

Sibley State Park Management Plan



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails
DRAFT – October 2012**





Sibley State Park Management Plan
State of Minnesota
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails

This management plan has been prepared as required by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 86A.09. For more information on this management plan please contact any of the following project participants from the Division of Parks and Trails.

Sibley State Park:

Jack Nelson, Park Manager
Gary Bullemer, Assistant Park Manager
Dick Clayton, Park Naturalist

800 Sibley Park Road NE
New London, MN 56273
320-354-2055

Regional Office:

Craig Mitchell, Regional Manager
Mike Salmon, Strategic Programs Manager
Molly Tranel Nelson, Regional Resource Specialist

261 Highway 15S
New Ulm, MN 56073
507-359-6000

Central Office:

Courtland Nelson, Division Director
Stan Linnell, Planning and Development Manager
Laurie Young, Planning Supervisor
Suzanne Rhees, AICP, Principal Planner
Jenny Wood, Conservation Corps of MN Planner

500 Lafayette Road,
Box 39, St. Paul, MN 55155 -5040
651-259-5600

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails would like to thank all who participated in this management plan process, especially members of the Citizen Advisory Committee (see below) and the Sibley State Park Improvement Association.

Copyright _____ 2012, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, age, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local commission, or disability. Discrimination inquiries should be sent to MN-DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4031; or the Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240. This document is available in a different format upon request of persons of all abilities.

For general information regarding DNR's programs, contact:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us>

651-296-6157 (Metro area and outside Minnesota)
1-888-MINNDNR (MN Toll Free)
TDD: 651-296-5485 (Metro Area)
TDD: 1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Paul Carlson	Superintendent, New London-Spicer School District
Julie Clark	Citizen, park user
Stewart Erickson	Izaak Walton League
Ron Erpelding	Sibley State Park Improvement Association
Mike Flanders	Business owner, park user
Trudie Guptill,	City Administrator, City of New London
Maxine Hauptli	Citizen, park user
Troy Haverly	Business owner, park user
Roger Imdieke	Business owner, park user
Buck Johnson	Citizen, park user
Sylvia Koll	Citizen, park user
Quentin Koll	Citizen, park user
Dave Lais	Sibley State Park Improvement Association, former park manager
John Lindstrom	Sibley State Park Improvement Association
Dave Pederson	Director, Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center
Forrest Peterson	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Paul Sebring	Glacial Lakes State Trail, snowmobile club
Roger Strand	Sibley State Park Improvement Association

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	TBA
Introduction	2
Park Overview	2
Sibley State Park’s Role in the State Park System.....	3
Planning Process	4
Mission and Vision Statements.....	5
Regional Analysis.....	7
Regional Population Analysis	7
Regional Recreation and Tourism Opportunities	8
Visitor Use Patterns	10
Natural Resources.....	14
Regional Landscape and Ecological Classification System	15
Climate	16
Geology and Topography.....	16
Soils	17
Presettlement Vegetation.....	18
Present-Day Vegetation	18
Hydrology	20
Groundwater and Drinking Water Supplies.....	22
Surface Water Quality.....	23
Fisheries	23
Wildlife	25
Species in Greatest Conservation Need.....	26
Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species.....	26
Natural Resources Recommendations.....	28
Cultural Resources	37
Cultural Resources Recommendations.....	40
Interpretive Services	42
Current Interpretive Services.....	42
Partnerships	44
Interpretive Services Recommendations.....	44
Recreational Use and Visitor Services.....	48
Existing Recreational Facilities	48
Recreational Use Issues	51
Recommendations for Recreational Use and Visitor Facilities.....	52
Park Operations	59
Monson Lake State Park Satellite Operation	59
Enforcement	59
Regional Office Consolidation.....	60

Staffing and Funding Levels	60
Staffing and Funding Recommendations.....	60
State Park Boundary	61
Current State Park Statutory Boundary and Adjacent Lands.....	61
Proposed Boundary Modifications	62
Park Boundary Recommendations	62
Plan Modification Process.....	65
Plan Amendment	65
Plan Revision	66
References	67

Appendices

A. Summary of Plan Recommendations.....	68
B. Summary of Public Involvement Efforts	76
C. Species of Sibley State Park	78

List of Figures

Figure 1 – 50-Mile Radius of Recreation Opportunities	12
Figure 2 – Glacial Lakes State Trail Connection	13
Figure 3 – Ecological Subsections	32
Figure 4 – 10 Foot Contours.....	33
Figure 5 – System Level Land Cover.....	34
Figure 6 – Desired Future Conditions	35
Figure 7 – Hydrology	36
Figure 8 – Historic District & Archaeological Sites	41
Figure 9 – Existing Visitor Facilities and Trails.....	57
Figure 10 – Proposed Development	58
Figure 11 – Park Boundary Adjustments.....	64

