

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

Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2010 (6:00 – 8:30 pm, Tower Civic Center)

Present: Steve Abramson, Andrew Brantingham, Tim Campbell, Skip Drake, Nancy Hanson, Mel Hintz, Bob Krepps, Nancy Larson, Bill Latady, Mark Ludlow, Bob Manzoline, Jay Schelde, Dave Simpkins, Mary Somnis, Tim Tomsich, Tom Umphress (for Karen Umphress)

Absent: Ken Gilbertson, Shawn Murphy (deployed), Hannah Tuntland, Karen Umphress

DNR Staff: Jim Essig, Guy Lunz, Christa Miller, Courtland Nelson, Larry Peterson, Erika Rivers, Jade Templin, John Voges

Public: Most members of CAC subcommittees were present for the meeting. In addition, nine members of the general public were present to observe the meeting and were invited to join in the small group discussions.

Minutes:

Project Manager Erika Rivers welcomed the group to the meeting. All present at the meeting (CAC members, subcommittee members, and the general public) were given hard copies of the “Internal DNR Review Copy” of the draft cooperative park master plan. Rivers explained that DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten agreed to release this internal draft to the CAC, but wanted to underscore that this version had not been reviewed or approved by the commissioner’s office or senior members of the Parks and Trails management team at that time. CAC members were also given copies of the “final” CAC recommendations document, an email from absent-CAC-member Karen Umphress describing some interesting ideas for “play trails” and a cell-phone interpretive application. [NOTE: Following the CAC meeting, the committee was also forwarded a letter from Umphress that came from the Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association, ARMCA. This letter asked the CAC to consider the idea of including off-highway motorcycle trails within Lake Vermilion State Park].

Rivers overviewed the master plan contents, divided the CAC and subcommittee members into small groups, and assigned each small group (“base group”) to read a section of the master plan. When the base groups got together after reading their section, they used a worksheet to collect their thoughts on 1) what the main points/takeaway messages were from their section; and 2) what issues/concerns came to mind for the group and how might those issues/concerns be resolved?

Following the base group discussions, the base groups divided into “jigsaw” groups, in which a member from each base group shared the major points, issues and concerns from each section of the master plan. The jigsaw groups then discussed how well the draft master plan captured the CAC recommendations and developed suggestions for DNR to consider to further refine/improve the plan. DNR staff were present to record the discussions of the base groups and the jigsaw groups. The information gleaned was used to further refine the plan before Commissioner Holsten’s review and briefing on Friday, November 19. Notes from the small groups follow.

JIGSAW: CAC DRAFT MASTER PLAN REVIEW

Base Group One – Introduction and Vision

Main points/take away messages:

- Focus on Sustainability
- Next generation concept
- Experimental, if this concept is a success, DNR will try in other parks
- Technology will be embraced, but not become too intrusive
- Important that footprint is light
- Discussion of two parks is good—one management unit/approach
- Plan will be continually amended as new information is gleaned
- No DNR development yet, but lots of ideas that sound exciting

Issues and concerns:

- Challenges that DNR anticipates with “next generation”
- Need more of a focus on initial years of operation
- Statement that there was no previous development is inaccurate—logged areas, leased land
- Don’t let technology distract from mission of parks
- Need more discussion in vision of what outreach to target groups entails
- Should be more explanation that the park is for entire state—not just local
- Nearby attractions: include Giant’s Ridge, Finnish Heritage at Embarrass, Hoodoo Point, Lost Lake Peatland SNA (6 miles away), Bois Forte include marina and golf course (p. 13)
- Magnificent facility for all, but keep a small footprint
- Lots of plans for future, but need plans for this year
- P. 14 where appropriate vs if in interpretation with Bois Forte (3rd bullet)
- P. 4 – resource work 2010 not 2009
- Embracing technology but not interfering with the experience, not to distract from experience
- Tower losing school, difficult to partner with school if it’s not there—do you mean charter school?
- Cooperative plan vs LVSP plan
- Urban/entire state should be connected to the park not just local connection
- Update to Soudan plan? No – Enhancement or attachment would be better (p.4) – integration of Soudan into LVSP plan
- What are ATV comments?
- Trying to provide diverse opportunities, but separating user groups
- Enough about BWCAW connection?

