and exhibits employ easily recognized print. Printed materials are available in alternative formats including large type. Instructor is available to interpret materials. The Department will provide a personal tutor to assist persons with disabilities when notified in advance.
Hearing	Department will provide an interpreter when notified in advance.  To learn about the availability of education classes, persons can call the Department's TDD at the central office or use the state's "Relay Service" to contact Department personnel at the information office.

## ■ Facilities

### 1. Guideline Requirements

For the purposes of this Self-Evaluation and Transition plan, we divided the Department's facilities into two categories: 1) buildings and 2) recreation sites. Buildings provide essential, but ancillary services that visitors would normally expect at a recreation area such as toilets, park offices and visitor centers. Recreation sites, on the other hand, are the facilities that directly provide the recreation experience such as picnic tables, walking trails, and campsites. Most recreation sites are served by one or more buildings. No matter how barrier free a recreation site might be, it cannot be considered accessible unless the buildings that serve it are accessible too. Therefore, the Department requires higher accessibility standards for buildings and analyzed them as a separate group.

To be considered accessible, a building must have several critical elements that are accessible. These critical elements are: parking with designated spaces and loading zones; walkways between the parking area and the building; entrances or doors; restrooms with toilets and sinks; drinking water; and telephones (where applicable).

For a recreation site to be accessible, it must conform to the Department's standards for outdoor accessibility published in Access for All, A Workbook for Outdoor Accessibility, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 1979. This workbook shows typical design layouts and dimensions for outdoor facilities such as campsites, fishing piers, recreation trails, and picnic areas.

### 2. Method Used to Evaluate Compliance

The self-evaluation survey evaluated the Department's facilities statewide that receive significant public contact including administrative offices, park offices, sanitation and shower buildings, visitor centers, modern group camps and trail centers. A questionnaire was developed with assistance from a consulting firm specializing in accessibility issues, the MN Council on Disability, and the MN Department of Administration. Facilities were evaluated by architectural consulting firms who visited the sites and completed the questionnaire. We also relied on information provided by Department program managers and field staff regarding the accessibility of outdoor recreation facilities.

### 3. Evaluation Results and Transition Initiatives

#### **Buildings**

Findings: The survey results showed that many facilities are not fully accessible - even though they were designed and constructed according to ANSI and UFAS accessibility standards. The demotion in accessibility was often caused by lack of maintenance. For example, a modern toilet building, constructed at a cost of \$150,000 can be rendered completely inaccessible if the sidewalk leading to the entrance ramp has settled by two inches. Barriers to otherwise accessible facilities are sometimes created by carelessly locating trash receptacles and vending machines in front of the entrances. We found that most problems can be corrected with only minor expense when department field staff are sensitive to the needs of people with differing abilities and can recommend simple, cost-effective remedies.

Although the Department has used accessibility standards for all new building construction and major rehabilitation for many years, some recreation sites are still not yet served by fully accessible buildings. The most important need is for accessible toilets and access routes at recreation sites receiving significant public visitation and at regional information centers around the state. Unless these anchor buildings that supply essential human needs are accessible to everyone, the remaining recreation facilities at the area cannot be considered accessible.

When viewed in their entirety, the Department's facilities and the programs they support are available to all persons without discrimination based on disability.

Transition Initiatives: The Minnesota Legislature's "Access 92" initiative has appropriated \$20 million to improve the accessibility of state-owned buildings - either by rehabilitating existing ones or replacing them with new, accessible ones. The Department has already received \$1 million from this pool with priority being given to buildings receiving intensive use by employees and the visiting public. An additional \$5 million has been requested for other recreational opportunities as well as buildings.



## **Recreation Facilities**

### **Picnic Areas**

Findings: The Department has 130 developed picnic areas containing 6,275 picnic tables. Approximately 20% of the picnic tables in place at various site locations are accessible; 99% of the Department picnic areas provide accessible tables. All new tables installed since 1980 are accessible.

Transition Initiatives: The Department readily provides picnicking for persons with disabilities and the percentage of tables will continue to increase, as the Department continues to provide new, accessible tables. Improving parking facilities and access routes to picnic sites is a priority.

