

# Cultural Resources

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Sibley State Park contains significant concentrations of archaeological and historical resources. The confluence of prairie, oak savanna, and protected hardwood forest around the park made it a favorable location for use by native peoples for centuries before Euro-American settlement.

There is evidence that humans inhabited this area as much as 6,000 years ago, leaving burial mounds with pottery fragments and implements. Unfortunately, most of these mounds have been disturbed, and few are well preserved. Later, the region provided important hunting and fishing grounds for the Dakota people who succeeded the mound builders. The name “Kandiyohi” comes from the Dakota phrase for “abundance of buffalo fish.”

Prior to Euro-American settlement, the Dakota (Sioux) Nation covered a broad expanse in modern-day central, western, and southern Minnesota. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, westward-moving settlers and the U.S. government took possession of Dakota lands through a series of treaties, the most important of which were signed in 1851 at Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. Soon, immigrants hoping to homestead farms were flooding in and land speculators were laying out towns along proposed railroad lines. Conflict between the Dakota and encroaching settlers flared up in the U.S.—Dakota War of 1862. While the main conflict was concentrated further south along the Minnesota River Valley, clashes occurred at what is now Monson Lake State Park, in nearby Swift County, and near present-day Hawick.

Ten archaeological sites have been identified within the park, mainly discovered during assessment of park development projects or highway construction projects. In some cases informant reports help locate the sites. All of these sites are places where American Indian stone artifacts or pottery was found. Three of the sites are assignable to the Woodland period, 3,000 to 350 years ago.

Sibley State Park was established in 1919 after a game reserve had been established on the site in 1917 (see discussion in Chapter 1 under “Park History and Legislation”). The park and was named after Minnesota’s first governor, Henry Hastings Sibley, who had enjoyed hunting in this part of west-central Minnesota. Improvements to the park, however, were slow and sporadic until the 1930s. In that decade, the New Deal work-relief programs launched by the federal government brought major investments in the infrastructure of state and national parks across the nation. Buildings, structures, roads and trails were designed by National Park Service architects and engineers in what came to be known as the NPS Rustic Style, using local wood and stone

In 1935, Veteran Conservation Corps Camp SP-7, known as the “Three Bear Camp,” was established at Sibley to house a 200-man contingent of World War I veterans. According to Meyer’s history, the group arrived on May 3, in the midst of a spring snowstorm.

“By July 10 the veterans had cleared 1,200 feet of beach (Lake Andrew had receded during the drought years, leaving a fringe of debris), planted 5,000 trees, and constructed ten permanent buildings, latrines (“not cheap outhouse style,” boasted the *Willmar Daily Tribune*, but real flush toilets), and a water system. Underway or planned were five miles of foot trails, a tourist camp building, a floating dock in the lake, completion of the picnic grounds, and planting of another 5,000 trees. New roads were also being built – straight rather than winding, in line with the preference of the era.<sup>6</sup>”



[View of the VCC camp during the 1933-38 period. Minnesota Historical Society](#)

The VCC activities stimulated public interest in the park, and in October of 1935 the Sibley State Park Improvement Association was formed. By 1938, VCC development projects were complete and the camp transferred to Itasca State Park, where they completed such notable stone buildings as the Forest Inn.

The CCC/Rustic Style Historic Resources district at Sibley State Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988. It includes the entire Lake Andrew beachfront, Lakeview Campground, Cedar Hill Picnic Area, and service yard, as shown in Figure 7. Individual resources in the district include not only the shelter pavilion, bath house (now store) and restroom buildings but drinking fountains, stone steps, and the garage and office buildings in the service area.

