



# Summary of Early Public Input Lake Vermilion State Park

## Introduction:

This questionnaire was created to provide an early public involvement in the development of the Lake Vermilion State Park master plan. The 19 questions explore the types of experiences and facilities Minnesotans would like to have at the state park. The questionnaire was available on the DNR Web site in September 2010. The questionnaire was also available to the public at the Minnesota State Fair. The questionnaire was completed by 2,964 respondents.

**NOTE: This public input tool is not a “vote” or a “scientific survey.” Responses should only be interpreted as early public input; this tool was not designed to be representative of the Minnesota population (see demographic comparisons with the Minnesota population, Q16-Q19). Master planning decisions will factor in many considerations in addition to public input and preferences.**

## Question #1: If I had to select one type of experience, I would most often look for a state park to provide (check one):

*Response Count:*  
 Answered question      2,916  
 Skipped question        48

*Discussion:*  
 Questionnaire respondents strongly favored *Quiet and solitude* as the type of experience they looked for when visiting a state park. This response is in line with previous research from existing state parks users.

This response was consistent to within several percentage points across all age groups, except the 18 & under, which favored *Energy & excitement*.

### Experience Type

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Energy & excitement	11.9%
<b>Quiet &amp; solitude</b>	<b>88.1%</b>
<i>For 18 &amp; under age group</i>	
<b>Energy &amp; excitement</b>	<b>55.3%</b>
Quiet & solitude	44.7%

**Question #2: What are the top three things you would like to see at the new Lake Vermilion State Park (List in order of importance to you):**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,797

Skipped question 167

*Discussion:*

A core set of ideas predominated across the responses, listed in order below. Many respondents also characterized the type of experience they wanted. Amongst the experiential comments, respondents most commonly used terms such as quiet, natural, wilderness, privacy, protect natural resources, undeveloped views and wildlife.

- Trails – Hiking, biking and cross-country skiing were the most widely supported trail uses. Experiential values favored narrow trails, trails along the lake or to viewpoints, trails that connected facilities, trails that took visitors to natural areas and “wilderness.” Other trail uses that were supported by fewer respondents, included snowmobiles and ATVs. Other respondents stated that they favored no motorized use within the park.
- Camping – Camping in general was strongly supported. Experiential values favored privacy and secluded sites, spacing and screening. Separating tent sites from RV sites was widely referenced. Hike-in or remote camping, boat-in camping and camper cabins were favored. Accommodating RVs split the respondents, with a majority favoring no or limited RV use, while a small number requested large sites/pull-through sites, full hookups, and dump stations.
- Bathrooms/showers – Running-water bathrooms and showers near camping areas were requested, as were facilities at trailheads and swimming areas. Year-round availability and cleanliness were often noted.
- Visitor center – To support interpretive programs, equipment rentals, a camp store, and park staff to answer questions/give information.
- Water access/boat access – Accessing the lake was identified as important by many respondents, with a variety different types of facilities from large-capacity access points to smaller walk-in sites. The divided responses on water access versus shoreline protection illustrates this as an important issue for the master plan to address. References to water access or water use also included calls for controls – boat speed limits, no-wake zones, no-motorized use in some areas.

Although not in the same number as those above, another common response was to provide enough trash cans to assure that the park and park facilities remain clean.

**Question #3: Lake Vermilion State Park overnight accommodations should include (check all that apply):**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,940  
Skipped question 24

*Discussion:*

Questionnaire respondents strongly supported providing *Drive-in, Hike-in/cart-in* and *Boat-in/canoe camping* options. *Camper cabins/yurts* were also supported by nearly two-thirds of respondents. *RV camping* and *Group camping or other lodging for larger groups* received support from less than one-half of respondents. Lodging received the least support among all options.

The support/non-support levels were fairly consistent across all age groups for all types of overnight accommodations. The 18 and under age group showed higher levels of support across all types of accommodations.

**Providing Overnight Accommodations**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Hike-in/cart-in camping	76.7%
Drive-in camping	81.4%
Boat-in/canoe camping	76.4%
RV camping	45.0%
Camper cabins/yurts	64.2%
Lodging	25.0%
Group camping or other lodging for larger groups	47.0%

**Question #4: A visitor center at Lake Vermilion State Park should include (check those desired):**

*Response Count:*

Answered question    2,833  
 Skipped question        131

*Discussion:*

Among the choices, respondents most strongly favored providing *Exhibits* and *Outfitting/equipment rentals*. *Gathering spaces*, *Gift shop*, and *Food/refreshment* were also well supported.