Introduction

Park Overview

Sibley State Park, over 2,500 acres in size, is one of the largest and most popular parks in west-central Minnesota, with almost 250,000 annual visits. Sibley is one of the state's oldest parks, established in 1919, but was largely developed in the 1930s by the Veterans Conservation Corps. Mount Tom, one of the highest points within a 50-mile radius, offers views of a patchwork of forest, farmland, prairie knolls, and lakes. Summer visitors enjoy swimming, boating, and fishing on Lake Andrew. A canoe route invites adventurers to explore the natural shorelines of Henschien and Swan lakes. The park offers several campgrounds, a modern group center, a primitive group camp, horseback camps, picnic area, and interpretive programs year-round.

Sibley State Park's boundary, land base and visitor facilities have changed significantly since the last management plan was completed in 1979. This new plan addresses development and preservation opportunities in the largely undisturbed western half of the park, the connection of the Glacial Lakes State Trail to the park, improvements to the beach area and its historic resources, addition of camper cabins, and potential campground expansion. Options for managing and restoring the park's oak savanna, forest and prairie ecosystems are important elements of the plan.

Resources

Sibley State Park is located within a glacially formed moraine, an area characterized by a lake-studded, rolling landscape. Glacial deposits in this region are among the deepest in the state, up to 400 feet deep in places. The region's original vegetation consisted of prairie openings within a northern hardwood forest (primarily oak to the south and west and maple-basswood to the north and east). The park lies within one of the narrowest vegetational transition zones in North America: from prairie to deciduous forest to coniferous forest.

Because of the park's hilly topography and long history as a recreational preserve, many important vegetative communities have survived there that are not found elsewhere within its ecological region.

Long before Sibley State Park was established, the Lake Andrew beachfront and present-day campground offered equally hospitable places for native people to camp during the Late Woodland period (500-1000 CE). The summit of Mount Tom, 150 feet above the level of Lake Andrew, was the site of Dakota Indian camps and councils. The park is rich in archaeological remains, although these have not been comprehensively inventoried to date.

Park History and Legislation

In the early years of the 20th century, Mount Tom was a popular picnic spot, and local landowners and tourism promoters strongly favored its designation as a park. Their strategy was to initially establish a game reserve and then campaign for park designation.¹ In 1917 the Monongalia Game Preserve was established, and a visit that year by game and fish commissioner Carlos Avery lent support for park designation. In 1919, bills were introduced calling for creation of Sibley State Park. The park was actually authorized through the 1919 appropriations bill, which included \$25,000 for purchase of so much of section 35, Colfax Township, and section 2, Lake Andrew Township, as the game and fish commissioner might deem “desirable and necessary” for park purposes. Supervision of the new park was vested in the game and fish commissioner; however, Kandiyohi County was permanently obligated for all maintenance of the park, which then comprised 356 acres, with about a mile of shoreline on Lake Andrew and a corridor connecting to Mount Tom.

The requirement for county maintenance was lifted in 1931, and small appropriations were made for the park in subsequent years. However, most park development occurred as a result of the Veterans Conservation Corps development projects between 1935 and 1938.

Park acreage did not increase significantly until 1957, when a gradual expansion began. Almost every legislative session from then until 1973 authorized additions to the park, with particularly large additions in 1969 and 1973. The 1973 bill substantially enlarged the park’s statutory boundary and brought in much of the wooded land adjacent to Middle, Norway and Games lakes. Recent legislation has focused on the Glacial Lakes State Trail and its extension to the park.

Legislative Record: [1919 c 463](#); [1931 c 292](#); [1957 c 63](#); [Ex1959 c 90 s 4 subd 2](#); [Ex1961 c 60 s 4](#); [1963 c 790 art 5 s 1 subd 1 \(15\)](#); [1965 c 810 s 9 subd 5](#); [1967 c 787 s 3 subd 18](#); [1969 c 524 s 2](#); [1969 c 879 s 1 subd 11](#); [1973 c 628 s 1](#); [1974 c 406 s 79](#); [1980 c 489 s 1 subd 10](#); [s 2](#); [2000 c 486 s 2 subd 6](#)

Sibley State Park’s Role in the State Park System

Sibley State Park is noteworthy for its diverse natural resources, which include natural communities such as oak savanna, prairie, and old growth forest, and several lakes that provide a range of aquatic habitats. The CCC/Rustic Style

¹ Information in this section is drawn from Roy Meyer, *Everyone’s Country Estate: A History of Minnesota’s State Parks*, 1991, and from legislative records.

historic district at Lake Andrew preserves the history of an important era of public works and park development.