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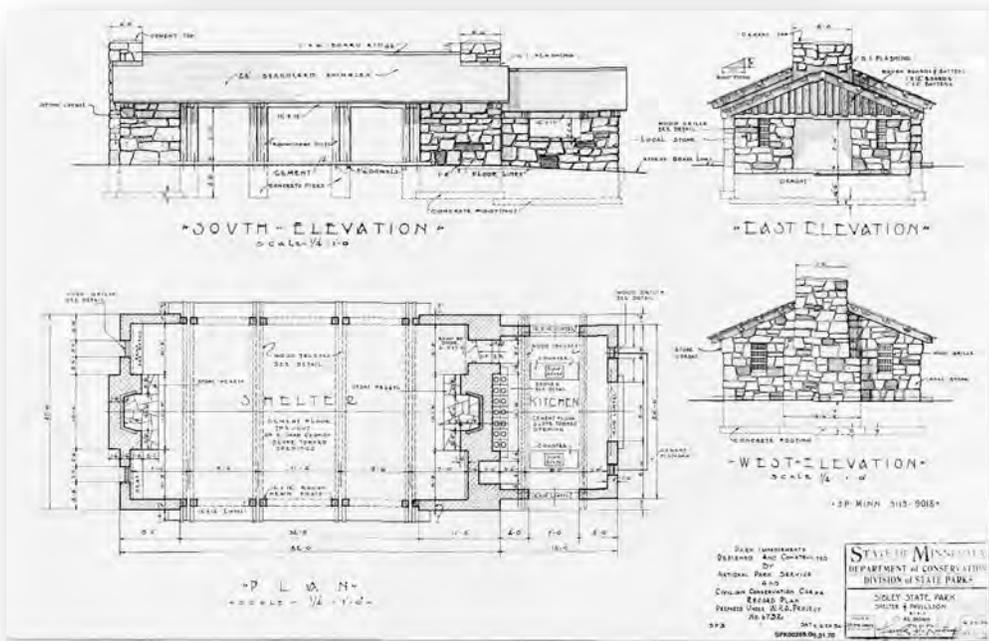
<sup>6</sup> Roy Meyer, *Everyone’s Country Estate: A History of Minnesota’s State Parks*, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991.

As described in the National Register nomination:

“The labor-intensive process characteristic of Rustic Style construction was clearly apparent at Sibley State Park. State park records indicate that 75 percent of the masonry was unusable because the exceptional hardness of the local stone [granite from nearby Cold Spring and Rockville quarries] made splitting very difficult. The Rustic Style stone buildings in the public use area of the park are significant because they have remained remarkably unchanged since construction. Sibley State Park also provides a superlative example of master planning, as the clearly defined circulation patterns and functional areas along the shoreline of Lake Andrew help reduce congestion and overcrowding among picnickers, bathers and campers.”<sup>7</sup>



The bathhouse shortly after construction, 1938. Minnesota Historical Society



Detail of picnic shelter design, 1938. DNR archives

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota Historical Society: <http://www.mnhs.org/places/nationalregister/stateparks/Sibley.html> Source: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1988.

One additional historic resource, the stone shelter on the summit of Mt. Tom, was later removed from the district when its height was increased in 1992, in an effort to recapture the views from the summit that had been lost to tree growth.

Today the historic district's resources are significant not only as buildings and structures but as a designed landscape – one that was designed for the park users of the 1930s, an era when picnicking was hugely popular and camping vehicles were small in size. Changes have been made over time to the Lakeview Campground (infrastructure, density, circulation patterns), the beachfront (retaining wall and erosion prevention) and the picnic area (fencing). Future changes must be evaluated carefully in order to ensure that the character of the landscape and the integrity of the resources are preserved.