Younger respondents were more likely to support *Outfitting/equipment rentals* and *Food/refreshment*, while older respondents more strongly supported *Exhibits* and *Gathering spaces*.

*Meeting rooms* received the least support; however, many responses in the *Other* category referred to space for education programs and gathering that could be functionally combined with meeting space.

Frequent mentions in the *Other* category included park staff/park ranger/naturalists; bathrooms or bathrooms/showers; and maps and other information about facilities and trails. Negative reactions to providing WiFi were also common.

**Visitor Center Amenities**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Food/refreshment	53.2%
<b>Exhibits</b>	<b>77.2%</b>
Gift shop	58.3%
WiFi	39.0%
<b>Meeting rooms</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
Gathering spaces	62.8%
<b>Outfitting/equipment rentals</b>	<b>70.2%</b>

**Question #5: We are looking for some fresh, creative ideas for this new park. What is one thing you would put in this state park that none of your friends or family would think to put in the park?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question      2,056  
Skipped question        908

*Discussion:*

A wide variety of ideas were offered. Many ideas for facilities or uses that already exist in state parks were offered, such as nature programming, GPS units for rent, and hike-in campsites. Other ideas had opposing positions offered, notably: ATV trails/camping vs. non-motorized use only; more technology (WiFi, cell phones) vs. no technology or technology-free areas.

Ideas offered repeatedly include:

- More programs: astronomy, orienteering (GPS and non-GPS), nature/wildlife
- Green/sustainability – for park buildings, facilities, operations
- Zipline, ropes course, and rock climbing activities
- Playgrounds and nature-themed play areas
- Treehouses as overnight accommodations
- Fire tower/lookout tower
- Dining/full-service restaurant
- National Park-style lodge (in appearance, type of materials)
- Dogs - off-leash dog exercise area, allow dogs in cabins, pet-free campground loops
- Quiet areas – no RVs, no generators, minimal facilities
- Movie theater – for interpretive use and for entertainment (movie night for campground)
- Lake tours – guided boat tours for those without boats
- Dark skies – as a development concept and for programming (e.g., telescopes)
- Saunas – year round use, spa-type opportunities
- Year round focus – trails, shower buildings, saunas that are open to bring visitors year round

Among the responses, many stated that they did not want new ideas, rather they supported the park being developed similar to existing state parks. Some improvements, such as more spacing between campsites, were offered but respondents wanted the same type of facilities and experiences already found in state parks.

### **Question #6: What role do you think technology should have in the outdoor recreation experience at Lake Vermilion State Park**

*Response Count:*

Answered question	2,355
Skipped question	609

*Discussion:*

Technology appears to be a polarizing issue. The majority of respondents wanted to limit technology use by visitors, seeing it as counter to the goal of connecting people to the natural environment, but supported some use for park purposes (e.g., interpretive displays). Others wanted to see the park as a leader for integrating technology – WiFi, touchscreens, podcasts, cell phone coverage. Some respondents favored a middle course – using technology to reach new and younger audiences and providing some convenience (e.g., WiFi in visitor center), but do it in a way that minimized its visibility and impact on other users. “Away-from-the-park” applications (trip planning via the web, marketing) were more supported. Responses did not vary significantly between age groups.

In contrast, there is strong support for using “green” technology in the construction and operation of park facilities – solar power, water-saving applications, low-level lighting, use of sustainable materials or local materials.

### **Question #7: What do you think this state park should offer to attract young people and the “next generation” of park visitors?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question	2,219
Skipped question	745

*Discussion:*

Respondents identified a range of ideas, many of which were similar or could be grouped together. The most frequent response groups were:

- Enabling tactics – offerings that will help people, especially those unfamiliar with state parks, to experience the outdoors and try new activities, including:
  - Equipment rentals
  - “How to” programs for skills-building
  - Interpretive programs
- Adventure or challenge experiences – rock climbing, survival or wilderness skills programs, physical fitness challenges
- Technology – web cams, virtual tours, downloadable programs and guides
- Family-friendly facilities and activities – playgrounds, junior ranger programs
- Partnerships – with schools, civic groups that work with children and young adults

Many respondents did not feel that changing what state parks offers was the way to attract new users. Instead focus should be on building awareness about opportunities that already exist at state parks to get the next generation involved. This likely in part reflects the high proportion of questionnaire respondents that are current state park visitors (see Question #18).