Sibley is heavily used by people from the Willmar – New London area, but also, because of its central location, by visitors from around the state and by travelers passing through the state. Sibley’s extensive lake frontage is rare in central Minnesota, where most lakeshore is privately owned. As Roy Meyer’s history of the state park system states, “It fills a niche in the state’s park system that needs to be filled. Not so environmentally fragile as some of the parks in the southeast and the northeast, it can stand relatively heavy recreational use without serious damage, and yet it offers the visitor much that cannot be found elsewhere on public land in the west central part of the state.”²

Planning Process

The management plan is a 20-year strategic vision for the park. It guides the development of facilities and management of unit resources. *Minnesota Statutes*, Section 86A.09 requires a management plan be developed for certain units of the outdoor recreation system – including state parks and recreation areas. The DNR must prepare and approve a management plan prior to requesting money from the Minnesota State Legislature for the construction of new facilities or other development.

Management plans are developed through an open public process. Division staff and planners work with other Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff, other agencies, local government officials, local legislators, and citizens during the planning process.

A citizen advisory committee (CAC) provided input during the planning process. The CAC was made up of representatives from the local communities, the Sibley State Park Improvement Association, other park users, and interested citizens. The committee met six times during the planning process. They reviewed information, provided input on park management issues, suggested park improvements and reviewed draft recommendations for the plan.

An interdisciplinary group of technical advisors from DNR’s various divisions also contributed to and reviewed the plan.

Public Input

An initial open house was held on October 18, 2011. About 35 people attended and commented on issues that the plan update should address. Many comments focused on the desire for horse trail and campground improvements.

² Roy Meyer, - # : “ = · U o h ,
Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991.

The Sibley State Park Improvement Association also suggested a range of improvements.

An on-line survey was made available to park users during the planning process. Open house comments and survey results are summarized in Appendix [. \[ADD INFO ON SECOND OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD COMMENTS\]](#)

Mission and Vision Statements

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Mission

The DNR has a three-part mission that encompasses its interactions with the environment and the public:

The mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.

Parks and Trails Division Vision

The Division of Parks and Trails is guided by this vision: To create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to the next generation.

The DNR's Division of Parks and Trails is also guided by the fundamental principles and strategic directions established by the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*, developed to guide how Legacy Amendment funds and traditional sources of funding should be spent for parks and trails of state and regional significance. The plan identifies four strategic directions:

- Connect People and the Outdoors: better develop Minnesota's stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in parks and trails.
- Acquire Land, Create Opportunities: create new and expanded park and trail opportunities to satisfy current customers as well as to reach out to new ones.
- Take Care of What We Have: provide safe, high-quality park and trail experiences by regular re-investment in park and trail infrastructure, and natural resource management.
- Coordinate Among Partners: enhance coordination across the large and complex network of public, private, and non-profit partners that support Minnesota's parks and trails to ensure seamless, enjoyable park and trail experiences for Minnesotans.

Vision and Management Principles for Sibley State Park

Over the next 20 years, Sibley State Park will continue to serve as an outstanding unit within the Minnesota State Park System, exemplifying best practices in resource and recreation management and providing high-quality visitor experiences.

Sibley State Park will be managed to meet the needs of current and future generations, guided by the following principles:

- Manage and enhance the park's natural, cultural and scenic resources.
- Preserve, restore, manage and interpret the natural communities found in the park, including oak savanna, prairie, and old growth forest communities.
- Continue to combat invasive species, both aquatic and terrestrial, and work to heighten awareness of the various species that threaten our native communities.
- Preserve, enhance and interpret the buildings, structures and landscapes associated with the CCC/Rustic Style Historic District, the focus of the park's development in the 1930s.
- Preserve opportunities to experience quiet, solitude, open spaces and dark night skies.
- Provide a diversity of sustainable trail opportunities, from remote walking trails to multi-use recreational trails, focusing on opportunities for shared trail use where appropriate.
- Consider priority land acquisitions and expansion of the park's statutory boundary to provide additional resource protection and recreational opportunities.
- Provide varied, unique, rewarding and diverse educational and interpretive programs to create a sense of stewardship among park visitors.
- Promote the diversity of the park's landscape, cultural resources and recreational attractions.
- Continue to promote group activities such as formal and informal group camping, family reunions, and various other forms of group gatherings.
- Increase the promotion of park activities and resources within surrounding communities. Continue to cooperate with city, county and regional agencies to link the park to other regional attractions, including county and city parks and cultural institutions, scenic byways and state/regional trails.

Regional Analysis

This section of the plan describes the socioeconomic region in which Sibley State Park is located. The region is described in terms of population and regional recreation and tourism opportunities.

