

Lake Vermilion State Park (LVSP) – Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

Meeting Minutes

September 29, 2010 (6:00 – 8:30 pm, Tower Civic Center)

- Present:** Steve Abrahamson, Andrew Brantingham, Tim Campbell, Skip Drake, Ken Gilbertson, Walt Moe (sitting in for Mel Hintz), Nancy Hanson, Mark Kailanen (sitting in for Bob Krepps), Bill Latady, Mark Ludlow, Bob Manzoline, Jay Schelde, Mary Somnis, Tim Tomsich, Hannah Tuntland, Karen Umphress
- Absent:** Nancy Larson, Shawn Murphy (deployed), Dave Simpkins
- DNR Staff:** Parks & Trails (PAT) Division Director Courtland Nelson, PAT Development Coordinator Larry Peterson, PAT Operations Section Manager Peter Hark, PAT Regional Strategic Manager Dave Olfelt, PAT Park Planner Jade Templin, LVSP Project Manager Erika Rivers, PAT District 3 Manager John Voges, SUMSP Manager Jim Essig, SUMSP Interpretive Supervisor James Pointer, Area Trails Manager Christa Miller, DNR PAT Archeologists Dave Radford and Doug George
- Guests:** Matt Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator for the North Country Scenic Trail
- Public:** Eleven members of the general public were present to observe the CAC meeting. Working subcommittees (full membership makeup shown below—not all were present for this meeting) met to discuss directional statements during the second half of the meeting. Members of the public were invited to join them in their discussions.

CAC Subcommittee Membership

Infrastructure	Experiences & Amenities	Education & Interpretation	Resource Management
<i>Roads, Trails, Entrance, Power, Water, Sewer</i>	<i>Contact Station, Visitor Center, Boat Accesses, Picnic-Day Use Areas, Camping</i>	<i>Focus Areas, Displays, Kiosks, Signs, Visitor Center, Next-Gen Technology</i>	<i>Cultural & natural resources management and protection priorities</i>
Co-Chairs:			
Larry Peterson (DNR)	Jim Essig (DNR)	James Pointer (DNR)	Dave Olfelt (DNR)
Rod McPeak	Steve Abrahamson (CAC)	Skip Drake (CAC)	Mel Hintz (CAC)/Walt Moe
Members:			
Tim Tomsich (CAC)	Nancy Larson (CAC)	Ken Gilbertson (CAC)	Mary Somnis (CAC)
Jay Schelde (CAC)	Dave Simpkins (CAC)	Hannah Tuntland (CAC)	Bill Latady (CAC)
Bob Manzoline (CAC)	Mark Ludlow (CAC)	Karen Umphress (CAC)	Andrew Brantingham (CAC)
Nancy Hanson (CAC)	Tim Campbell (CAC)	Rose Berens (?)	Steven Lotz
Tom Pustovar	Marge McPeak	Marshall Helmberger	Brenda Broten
Carolyn Miner	Christina Hujanen	Bill Tefft	

Minutes:

Prior to the meeting, four CAC members joined DNR staff on a tour of the US Forest Service Station in Ely, MN, a silver-level LEED-certified, multi-purpose building—visitor center, gift shop, staff headquarters, and contact station for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The group also toured the International Wolf Center facility, which principally serves to interpret wolf

biology and behavioral ecology. The group finished its tour with a visit to the Tower Harbor/Marina site at the junction of highways 169 and 135, which was explained by CAC member and Tower mayor, Steve Abrahamson.

Following the tour at 6:00pm, Courtland Nelson welcomed the group to the meeting and overviewed the agenda. He also introduced a group of graduate students from the University of Minnesota-Duluth, who are doing a research project on what would attract young people to state parks.