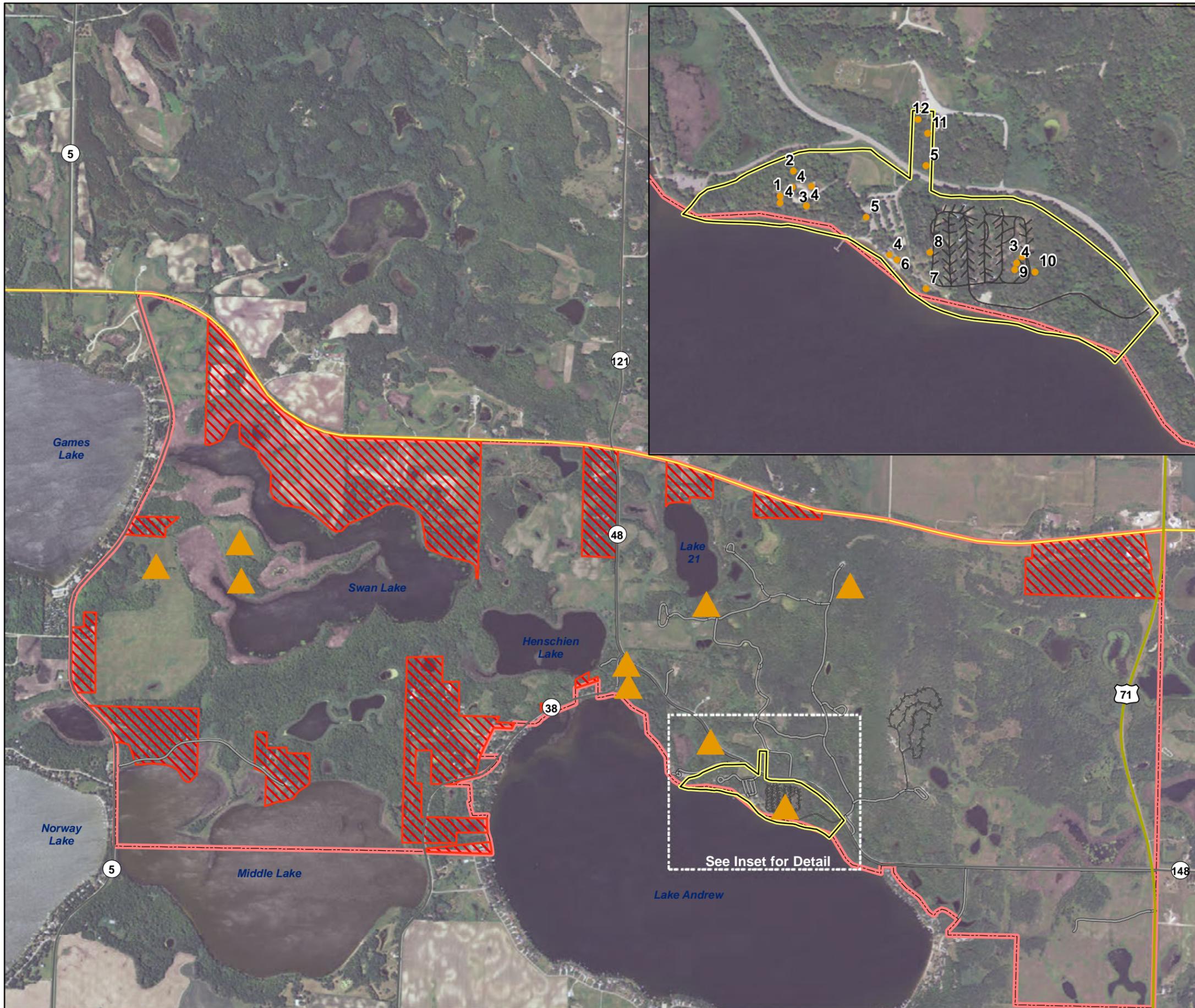
## **Cultural Resource Recommendations**

***Overall Cultural Resources Goal: Preserve, restore and interpret Sibley State Park's historic structures, historic district and archaeological resources.***

- Protect all known cultural resources within the VCC Historic District, including landscape resources. Seek context-sensitive solutions to shoreline erosion, beach recession and campground overcrowding within the historic district. Manage vegetation in the Cedar Hill picnic area to open up historic views of Lake Andrew.
- Manage historic scenic vistas elsewhere in the park, such as Mount Tom, through targeted vegetation management (see discussion of prairie and oak savanna restoration under Natural Resource Recommendations).
- The stone shelter on the summit of Mount Tom was an important element of the historic district and of the park's cultural landscape. If the Mount Tom lookout tower should require extensive repairs in the future, consideration should be given to returning the structure to its original form. If the surrounding viewshed is restored or improved as planned, consideration should also be given to restoring the structure.
- Conduct resource assessments during the planning stages of any development projects, ideally before exact locations have been identified, so that potential for resource impacts can be identified and avoided or mitigated.

# Sibley State Park

Figure 8:  
Historic District and  
Archaeological Sites



## Legend

-  Archaeological Sites
-  CCC/Rustic Style Historic District
-  Private Property within State Park Boundary
-  State Park Statutory Boundary

## Features in Historic District:

1. Shelter Pavilion
2. Pump House
3. Latrine
4. Drinking Fountains
5. Stone Steps
6. Bath House
7. Fish House
8. Ice & Wood House
9. Campground Shelter
10. Water Tower
11. Custodian's Cabin
12. Garage & Office



MN Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Trails

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# Interpretive Services

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The mission of the DNR Division of Parks and Trails interpretive program is:

*To provide accessible interpretive services which create a sense of stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage by illuminating the changing relationships between people and landscapes over time.*

The Division of Parks and Trails' interpretive services program focuses its efforts on providing first-hand, resource-based accessible programs and activities that create a sense of connection with and stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage. Telling the park's unique stories and illuminating the changing relationship between people and landscapes over time may accomplish this.