Regional Population Analysis

Sibley State Park is located in northern Kandiyohi County, near the city of New London. Willmar, the county seat and largest city, is located about 18 miles south of the park. The cities of Willmar, Spicer and New London are linked by State Trunk Highway 23 and by the Glacial Lakes State Trail, which begins in Willmar.

The 2010 Census recorded a population of 42,239 for Kandiyohi County, a 2.5% increase over the 2000 population of 41,203. The population of Kandiyohi County is expected to increase steadily over the next several decades. By 2035, the population is projected to be 44,180, or an increase of 6.1% since 2005.

All of the cities near the park saw larger population increases in the 2000s than the county as a whole. New London's population grew by 17.3%, from 1,066 in 2000 to 1,251 in 2010. Spicer grew by 3.6%, from 1,126 in 2000 to 1,167 in 2010. Willmar saw an increase of 6.9%, from 18,351 in 2000 to 19,610 in 2010. The desirability of lakes-area housing likely affects population growth in all three cities, in addition to Willmar's growth as an employment center.

According to the State Demographic Center, Minnesota's population as a whole is projected to increase 18% from 2010-2035. Much of the growth is expected to occur in the suburban counties surrounding the metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul and along the major highway corridors to St. Cloud and Rochester. "Lakes regions" such as the Willmar – New London area are likely to experience growth in both vacation properties and year-round homes. The median age of the population will rise as well, with the fastest growth in the 65+ age group.³

At the same time, the ethnic and racial diversity of Minnesota's population is increasing. The state's Latino / Hispanic population increased by almost 75% during the 2000s. Kandiyohi County saw a 42% increase in the Latino population, which now comprises 11% of the county's total population. The city

³

<http://www.demography.state.mn.us/documents/MinnesotaPopulationProjections20052035.pdf>

Statewide, Minnesota's total population of racial and ethnic minorities is expected to grow by 112 percent. Comparatively, Minnesota's white population is expected to only grow by nine percent. By 2035, a quarter of all Minnesotans are projected to be nonwhite or Latino, compared to 14% in 2005.

Racial and ethnic minority populations tend to participate less in most nature-based outdoor recreation activities, including visiting state parks and trails. In 2007, only 2.8 percent of state park visitors identified themselves as non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino, while representing over 14 percent of the state's residents. The division will reach out to these groups and learn what opportunities and experiences they may be seeking, and what barriers they may face in visiting state parks and trails.

**Minnesota State
Parks and Trails:
Directions for the
Future, 2011**

of Willmar's population is particularly diverse, with about 21% Latino and with a growing Somali population.

Regional Recreation and Tourism Opportunities

There are a variety of recreational opportunities available in the areas surrounding Sibley State Park.

State Parks, Recreation Areas and Waysides

There are five state parks, one state recreation area and one state wayside located within 50 miles of Sibley State Park. These units include Lake Carlos State Park, Glacial Lakes State Park, Monson Lake State Park, Lac qui Parle State Park, Upper Sioux Agency State Park, Joseph R. Brown State Wayside and Greenleaf Lake State Recreation Area. Recreation opportunities available in one or more of these units include hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, wildlife watching, interpretive programs and water access.

Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA)

SNAs offer wildlife watching and nature viewing opportunities. There are 13 SNAs within 50 miles of Sibley State Park including St. Wendel Tamarack Bog, Avon Hills Forest, Partch Woods, Bruce Hitman Heron Rookery, Cold Spring Heron Colony, Roscoe Prairie, Clear Lake, Blue Devil Valley, Gneiss Outcrops, Swede's Forest, Quarry Park, Sedan Brook Prairie and Langhei Prairie.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)

There are nearly 250 WMAs within 50 miles of Sibley State Park. These units offer hunting opportunities as well as nature viewing and wildlife watching opportunities.

State Trails

Portions of three state trails are within 50 miles of Sibley State Park, including the Glacial Lakes State Trail, Luce Line State Trail and the Central Lakes State Trail. These trails are available for hiking, biking, in-line skating, horseback riding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing along various trail segments.

The **Glacial Lakes State Trail** is located on a former Burlington Northern Railroad grade. It currently extends from Willmar to Paynesville in Stearns County, a distance of 27 miles. The segment from Willmar to New London has 10 miles of parallel, grass treadway for horseback riding, while the New London to the Kandiyohi/Stearns County line segment has grass shoulders to accommodate this activity. The five mile segment extending to Paynesville was recently paved.

There is an on-road connection from the trail in New London to Sibley State Park via three miles of paved shoulder along County Road 148. An off-road paved

trail connection is in the planning and land acquisition stage; it will generally parallel County Highway 40 and State Trunk Highway 71 (see Figure 2).