**Question #8: Is there anything that might be included in this park that would make you less likely to visit?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,258

Skipped question 706

*Discussion:*

Several consistent themes carried through responses about what would make people less likely to visit Lake Vermilion State Park:

- Motorized use - especially ATVs, was the most identified detractor. ATVs were the single most noted detractor. Other motorized uses – OHV, motorbikes, and snowmobiles were included in many of the responses. This also extended to motorized watercraft – jets skis particularly, but also large/fast/loud boats.
- RVs - were the second-most identified. Noise, generators, lights, size of unit/size of site needed to accommodate unit were all listed as why RVs are a detractor.
- Campsite design and operation – many issues related to camping experiences were identified such as mixing RVs and tents, not enough spacing, not enough privacy, no shade or screening, too much noise, too crowded/campground too large.
- Noise – as a general detractor in a wide range of situations: from motorized use, in campgrounds, from RVs, from large crowds.
- Too commercial - too much emphasis on making revenue or selling products –either vendors or the state itself.
- Too much development – respondents preferred a more natural park experience, with less developed infrastructure, fewer buildings, smaller development footprints. This response is often related to “commercialization.”

**Question #9: I would visit Lake Vermilion State Park primarily (check all that apply):**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,822  
Skipped question 142

*Discussion:*

Respondents identified *To appreciate the natural world* and *To relax and find serenity* most often for reasons to visit Lake Vermilion State Park. *To participate in outdoor recreation activities* was also supported. Park design and development should take into account this balance of providing recreation, yet preserving quiet places to relax and appreciate the natural environment of the park.

The responses are fairly consistent across all age groups, with older respondents more strongly favoring *To appreciate the natural world* and *To relax and find serenity*, while younger respondents rated *To participate in outdoor recreation activities* higher.

**Reasons to Visit**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
<i>To appreciate the natural world</i>	88.3%
To participate in outdoor recreation activities	69.0%
<i>To relax and find serenity</i>	85.2%
To visit with family and friends	49.8%

**Question #10: What educational and interpretive programs would most entice you to visit Lake Vermilion State Park (check all that appeal to you)?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,764  
 Skipped question 200

*Discussion:*

Older respondents more strongly favored *Naturalist-led hikes and/or boat tours*.

*Programs for kids and/or teens* was supported higher among the middle age groups – those more likely to travel with children. Programs for adults was volunteered by a large number of respondents in the *Other* category.

Additional comments in the *Other* category provide several details that may be important to promoting and operating the new park. Those that utilize educational opportunities put a high value on staff-led programs. Many respondents stated they primarily choose parks to visit based on recreational opportunities or park facilities, and programming is a “bonus” activity they find out about after arriving.

**Educational and Interpretive Programs**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Naturalist-led hikes and/or boat tours	<b>57.9%</b>
Programs for kids and/or teens	39.7%
Brochures, podcasts, audio tours, and other materials for self-guided exploration	40.8%
I don't make my park choices based on educational and interpretive programs	36.9%

**Question #11: What activities or services would most entice you to visit Lake Vermilion State Park (check all that appeal to you)?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,799  
 Skipped question 165

*Discussion:*

The most strongly supported activities were *Non-motorized recreation (e.g. biking, hiking, canoeing, snowshoeing, skiing)*. These represent the core recreational activities currently provided at state parks. *Equipment rentals on site (e.g., canoes, snowshoes, tents)* was also favored, in line with the response in Q4. Where in the park and how (as a park operation, via a concessionaire or vendor) to provide equipment rental will be an important consideration during the development of the park.

*Motorized recreation (e.g., boating, touring by vehicle, snowmobiling), Full-service options, and Connections to area ATV trails* were not well supported by respondents. In the *Other* category, a large number of respondents expressed strong objection to ATVs specifically and motorized recreation in general being included in the state park.

**Recreation Activities and Services**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Outdoor skills building/how-to short courses (e.g., camping, geocaching, kayaking, ice fishing)	47.5%
<b>Equipment rentals on site (e.g., canoes, snowshoes, tents)</b>	<b>58.2%</b>
A guided, full-service option (e.g. pre-arranged meals, equipment and programs)	15.2%
Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing	50.1%
<b>Non-motorized recreation (e.g., biking, hiking, canoeing, snowshoeing, skiing)</b>	<b>79.2%</b>
<b>Motorized recreation (e.g., boating, touring by vehicle, snowmobiling)</b>	<b>31.7%</b>
<b>Connections to area ATV trails</b>	<b>20.6%</b>
I don't make my park choices based on activities/services offered	5.3%

**Question #12: How interested are you in learning about the following during your Lake Vermilion State Park experience:**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,792  
 Skipped question 172

*Discussion:*

Learning opportunities for the *Cultural history of the area* (e.g., *American Indians, mining, fur trading*) was the most strongly supported, followed by *Natural history topics* (e.g., *forest succession, birds*) and *Natural resources conservation* (e.g., *Water quality, habitat types, geology*). These are typical interpretive topics for state park conservation education programming. Linking to programming at Soudan Underground Mine State Park will be especially important.