CAC member Mark Ludlow passed along visitor center design recommendations from architect Dale Mulfinger:

1. Seek a location which has good solar access for the building along with sheltering from the cold northwest winds which will be difficult as the visitor center should have a view of the lake. However, the view should be protected from the water. This is achieved with a design much like a Saudi woman's veil, she can see you but you can't see her. Recognize the view will likely to be a horizontal one not a vertical one. The horizon is more important than excessive sky view.
2. Consider earth sheltering if possible for further protection from the cold. Work with the power company for active and passive solar. Sell excess power back. Consider a geothermal well or loop system, with possibility for the new deep well type where you integrate potable water with geothermal demands. This is relatively new and invented by a gentleman in Superior WI and has recently been approved for use in Minnesota.
3. Control water runoff from the building and parking lots so as not to enter the lake. Consider rain gardens for run-off ponding and in conjunction with geothermal wells. The water helps in the geothermal process in dissipating heat or cool.
4. Create several smaller parking lots rather than one larger one to reduce impact on the character of the land.
5. Keep site and building lighting near the ground to reduce light pollution. Keep vegetation close to the building.
6. Make this a LEED certified building to use as demonstration to region as to how, "Stepping More Gently On The Earth" looks.
7. Windows should have a high R value.
8. Maximize use of local materials. Local stone is available as found on the site or as found at mining sites.
8. Blend building with nature. (See Cabinology book pp. 156-157 Lake Vermilion and pp. 220-221 Saganaga Lake.)
9. Not so Big. Keep the building smaller using the budget to build better rather than bigger (Sarah Susanka's books on the "Not So Big House" concept).
10. In the rustic vs modern debate, keep the design timeless, drawing both from the history of vernacular forms and yet learning from the best of today's ideas and technologies.
11. Make sure that the buildings and grounds are accessible to all.
12. Use local craftspeople for construction.

Erika Rivers also passed along comments submitted by the **North Star Trail Travelers**, who visited the park earlier in the week and had some recommendations for structuring hiking loops in the parks. She also passed along some recommendations from Jim Plummer, a planner with Iron Range Resources, who visited the site earlier in the month with IRR Deputy Commissioner Brian Hiti and CAC member Mary Somnis. Following the meeting, a proposal by Vermilion Houseboats to include overnight houseboat campsites in the park was forwarded by email to the CAC for consideration.

Matt Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator for the national North Country Scenic Trail (NCST), provided a short overview of the NCST and asked the CAC committee to consider making a recommendation for a trail alignment through LVSP and SUMSP. The NCST is a hiking trail that, when complete, will link natural areas across seven states and be the longest continuous hiking trail in the United States. Currently, a route alignment is being examined that would run west from Ely through the Superior National Forest and George Washington State Forest, continuing westward into the Chippewa National Forest north of Grand Rapids and eventually intersect with the existing trail further to the west.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to working on directional statements in small groups. The small groups, led by subcommittee co-chairs, discussed the statements and reported back on their deliberations to the larger CAC group. Erika Rivers explained that a small group of CAC members will present the committee's recommendations to DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten in early December, and that the recommendations of the CAC would be considered in the writing of the Master Plan. The subcommittees discussed the following directional statements—some of which were initially proposed in small groups during the previous CAC meeting in August, and others were created and amended between the August and September meetings by CAC members during the meeting minutes review process. The subcommittees will meet by email and/or phone during October to further hone the statements between CAC meetings.

NOTE: The directional statements reported here are those that were forwarded to Erika Rivers following additional deliberations during the month of October.

Visitor Experiences Subcommittee

1. The park should offer plenty of camper cabins and yurts. The park should work with local resort association to insure that the park overnight opportunities are complementary with experiences offered by resorts.
2. The park should offer some primitive camping opportunities (e.g., remote, single-site, boat-up or hike-in opportunities) as part of the range of camping options at the park.
3. A clustered, family-friendly, full-service campground should be located within a reasonable walking distance of the lake, but should not be visible from the lake. The campground should cluster like kinds of use in order to minimize user conflicts. Smaller, non-electric sites should be located closer to the lake; electric and larger RV sites should be located further away from the lake in a separate location.
4. The park should offer upgraded group camping opportunities (with a higher level amenities).
5. The park should offer a separate campground for ATVs with connections to area trails. The park should investigate the demand for year-round use of the campground by ATVs or snowmobiles.