Nature Preserves

The Nature Conservancy manages several preserves within a short distance of Sibley State Park. Moe Woods Preserve, Leif Mountain Preserve, and Ordway Prairie are all located northwest of the park on the same glacial moraine topography that characterizes the park, and contain both grasslands and woodlands in a mosaic representation of millions of acres in the Midwest.

County and Local Parks

There are six parks in Kandiyohi County, of which five offer camping. Park #7 is located on Games Lake on County Highway 5 near the western boundary of Sibley State Park. The park offers 56 campsites, picnicking, fishing, boating access and rental, and a swimming beach with a lifeguard. The nearby cities of New London, Spicer and Willmar all have park systems.

Scenic Byways

The **Glacial Ridge Trail Scenic Byway** is a largely circular route that extends for 245 miles from Alexandria to Willmar, mainly on county and township roads. Because there is not a single Point A to Point B route, travelers can enjoy many different segments along the way. There are many points of interest along the Glacial Ridge Trail, including historic sites, natural scenery, and four state parks, including Sibley State Park. Near the park, the scenic byway includes sections of County Roads 2, 5, 8, 40, and 121, and Minnesota Trunk Highway 9.

Canoeing and Boating

There are many lakes, rivers and streams near Sibley State Park, with over 300 water access sites within 50 miles. Portions of eight different State Water Trails (designated routes for boating, canoeing, and kayaking) are located within 50 miles of the park. These water trails include the Chippewa River, Minnesota River, Long Prairie River, Mississippi River, Pomme de Terre River, Sauk River, North Fork Crow River and South Fork Crow River. Portions of the North Fork Crow, Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers are also designated as scenic or recreational under Minnesota's Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

Other Day Use Activities

Several other recreational and educational opportunities are available near Sibley State Park.

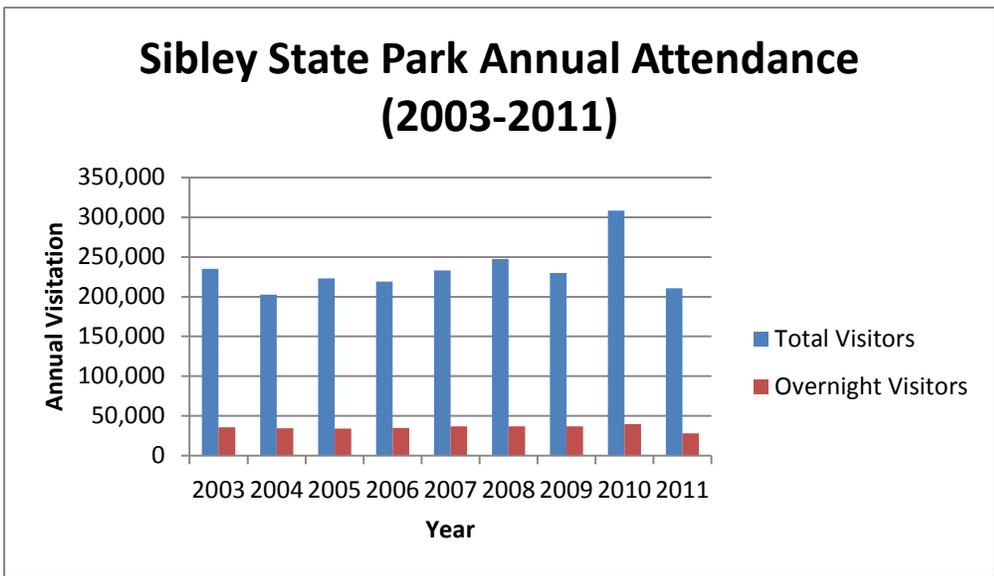
- Monongalia Historical Society and Museum - Located in New London, the museum houses historic artifacts including a linotype newspaper, handmade wooden tools, and a wicker undertakers basket. The genealogical

library contains the oldest records in the county, dating back to 1859. The 1869 Sakariason Cabin, a pioneer homestead, is open for viewing.

- Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center – Located near Spicer about seven miles south of Sibley State Park, Prairie Woods is a nonprofit environmental learning center that provides a variety of educational programs, public events and outdoor experiences to people of all ages in Kandiyohi County and throughout Southwestern and West Central Minnesota. The mission of Prairie Woods states: “We will promote an individual and shared commitment to the responsible use, management, and preservation of our natural resources.” Prairie Woods encompasses 500 acres and includes nearly seven miles of hiking and cross-country ski trails, an education building with 5 classrooms, a trailhead, and a 30-foot indoor climbing wall. The Gary Westby Observatory building sits atop Prairie Woods’ highest hill. Also onsite are a Native American History Village and the Gary Westby Educational Shooting Sports Range.