### **Campgrounds**

Findings: The Department operates 101 modern vehicular campgrounds consisting of approximately 4,700 campsites. The Department's practice is to provide a minimum of 2 or 2% of total campsites per sanitation building, whichever is larger, as being designed and constructed for persons with disabilities. A review of responses suggest that 84% of modern vehicular campgrounds now meet these guidelines. Typically, the more developed drive-in campgrounds are conducive to camping by persons with mobility impairments whereas cart-in, walk-in and backpack camping opportunities are less accessible due to their rustic characteristics.

Transition Initiatives: Since 1980, the Department has used a standard design for accessible campsites when developing new campsites and when upgrading existing ones. With this standard already in place, camping opportunities for persons with disabilities will continue to increase. The Department will continue its practice of reserving accessible campsites for persons with mobility impairments until all other campsites are full. Accessible campsites are either identified by small signs at the site or through campsite assignments made by the park office. Our percentage of accessible campsites is now satisfactory. The Department needs to increase the amount of accessible camping opportunities by improving existing access routes, and providing additional toilet buildings and water fountains.

### **Recreation Trails**

Findings: The Department has 890 miles along eleven State Trails. Approximately one fourth of these miles follow abandoned railroad grades providing a hard surface, normally 8 - 10 feet wide with 99% of these trails

having slopes no greater than two percent. The Department has approximately 50 interpretive trails which are between 0.5 miles to 3.5 miles in length with the average length being 1.0 mile. The grade and alignment of these trails is affected by natural features such as soil properties and topography; so much so that they may not lend themselves to provide total accessibility. Accessibility designs are incorporated whenever possible - especially for interpretative trails and trails to structures or points of interest. Recent accessible interpretive trail efforts have included the Mystery Cave underground tour which is over 70% accessible to persons with mobility impairments. The remainder of the tour is accessible with assistance over grades that slightly exceed UFAS standards. We feel this to be a major accomplishment since we were working with a very sensitive and restrictive natural resource, that offers a unique experience for interpreting underground geology.

Transition Initiatives: The Department designed a workbook for outdoor accessibility in 1979 entitled Access for All that identified that the Department provide trails physically accessible to all users whenever possible without undue alteration of the landscape. To accomplish those goals, a trail chart containing "levels" of accessibility was developed. By using this system, all trails could be categorized into various degrees of accessibility. Whenever the Department develops or rehabilitates a recreation trail, its design is determined by using these trail specifications as defined in Access for All. A Class I or II trail offers the greatest level of accessibility, providing a minimum width of 4' one-way or 8' two-way, a crushed rock or asphalt surface, and a slope no greater than 1:20. When topography, geographic location or unique natural features make a Class I or II trail prohibitively expensive or impracticable to construct, the Department considers downgrading the design to a Class III, IV or V trail. The Department intends to expand the number of accessible trail miles provided - especially throughout the state park system, forest day use areas, and wildlife lands.

### **Outdoor Amphitheaters**

Findings: Twenty six (40%) of Minnesota's 66 State Parks provide interpretive programs that rely on amphitheaters or assembly areas. While outdoor facilities are sometimes used for natural resource interpretive presentations, few are fully accessible to persons with disabilities other than hearing impairments, due to the nature of their design (on slopes) and surrounding topography. The Department has improved or developed five new outdoor amphitheaters since 1986 using accessibility guidelines.

**Transition Initiatives:** The Department will provide for increased accessibility as funding becomes available for the improvement of existing facilities or construction of new amphitheater development.

### **Play Areas**

**Findings:** Play areas are generally found in the Department's state park system, and consist of a mixture of natural and man-made structures. Currently, play areas are found in 43 (65%) of the state parks. Play areas are located on flat terrain with varying degrees of accessibility to these areas. Because of their somewhat rustic nature and surrounding natural topography, few are totally accessible by persons with mobility impairments. All are considered useable by persons with hearing and learning impairments.

**Transition Initiatives:** All new and rejuvenated play areas shall be designed and constructed to be sensitive to accessibility needs. Existing play areas will be considered for adaptation as replacement needs and funding occur.

### **Scenic Overlooks**

**Findings:** The Department has a number of scenic overlooks and vistas throughout the state. Typically, some have structures while others are less accessible due to their rustic state. Recent efforts to provide accessibility to persons with mobility impairments incorporated the use of "artificial" rock formations to provide accessible trails and bridges to significant geological formations at Interstate State Park, overlooking the St. Croix National Wild and Scenic River.