Division of Parks and Trails interpretive staff work in collaboration with other DNR divisions, agencies, educational institutions, local communities and citizens to develop programs and activities that will enhance the visitor's experience by increasing their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources. Interpretive opportunities are presented in a variety of ways: guided experiences such as naturalist-led talks, special events, and outdoor skills building programs; and self-guided experiences such as interpretive trail kiosks, exhibits, brochures, and electronic media

## Current Interpretive Services

According to the 1995 *Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan*, Sibley State Park is a Group 4 park, meaning that it has high resources significance and visitor use that is high throughout the year with high seasonal peaks. ("Group 5" is the highest of these categories in terms of use and significance.) This merits programming four to seven days a week during heavy use periods throughout the year with a full service interpretive center, usually open year round; audio-visual programming; indoor displays and exhibits; supporting interpretive facilities such as information stations, self-guided trails, wayside exhibits, and multi-developed interpretive locations.

Currently, Sibley State Park has one full-time Interpretive Naturalist, a Seasonal Interpretive Naturalist, and two Naturalist Corps Aides assigned to provide naturalist-led programs and activities. Guest speakers provide additional educational programs and activities that may be outside the expertise of the interpretive staff at the park. Subjects covered by guest speakers have included wood carving, flint knapping, birds of prey, photography, music, cross-country ski lessons, summer and winter fishing, among others.

Interpretive services highlights at Sibley State Park currently include:

*DRAFT - October 2012*



- Modern Interpretive Center

The interpretive center contains three exhibit rooms, including a wetlands room, a glacial geology and park orientation room and an oak savanna exhibit room, installed in 2011, with 12 separate panels, interpretive signs and other objects explaining the oak savanna ecosystem. The glacial geology room contains a large, three-dimensional colored topographic map of Sibley State Park. A new touch screen kiosk that helps park visitors identify birds, wildflowers, amphibians and the Park's Veterans Conservation Corps history is located in the interpretive center. In front of the building is a native prairie garden with wildflower identification signs. The center includes an indoor auditorium with seating for 120 people, a big screen television and a large rear screen for videos, DVDs and computer presentations. An outdoor amphitheatre and stage area adjacent to the building has seating for over 200 people.



- Self-Guided Trails

Two self-guided trails begin near the Interpretive Center. One trail focuses on Wetlands and the other on "Trees and Shrubs that Benefit Wildlife." These trails offer park visitors the opportunity to learn more about the trails' native surroundings.

- Lakeshore Area  
A lakescaping demonstration area with interpretation is located at the Lake Andrew boat landing. An interpretive kiosk about the history of the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) is located near the Lakeview Campground.
- Mt. Tom Area  
Interpretive panels displaying information on Minnesota Biomes and Sibley State Park Windows to Minnesota are located near the Mt. Tom parking lot. Six vista identification signs help park visitors understand what distant features, including lakes and towns, they are seeing from the Mt. Tom observation deck. These signs also provide the direction and distance of each point from Mt. Tom. Six signs that interpret the subjects of common birds, trees and shrubs, glacial geology, plan succession and history are also located near Mt. Tom.

## **Partnerships**

Partnership can enhance interpretive services in several ways, from assisting with the design or supporting programs directly to providing avenues for reaching specific audiences such as youth. The core partners for interpretive services at Sibley State Park will be the other divisions within the DNR, which continue to integrate their interpretive and educational efforts into the programs at the Park.

Park staff already work with other partners in the area, including the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, local school districts, and service organizations. Other potential partners have been identified during the planning process, including community groups that serve youth and minority populations. The DNR will actively seek partnerships to expand the potential topics and reach of the interpretive services programs at Sibley State Park.

## **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

### **Overall Interpretive Services Goal:**

Visitors to Sibley State Park will be made aware of, come to appreciate and understand the scenic landscapes, the human impact on the surrounding landscape, seasonal recreational possibilities and wildlife viewing opportunities found in the park. Through this process, they will take ownership in the Park and work to protect, preserve and enhance the Park's resources.