Visitor Use Patterns

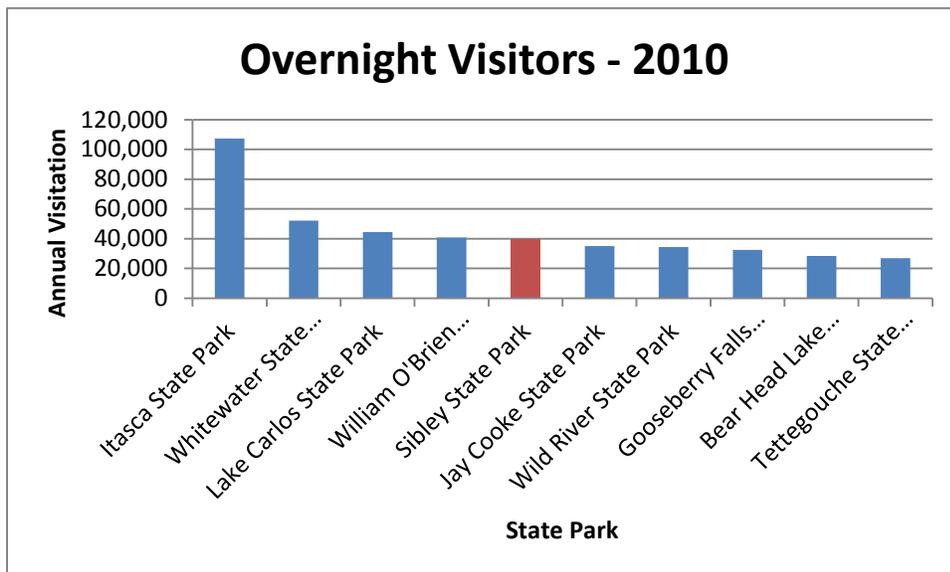
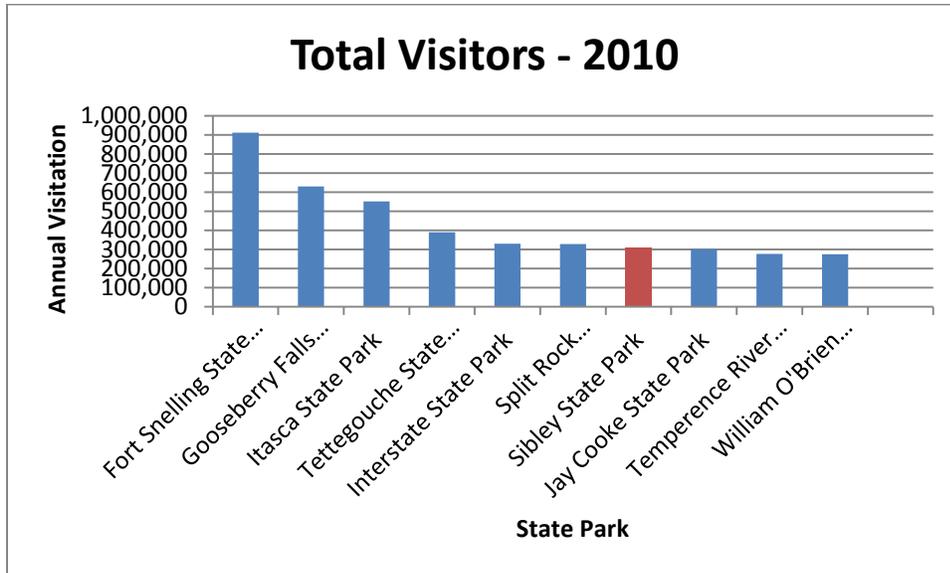
During the last nine years (2003-2011), annual attendance has varied from 200,000 to over 300,000. The number of annual overnight visits has remained relatively constant, varying from just about 28,000 to nearly 40,000. Average annual visitation over the nine year period is 234,382 while the average number of overnight visits is 35,238.