Base Group Two – Cultural and Natural Resources

Main points/take away messages:

- Citizens Advisory Committee – strong emphasis on preservation and sustainability
- This is a guiding plan, not meant to be an action plan
- “Devil in details” – how is this implemented? Plan necessarily needs to be broader—higher level
- Mining has occurred here for thousands of years
- Important to include the “restore” element into the document (restore, then sustain)
- Emphasis on preservation – require the restoration

- Draft master plan followed committee recommendations well
- Cooperate and collaborate with Bois Forte
- Maintain mining focus over at Soudan
- Liked recreation skills areas; like skill-building courses

Issues and concerns:

- Cultural areas – why can't we let people go to these areas? Sometimes we love things to death.
- Will there be boat-in campsites? How do we protect lake/shoreline?
- Need to be aggressive on invasive species -- control, not just prevention
- Include information on how DNR is currently treating discharge water
- Mining 5,000 years ago, 150 years ago – “economy of mining” goes on for millennia

Base Group Three – Recreation and Visitor Services

Main points/takeaway messages issues/concerns (all together):

- Discussion about the loss of identity for Soudan under the Lake Vermilion banner (capital development) -- Is this one park or two parks?
- Heritage Center and visitor center – shared
- Add a kids activity area (playgrounds) at the campgrounds
- Snowmobile access to/through Soudan/Tower -- p. 39
- Location of campgrounds and access area – p 45 – location questions/concerns with neighbors on the east side of park -- walk-in, cart-in, RV camping (concern)
- If you do have OHV camping, keep south of 169
- OHV/snowmobile access to Bear Head Lake state park, and Bear Island State Forest – relative distance? See map p. 13. Distance to Gilbert SRA.
- Trail activities within park boundary – p. 38
- Need language in place to “clear up” OHV access to property south of Hwy 169 (state park prohibits motorized activity)
- It seems the need for OHV is filled (Gilbert & Bear Island connections), and we can spend our budget providing unfilled needs.
- Senior citizen activities – need services, amenities, programs – more emphasis on this demographic
- Stuntz Bay and lake access – where will the access there be, given the boathouses?
- Need classroom facility for training.
- Houseboats – where do we want them? Need to separate conflicting experiences.
- P. 42 – require boots to be clean
- It is critical we segregate camping opportunities from primitive tent camping to large RVs. We must remove vehicles from the camping area whenever possible. Cars are mostly an imposition on our lives are remindful of commuting. People can walk a distance to their vehicle.
- We must look to public-private partnerships of any nature we can think of from trail sponsorships to volunteer interpreters and guides. People support those things they are involved in and our budget can be utilized more efficiently.

Base Group Four – Interpretation & Looking Forward

- Too early to get into too many specifics (probably appropriate)
- Need to do park interpretive plan with stakeholder involvement – what is the process, timeframe?
- Need more about interpreting the lake; add lake-related tours
- Add the whole lake experience
- Emphasize invasives
- Heavily focused on Soudan (especially in the science section) – need more on LVSP
- IS2.2 add water, water lilies, water fowl
- Large lake specialist should be involved in developing interpretive and education programs – lots of interesting activities going on now to interpret – spawning, electro fishing, surveys
- Need more on how to get kids/city folks out of the car and parking lot and buildings and into the outdoors
- Need to start interpretation at the very beginning of the parks development
- Add water-based recreation, toys, (e.g., trampoline in water)
- Interpret what this area has been and what it should be
- Interpretive plan – add water, lake, wetlands, beaver, wildlife that live in and affect these
- Two parks are very different – need different people and different skills in each park – need to highlight each – unique – make sure staff emphasize both parks, both experiences – underground, outdoors, lake – this is unique in Minnesota, maybe in U.S.
- There is a potential for a conflict in management – need lots of coordination
- Section on crossing boundaries – need some examples here – too vague
- IS4.1 and 2 – partnership – very important to integrate with community – have groups help to do trail maintenance (like adopt-a-highway). This can relieve some state funding. People like to help. It's a good educational process – people learn how to do things outdoors, and they are more likely to support the park because they are part of it.
- Get the Junior Naturalist program involved
- Is there a way to get Habitat for Humanity involved?
- Guided tours are a cornerstone for Soudan, but add more self-guided tours and self-guided ways to experience the park – doesn't have to be a physical tour.
- Maybe do audio tour from your smart phone
- Many ways to visit/learn about outdoors/culture
- Geocaching is so popular because it challenges people to go out and find and learn things on their own
- Not everyone wants to tour in a group. Some like to go out on own. Some like show and tell and interaction.
- Idea: Idaho incorporated Google Earth with trail system – people can look up ahead of time and virtual tour trail so they can decide where they want to go.
- Guiding expectations so people know where to go and what they will see – Google Earth
- IS1.1 (Big discussion) -- says inexperienced outdoor users should be the primary audience for above-ground, non-mining-related interpretation at the parks. Group disagreed with this. Felt it alienates parks main users. There could/should be an emphasis on inexperienced users, but there should be programming for ALL park users.
- Also emphasize outdoor skills at all levels; outdoor recreation generally
- Do historical interpretation of Vermilion – Am Indian and mining
- Encourage day use of park and surrounding attractions
- Send a daily "What's Happening at the park/s" flyer to resorts