Respondents in younger age groups more strongly favored *New outdoor skills* (e.g., *fishing, archery, cross-country skiing*) but showed much less interest in *Cultural history of the area* (e.g., *American Indians, mining, fur trading*) than the other age groups.

**Learning Opportunities**

	Questionnaire Responses		
	Very Interested	Neutral	Not Interested
Cultural history of the area (e.g., American Indians, mining, fur trading)	71.9%	22.2%	5.9%
Natural resources conservation (e.g., Water quality, habitat types, geology)	66.5%	27.7%	5.8%
Lake Stewardship (e.g., shoreland stewardship, invasive species)	53.5%	37.8%	8.7%
Natural history topics (e.g., forest succession, birds)	68.1%	26.6%	5.3%
New outdoor skills (e.g., fishing, archery, cross-country skiing)	50.1%	38.4%	11.5%

**Question #13: What kinds of activities, amenities, and/or facilities would most entice you to visit Lake Vermilion State Park in the winter? (e.g., winter recreation equipment, heated trails facilities, etc.)**

*Response Count:*

Answered question      2,193  
Skipped question        766

*Discussion:*

A large number of ideas were offered, but most clustered around a set of responses. The main clusters of responses were:

- Provide trails for cross-country ski, snowshoeing, winter hiking. Trail opportunities for snowmobiling received both support and opposition amongst respondents.
- Lots of trail miles for activities arranged in loops
- Lighted trails
- Warming huts or other warming opportunities along trails
- Heated cabins/yurts along trails – ski- or hike-in opportunities
- Heated cabins or lodging
- Visitor center/lodge with fireplace, food, gathering space, bathrooms
- Heated bathrooms with showers and sauna
- Rental equipment – skis, snowshoes, winter camping, ice fishing
- Ice fishing houses to rent – already set up on the lake
- Skills building/guided experiences – snowshoe, ski, winter camping, ice fishing

Experiential-related comments focused on relaxation, peacefulness, absence of noise, and fewer people.

**Question #14: If you would likely bring children and teens to the park, what kinds of facilities and activities would you like to see provided? (Skip to Question 15 if you would not likely bring children/teens)**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 1,075

Skipped question 1,889

*Discussion:*

Approximately one-third of respondents answered they would likely bring children or teens to the park. Suggestions for facilities and activities clustered around several areas:

Children

- Naturalist-led education programs – hands-on programs on wildlife, arts and crafts, basic skills
- Playground/free-play areas
- Hiking and biking trails
- Swimming area
- Fishing opportunities
- Kid-friendly bathrooms
- Camping opportunities

Teens

- Skills-building programs on more advanced topics
- Challenge activities – zip line, ropes course, rock climbing
- Rental equipment to try new things, part of challenge activities
- Hiking and biking trails
- Swimming area
- Places to hang out
- Programs just for teens (without parents)

Respondents for teen opportunities demonstrated a push-pull on technology. Many strongly resist the presence of technology and want the park to be a place where teens “unplug” for their experiences. Others wanted to use technology to connect teens to the outdoors (e.g., geocaching, audio tours, interactive displays).

**Question #15: Which other activities, destinations or attractions might you also explore during your trip to Lake Vermilion State Park?**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 1,650

Skipped question 1,314

*Discussion:*

Approximately two-thirds of respondents provided information on other activities, destinations, or attractions they may visit. Responses included specific references to an attraction or location and more general ideas of activities:

Most frequently mentioned destinations and attractions include (in general order):

- Soudan Underground Mine State Park
- Other state parks – Bear Head, Scenic
- BWCAW
- North American Bear Center
- International Wolf Center
- Local towns – Tower, Soudan
- Duluth/North Shore
- Fortune Bay Casino and Resort

Activities most frequently mentioned (in general order):

- Eating at local restaurants
- Gift shops/shopping in local communities
- Hiking
- Fishing
- Biking
- Canoeing/kayaking
- Boating
- Golf
- Cross-country skiing
- Local festivals