**Transition Initiatives:** The Department shall provide the greatest level of accessibility to its overlooks wherever practical without adverse effects to the natural site conditions and resources.

### **Swimming Facilities**

**Findings:** Department swimming facilities consist of natural or man-made beaches lying within state park and state forest units. Survey information indicates that there are 39 swimming beach areas, with only 10% having trained adult (lifeguard) supervision. Due to the natural state of the facilities on lakes and rivers, few provide total accessibility, but do provide accessibility with assistance to persons with mobility and visual impairments. They are considered accessible to persons with hearing and learning impairments.

**Transition Initiatives:** The Department is aware of the need for accessible swimming facilities and continues to research state of the art solutions in efforts to program and design rehabilitation accordingly.

### **Water Access/Docks**

**Findings:** There are approximately 1,100 Department administered water access sites existing statewide. The Department readily provides water access sites including parking, access to the water, boarding docks and toilets where use and topographic site conditions allow us to provide a greater level of accessibility. Approximately 65 (6%) access sites provide bituminous parking surfaces with designated signing and striping of parking spaces for the persons with disabilities. Both UFAS requirements and State Organizations on Boating Access (SOBA) standards establish required minimum guidelines for providing access to persons with disabilities. The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area fishing opportunities were recently enhanced with barrier-free design and development of a boat launch and fishing structure in South St. Paul on the National Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Mississippi River. This was completed in close cooperation with local "fisherpersons" with mobility impairments.

**Transition Initiatives:** New improvements to water access developments, through the promulgation of SOBA standards, will increase accessibility even further in the future. Simple paving of lots and the addition of support facilities will increase accessibility. These efforts are most effective when site conditions are conducive. The Department's goal, subject to funding, is to increase the percentage of accessible water accesses from 6% to 20%.

### **Fishing Piers**

**Findings:** Since the initiation of the fishing pier program and the development of a typical design guide standard in 1985, survey information indicates that 80% of sites that provide fishing piers have at least one pier designed and constructed for use by persons with mobility impairments, including parking and access to the pier. This is in standing with Department goals. The Department recently cooperated with the city of St. Cloud, MN to design and construct a unique shore fishing platform along the Mississippi River. This novel design incorporates cantilevered arm-rests and pole holders for persons using wheelchairs.

**Transition Initiatives:** The Department's long range plan is to construct 20 new, accessible fishing piers annually for the next 10 years..

## **Hunting Blinds**

**Findings:** Hunting blinds (stations) are generally found only on Department wildlife management area lands and vary in level of accessibility. The Department maintains accessible hunting blinds on 7 of its larger wildlife management units. These blinds need to be reserved 24 hours in advance, and if not, are opened to the general public. A parking space is provided nearby, usually within 100 feet, level access to the hunting blind or station, and some type of partially screened enclosure is found. Capacity is generally limited to four hunters or observers. Of the 320 hunting blinds evaluated, 22 (or 15%) are accessible persons with mobility impairments. About one-fourth could be accessible persons with mobility impairments with minimal assistance. All blinds are deemed accessible to persons with hearing and learning impairments. None are fully accessible by persons with visual impairments without assistance. The Department, along with special interest groups, provides special regulations, permits, and assistance to persons with disabilities.

**Transition Initiatives:** As wildlife hunting accommodations are improved or newly developed, the Department will develop at least two hunting blinds per wildlife management area, when hunting blinds are provided, for persons with mobility impairments as site conditions allow. No further action by the Department is required as it continues to provide special regulations and to work with interest groups in making hunting opportunities available to persons with disabilities.

## **Summary**

The Department has used accessibility standards for all new building construction and major rehabilitation for many years. However, some recreation sites are still not yet served with fully accessible buildings. Even though every building is not now accessible, the Department's facilities and programs, when viewed in their entirety, do provide opportunities to all persons without regard to handicap. If anyone needs information about the accessibility of a certain recreation area, they can call the Department's information bureau where staff can give them information about the facility or guide the caller to a nearby facility that is accessible. The Department is now in compliance with Section 504 guidelines.