Part II – Summary thoughts from Jigsaw groups (combined)

Vision/intro

- When will this all happen? When will park be open? Need to manage expectations.
- What is the timeline?
- What is the budget?
- Many challenges to developing a “new generation” park – need community involvement, need to address demographic changes – new users
- Focus on sustainability

Natural and cultural resources

- Emphasize preservation and restoration before new construction
- Don’t introduce invasives
- Emphasize beauty – rocks and woods
- Restoration of natural resources
- Work with Bois Forte on cultural/archaeological sites
- Lake and water quality concerns
- Non-native species – problems with construction and disturbances near shore

Recreational use

- RV camping – minimize noise
- Make connections to Tower, Soudan, businesses, commercial
- ATV/OHV connections with Tower, state trails
- Trail use – non-motorized emphasis
- State wants to maintain Soudan’s identity
- Different types of trails – Is there a list? Priorities? Different levels of difficulty?
- Include the fire tower and tours to Jasper Peak
- Would like to see a large picnic shelter and natural amphitheaters large and small
- Are islands included in the recreation plan?
- House boat use in park is not addressed.
- Sportsmen’s club is interested in another shore lunch site (public-private partnership)
- Access is critical – by lake, by bike, by snowmobile, by OHV. If done well, resorts will refer guests
- Should you seek statutory changes to allow motorized use?

Interpretation, looking forward

- Who are you going to serve? Focus should be in broad areas, not on specific groups
- More lake-based programs, lake experiences, resources, science, history
- Tour opportunities on the water are left out
- More partnerships with community, more volunteerism
- Don’t label user groups so much
- Integrate both parks

- Be sure to have something “new” for people returning, continue to change over time, don’t stagnate
- Partner with internet groups, local clubs, trail volunteers
- Avoid labels that are demeaning “inexperienced”
- Marketing – IMPORTANT; market park opportunities
- Discuss logging history

General

- Concerns about managing such different parks with same staff
- Need for lots of enforcement
- Need for park presence on water
- Need for search and rescue operations
- Need to clarify section on water treatment – being treated successfully now
- Concern about language on p. 42 (VS1.8) 60 acres (near Jasper Peak) for private provision of services. Concern that this could occur anywhere in the park as long as it doesn’t exceed 60 acres. Should there be more definition of where this should occur?
- Concern about Murray Forest Road (south of 169) and the continued logging that occurs south of there. Make sure to separate logging trucks and park uses so there aren’t conflicts.
- Concern about accessibility. Where will accesses be to the lake for all? Want activities to be adaptable to people with disabilities. Need access for old and young.
- Continue to remember the water is this park’s great resource. However, send a delegation to talk with the Voyageur Park people to see what they would do differently if they had a clean slate to start again. It just has not taken off like everyone predicted when it opened.
- We have emphasized a park for the x, y, or younger generation but, remember the “baby boomers” are a big population that will use the park. They are the largest upcoming retirement group this country has ever seen and have discretionary dollars to spend and time to use the park.
- Marketing--Partner with Explore Minnesota Tourism to tell the world about our park.