Sibley State Park has been among the top twelve most visited parks in the state park system and has ranked in the top ten for overnight visits each year since 2003. Visitor numbers have increased over the past several years, with a significant increase in 2010. In that year, Sibley was the seventh most visited

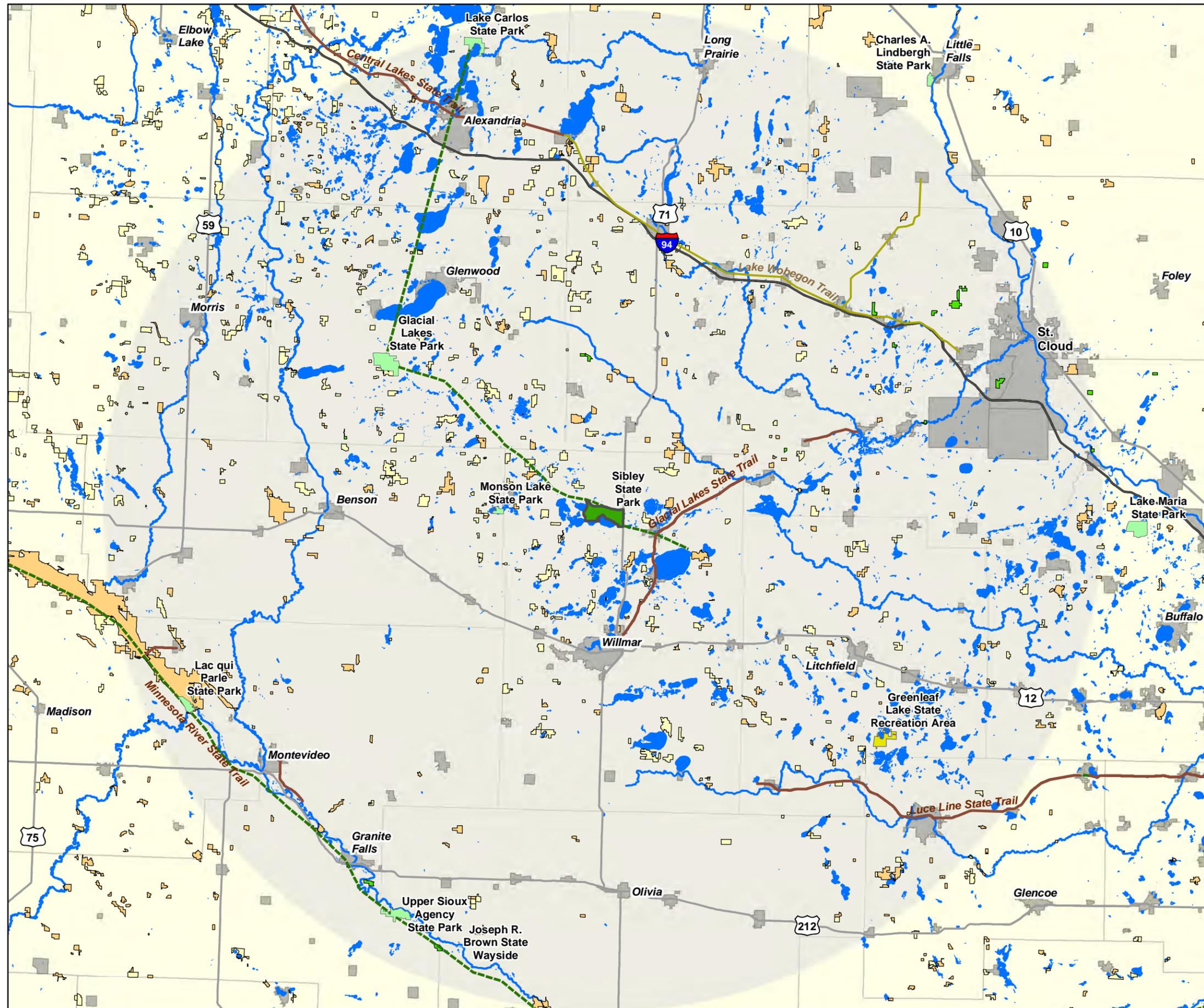
park and had the sixth largest number of overnight visits. Comparative visitor numbers for 2011 were not used because of the state government shutdown, which caused the park to be closed for 3 weeks in July. In 2012, Sibley State Park had over 42,000 visitors through May, making it the third most visited park in Minnesota during that time period.

Sibley State Park experiences a high rate of repeat visitors, especially at campgrounds. The Group Center, which accommodates up to 128 people, is frequently booked by the same groups each year.