### **Interpretive themes**

Sibley State Park provides opportunities to learn about quality natural and cultural resources and actively recreate in them. Interpretive themes for Sibley

State Park can be organized in three main groups, listed below with examples of the many potential sub-themes.

### ***Glacial Processes, Plant Communities and Wildlife***

Natural forces have shaped this landscape and its plants and animals and continue to shape them today.

- Geological themes
  - Advancing and retreating glaciers formed the landscape we see today.
  - Glaciers form lakes in Sibley by two processes.
  - Glacial till deposits can identify the movements of glaciers.
  - Glaciers provide benefits for us today.
- Botanical themes
  - Fire helps maintain healthy environments.
  - Lack of fire causes a decline of biodiversity.
  - Resource management activities improve Sibley's natural resources.
  - Prairie seed collection and planting helps improve prairie biodiversity.
  - Wildlife diversity can improve plant diversity.
  - Wetlands benefit people and wildlife.
  - Human activity causes wetland loss
  - How and why does Sibley's park management restore oak savanna?
- Zoological themes
  - Why and how do we manage Sibley's deer herd?
  - How do Sibley's water resources affect wildlife and fisheries?
  - Water quality and effects on fisheries
  - Sibley has 11 of the 29 reptile species found in Minnesota.
  - Sibley has 11 of the 19 amphibian species found in Minnesota.
  - Dragonflies are common because of Sibley's many wetlands.
  - Over fifty species of butterflies inhabit Sibley State Park.
  - Lake Andrew is part of the Shakopee Creek Watershed. What is a watershed?
  - What function do plants play in lakes?
  - What is a depression lake?
  - What are invasive species and how can they harm a lake?

### ***Human Presence and Impact on the Sibley State Park Area***

People have had an important impact on the development of Sibley State Park.

- Evidence of early people who lived and hunted in the area since the last ice age is abundant.

- In the 1800's the Sibley area was the boundary between the Dakota and Ojibwe.
- Did an ox cart trail run through Sibley in the 1800's?
- How and why did Sibley become a state park?
- Why is Henry Hastings Sibley the namesake of Sibley State Park?
- Henry Hastings Sibley is one of Minnesota's most important historical citizens. What were his main accomplishments?
- The Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) built today's modern state park.
- Many of Sibley's oldest buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.
- How do we manage and protect the park's archaeological and historic resources?

### ***Outdoor Recreation and Nature Skills***

Quality natural resources provide great opportunities for visitors to learn about and actively experience Sibley State Park.

- Sibley offers a blend of recreational opportunities ideal for winter and summer activities, for water- and land-based recreation, and for both active and observational activities
  - Sibley offers many excellent winter recreational activities including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, winter camping, sledding and snowmobiling.
  - Lakes provide many opportunities for summer water-based recreation including fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and sailing.
  - With over 200 species of birds, Sibley is a premier bird watching area.
  - Land-based recreation such as biking, hiking, running, horseback riding, rollerblading, camping, geocaching, digital photography, archery and outdoor cooking are popular warm season activities.
  - Beautiful and diverse natural resources provide opportunities for nature observations, photography, nature and song writing, painting, drawing, woodcarving, etc.

### **Program Recommendations**

- Integrate existing division programming, such as the "I Can" outdoor skills program series, into the outdoor education efforts at Sibley State Park.
- Organize an outdoor academy that will offer value added (fee-based) beginning and advanced training in recreational skills (camping, outdoor cooking, fishing, trapping, hunting, canoeing, etc.) and nature skills (photography, native plant gardening, plant identification, etc.)

- Pursue acquisition of a pontoon, motor, trailer and dock for fishing, aquatic education and value added tours on Lake Andrew.
- Develop a demonstration area, activities and programs on solar and renewable energy and energy conservation initiatives.
- Integrate new resource information into interpretive programs and materials.
- Investigate partnerships for creating and providing interpretive programs.
- Promote the direct linkage between the park and the Glacial Lakes State Trail, both as an interim bike route and as a future off-road trail connection.
- Provide programs and facilities that meet the emerging needs of younger generations of park visitors.
- Explore and implement outreach activities and programs that specifically target underserved populations, including youth, young families, low-income people, and specifically Latino and Somali communities in the Willmar area.
- Provide programs and facilities that meet the outdoor recreation needs of an aging population, with relevant programming and volunteer opportunities.