6. Whenever possible separate the vehicles from the camping and centralize the parking in clusters.
7. The Visitor Center should also serve as the trail center for both warm- and cold-weather activities. The center should be a mix of modern and up-north design, and include 1) outdoor gathering spaces (amphitheater and outdoor fireplaces), 2) interpretive spaces; 3) local contract vendor for food service; 4) equipment rentals; 5) a hub for trail activities; and 6) boat access from the lake; and 7) indoor classroom/meeting space.
8. Build a contact station on Hwy 169 that will include 1) registration station, 2) invasive species inspection and cleaning area, 3) general area/park information, 4) park office (for Soudan and Vermilion) and 5) public restrooms.
9. The Visitor Center should embrace WiFi and other technologies to make “being away” easier.
10. The Visitor Center should have a museum or interpretive displays for mining, fur trading, American Indians and/or natural resources conservation.
11. The Visitor Center should have a gift shop, outfitting service, equipment rentals, and meeting rooms.
12. The park should primarily focus on the following three kinds of trails:
 - 1) Hiking/Cross-country skiing (traditional and skate)/Snowshoeing
 - 2) Biking
 - 3) Snowmobiling
13. The park should be a model for sustainability.
14. Some of the overlook peaks at the park should be made accessible, but some exceptions should be made if doing so will severely diminish the character of the site.
15. The park should provide overnight and day use opportunities for groups:

Overnight – a) pods/loops within the campground that allow groups to be together b) designated group camp

Day use – a) areas within a picnic area for reservation/use by groups b) a gathering area near the visitor center
16. The park should be a national leader by requiring visitors to clean boats, vehicles and equipment before entering and leaving the park.
17. DNR should obtain ownership of the BLM islands in the vicinity of the park.
18. Create public-private partnerships for things like trail maintenance, interpretive programming, and rental/food concessions.

Interpretation & Education Subcommittee

1. While traditional users should not be ignored in interpretive efforts, the inexperienced park/outdoor user should be the primary audience for interpretation. A subset of this group would include schools/youth. A secondary audience, aside from the school/youth, should be the regional (permanent, seasonal, and temporary) residents.
2. The park offers the opportunity to interpret a wide variety of thematic areas; however, the themes that fit best with the primary audiences are listed below. Regardless what theme is chosen, it must allow visitors to think creatively and critically and to constantly use their imagination.
 - a. **Creating a sense of place and comfort in our natural environment**, which can be accomplished by teaching outdoor skills, such as, how to camp, how to canoe, how to geocache, how to build a fire, how to fish, how to snowshoe, etc. – skills that will enable the individuals to better enjoy/feel comfortable in the outdoors.
 - b. **Crossing boundaries** – this will explore how this area relates to other areas, regions, biomes, or nations. It will include a focus of cultural history (mining, Native American, fur trading, current management of resources, etc.) and natural history (geology, flora, and fauna, especially the boreal forest habitat).
 - c. **Scientific discovery** – there are many “true” scientific experiments occurring at the park, including water quality testing, physics experiments, bacteria research, and bat research. There are also opportunities for citizen science projects relating to these and other research projects. We need to encourage self-directed enquiry in addition to the true research projects.
3. There are a variety of interpretive approaches to present information to the park visitor. To accomplish this effectively, however, the park needs to incorporate the following:
 - a. Different methodologies must be used to appeal to a wider audience – there must be variety with tried and true approaches (exhibit displays, guided tours, kiosks, etc.), combined with cutting edge approaches (touch screen displays, smart phones, video conferencing, etc). An emphasis should be placed on approaches that involve audio programming, such as mp3 audio tours.
 - b. Guided interpretation and skill development need to be integrated into the programming.
 - c. There needs to be flexibility so the selection of an exhibit/display or an electronic approach enhances the interpretive message.
 - d. Interactive web-based approaches need to be cultivated.
4. Programming should be conducted from a variety of locations at the park, including visitor centers, trail centers, access points, etc. One main visitor center for all interpretation is not practical. It will be crucial to the success of Soudan Underground Mine State Park to have a new visitor center that meets the needs of its clients. There also needs to be flexibility to offer interpretation on the park web pages and at a variety of off-site locations.
5. There are a variety of partners that the DNR should utilize for its interpretive programming, whether it is as a program and activity advisory group or to serve as an interpretive resource. The most important aspect should focus on the park being a role model for other organizations in how it conducts its partnerships. The major partners should include the following:

- a. Local community, including the local charter school, resorts, local government entities, community organizations/members, and professionals in the field.
- b. Bois Forte Band
- c. School – area schools and schools throughout the state
- d. Various non-profit organizations/state organizations, including area colleges/universities, historical societies, USFS, MN Master Naturalists, etc.