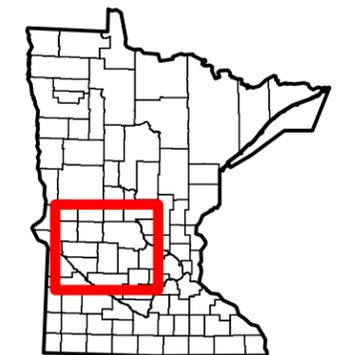
Sibley State Park

Figure 1:
50 Mile Radius of
Recreation Opportunities



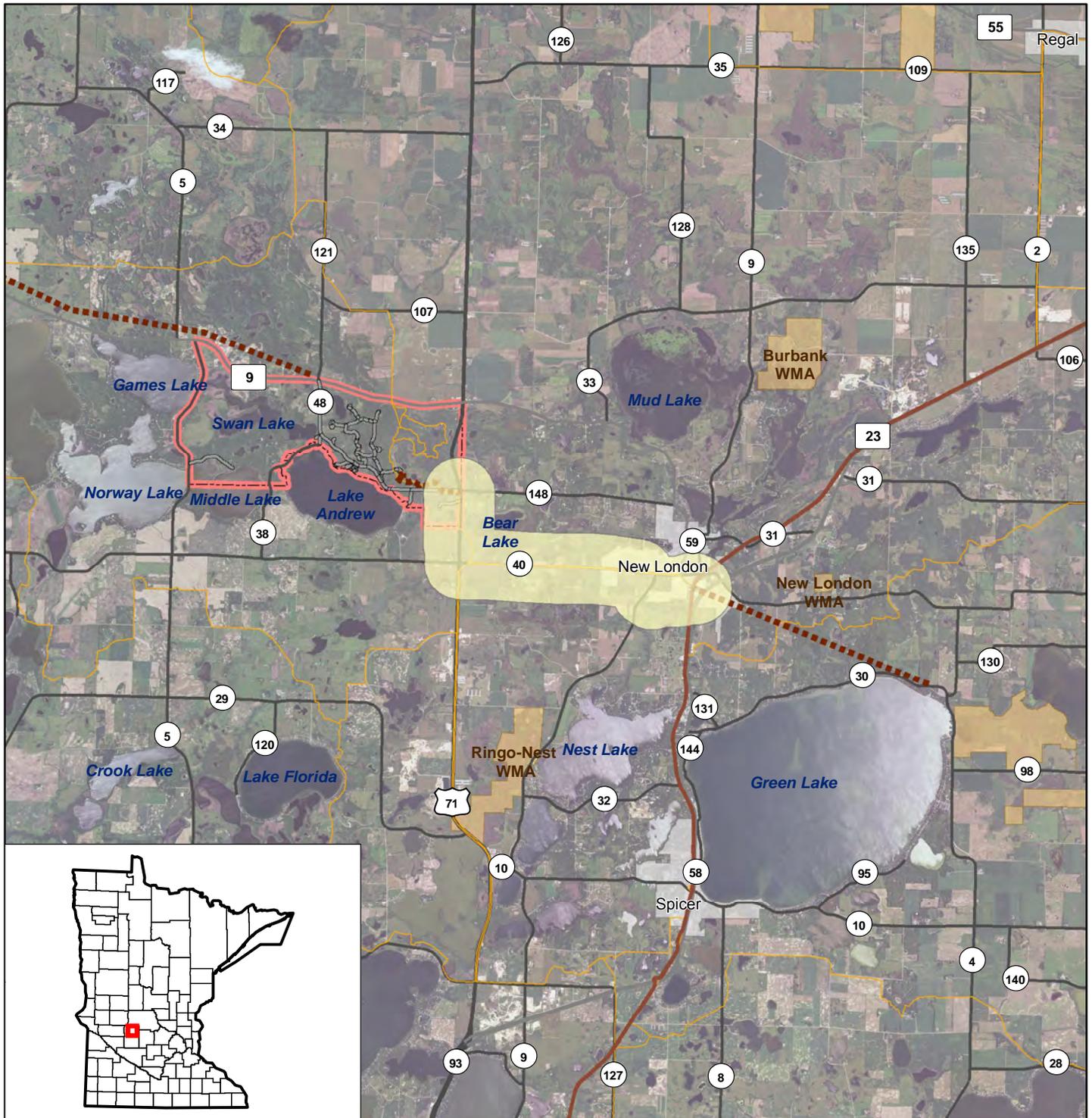
Legend

-  Regional Trails
-  Minnesota State Trails
-  Legislatively Authorized State Trails
-  Sibley State Park
-  State Park
-  State Recreation Area
-  State Wayside
-  State Wildlife Management Areas
-  Scientific and Natural Areas
-  USFWS Waterfowl Production Areas
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  City Boundaries
-  County Boundaries



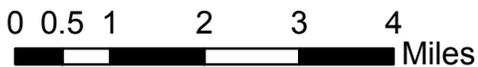
MN Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails

August 2012



Sibley State Park

Figure 2:
Glacial Lakes State Trail Connection



MN Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails

August 2012

Legend

- Glacial Lakes State Trail Search Corridor
- Planned Glacial Lakes State Trail
- Glacial Lakes State Trail
- Snowmobile Trails
- State Park Statutory Boundary
- State Wildlife Management Area
- City Boundaries