**Question #16: What is your Zip Code**

*Response Count:*

Answered question 2,674  
 Skipped question 290

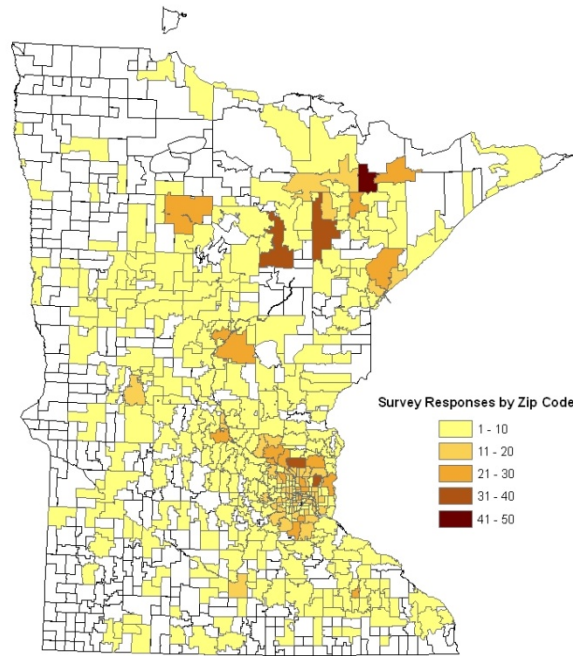
Of the 2,674 responses, 11 responses were omitted as incorrect entries.

*Discussion:*

The questionnaire responses were widely distributed from throughout Minnesota. The single highest response rate was 46 responses from the Tower zip code.

In relation to the state’s population, responses under-represent the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and over-represent outstate Minnesota, especially the northeast.

**Distribution of Questionnaire Responses**



**Question #17: How old are you?**

*Response Count:*

Answered questions 2,801  
 Skipped questions 163

*Discussion:*

Questionnaire respondents are skewed toward older age groups in comparison to the state’s population, and when compared to state park visitors. The youngest age groups – children, teens and young adults - are significantly under-represented in the questionnaire responses.

Data from the most recent state park visitor studies also show the pattern of more visitors among older Minnesotans in comparison to the state’s population, but to a lesser extent than the questionnaire respondents. (Note: Age groups for the state park visits and questionnaire are not the same.)

The small number of respondents in the two youngest age groups means caution should be used when comparing across groups.

**Age Comparisons**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>	<b>MN pop ('09)</b>
18 & under	1.7%	25.3%
19 – 25	3.2%	10.0%
26 – 40	24.5%	19.6%
41 – 65	62.3%	33.1%
Over 65	8.3%	11.9%

	<b>State Park Visitors ('07)</b>	<b>MN pop ('06)</b>
18 & under	29%	28%
19 – 34	12%	22%
35 – 44	17%	15%
45 – 64	35%	25%
Over 65	7%	12%

**Question #18: How often do you visit State Parks?**

*Response Count:*

Answered questions 2,802  
 Skipped questions 162

*Discussion:*

The questionnaire respondents are overwhelmingly current visitors to state parks – more than 83% answering *A few times per year* or *Once per month or more*. In comparison, the 2007 state park studies found that 30% of Minnesotans visit a state park in a given year.

**State Park Visitation**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
Once per month or more	23.3%
A few times a year	59.9%
Occasionally (once/year or less)	16.0%
Never	0.9%

**Question #19: When you visit Lake Vermilion State Park will you likely visit: (select one)**

*Response Count:*

Answered questions 2,797  
 Skipped questions 167

*Discussion:*

Questionnaire respondents are most likely to visit Lake Vermilion State Park *With immediate family* or *With a small group of family/friends*. These answers are in line with existing visitation patterns for state parks. The majority of park visitors are family groups.

However, for 18 & under and 19-25 age groups, *With a small group of family/friends* replaces *With immediate family* as the most common response.

The low response for *With larger group of family/friends* should not be characterized as to not support the need for group gathering spaces or group camping. “Small” was not defined, and some of these groups will likely utilize group facilities.

**Visitation Group Size**

	<b>Questionnaire Responses</b>
By yourself	3.0%
With immediate family	55.0%
With a small group of family/friends	39.4%
With a large group of family/friends	2.6%
For 18 & under age group With immediate family	39.1%
With a small group of family/friends	45.7%
For 19-25 age group With immediate family	34.1%
With a small group of family/friends	58.0%