Natural & Cultural Resources

Natural Resource Guidance Statements

1. Protect endangered, threatened, rare, and/or significant plant and animal species, and unique geologic features.
2. Maintain, enhance, or restore a variety of healthy natural communities, especially uncommon forest types or components.
 - Preserve the dry open woodlands with thin soils, rock outcrops, cliffs, and talus slope features.
 - Preserve the beaver wetland complexes.
 - Preserve the mesic hardwood forests.
 - Encourage the development and maintenance of older forests
 - Prevent the introduction, establishment, and spread of terrestrial and aquatic invasive plants.
 - Be willing to employ a variety of forest management techniques including prescribed fire, logging, and non-commercial thinning or release, planting, scarification and seeding provided they help meet management objectives.
3. Preserve or enhance the park's water resources and aquatic systems.
 - Preserve the park's open and forested wetlands and peatlands.
 - Maintain the integrity of the Park's undeveloped shoreline and near-shore habitats.
 - Employ strategies to minimize phosphorus inputs.
4. Maintain high use areas like campgrounds, picnic areas and heavily used trails so that natural and cultural resource degradation is minimized while visitor safety and enjoyment are enhanced.
5. Manage wildlife populations for ecological sustainability.
 - Manage white-tailed deer populations such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not negatively impacted.
 - Monitor other wildlife populations, and if needed, create and implement management strategies to maintain ecosystem sustainability.
 - Maintain healthy, stable bat populations at the mine.
6. Work with the Bois Forte community to identify and manage the continued traditional use harvest or collection areas and plant populations.

7. Protect Lake Vermilion State Park's scenic and aesthetic qualities so that evidence of human influences are minimized.
 - Site new development so that it is not visible from long distances, including views from Lake Vermilion.
 - Protect northern lights, night-sky aesthetic by minimizing light pollution from parks.
 - Design boardwalks and overlooks to minimize their visual impact when seen from Lake Vermilion and other vantage points.
 - Keep certain pits and stockpile areas in Soudan Underground Mine free of vegetation so as to maintain the mine site's industrial characteristics.
8. Develop natural resource research, monitoring, and outreach programs.
 - Continue to expand the natural resource inventories in the park.
 - Use interpretation and outreach to more effectively promote understanding and awareness of natural and cultural resources within the park.
 - Explore ways to involve a variety of people in the resource management work at the park.

Cultural Resource Guidance Statements

1. Inventory and evaluate cultural resources in SUMSP and LVSP and record the resources within the cultural resource geodatabase, part of the overall Geographic Information System.
2. Integrate results of cultural resource studies into interpretive programming at SUMSP and LVSP.
3. Investigate revising the Soudan Mine National Historic Landmark nomination and boundary.
4. Review management of the Stuntz Bay Boathouse Historic District.
5. Develop a cultural resource management plan to facilitate the preservation and management of cultural resources within SUMSP and LVSP.
6. Balance the desire for maintaining the historic integrity of the Soudan Mine NHL with modernizing and making buildings and equipment efficient, safe and code compliant.
7. Preserve the historic integrity of the underground areas at the site.
8. Conduct cultural resource reviews for new development proposals and resource management activities.
9. Prioritize park areas for vegetative removal to maintain the mine site's industrial characteristics.
10. Follow the Division of Parks and Recreation's Collections Policy protocol.
11. Inform local communities, mining companies, and equipment distributors of the Division Collections Policy.
12. Work with the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa and the local communities to promote the protection and interpretation of cultural resources outside of the park boundaries.

Parks Infrastructure

1. Water, sewer, utilities and any other type of infrastructure should be designed in a sustainable manner and situated in such a way that they have the least impact on the park's natural and cultural resources.
2. Murray Forest Road and the Jasper Peak intersection should be equally considered for the main park entrance location.
3. A connection to Soudan Underground Mine State Park should be provided from the Lake Vermilion State Park.
4. A tunnel access under Hwy 169 should be pursued for access to the southern LVSP unit.
5. The main park road should be a wishbone with a natural surfaced, accessible trail connecting east and west sides. Lake views should be incorporated where possible, as well as spur trails to lakeside campsites and day-use areas (observation areas). Paving this connector trail should be evaluated in the future.
6. The park visitor center should be located near the lake, preferably near the statutory boundary that separates the two parks. Reasonable access should be provided.
7. The park should develop a new boat access in close proximity to camping facilities. The Stuntz Bay access should remain available for general public water access. If necessary, an alternative access on Stuntz Bay should be pursued.