

Recreational Use and Visitor Services

The Division of Parks and Trails strives to create memorable recreational experiences and to inspire users to pass along a love for the outdoors. The park planning process provides an opportunity to determine what types of recreation park users are interested in and balance those desires with the park's resource base and complement what recreational opportunities are available within the surrounding region.

Existing Recreational Facilities

Existing trails and park facilities are shown on Figure 8.

Camping

Sibley State Park offers many opportunities for camping. The Lakeview Campground has 74 campsites, of those, 53 are electric sites that can accommodate RVs up to 70 feet in length. Four sites are accessible and one of the accessible sites is electric. There is an accessible shower building with flush toilets and a trailer sanitation station that operates from mid-May through mid-October.

The Oak Ridge Campground has 58 campsites, four of which are accessible. No campsites offer electrical service. There is a shower building with flush toilets. Four camper cabins are available for year-round use.

The horse campground has nine campsites. No sites are electric. Water, tie lines, and vault toilets are available.

The primitive group camp located near Lake 21 has three sites that can accommodate up to 30, 50 and 20 people respectively. These sites are all tent only sites that include fire rings, picnic tables, running water and vault toilets.

The group center can accommodate up to 128 people. The center includes staff quarters, seven bunk houses, a dining hall, a modern sanitation building, a craft hall and an outdoor amphitheater.

Trails

Summer Trails

- Eighteen miles of hiking trails
- Seven miles of horseback riding trails
- Nearly two miles of biking trails connect the Lakeview Campground and the Interpretive Center



Primitive group camp



Horse camp

A canoe route connects Middle Lake, Lake Andrew, Henschien, Swan, and Games lakes. Short portages are necessary between Middle Lake and Lake Andrew (1,850 feet), Lake Andrew and Henschien Lake (850 feet), Henschien and Swan Lakes (600 feet), and Swan and Games Lakes.



Sibley's lakes are ideal for canoeing and kayaking

Winter Trails

- Eight miles of classic ski trails
- Two and a half miles of skate ski trails
- Six miles of snowmobile trails within the park that connect to an extensive county trail system
- A two and a quarter mile snowshoe trail. Snowshoeing is also allowed anywhere in the park except on groomed trails

Picnic Areas

Picnic areas are located at Cedar Hill, the Lake Andrew Beach area and the boat access area. The Cedar Hill picnic area features an open stone shelter with electricity, two fireplaces, picnic tables, fire rings and flush toilets overlooking Lake Andrew. This picnic area is reservable up to one year in advance.

The picnic area near the beach area features numerous picnic tables and fire rings. A volleyball court and the swimming beach are nearby. The picnic area at the boat access also has picnic tables and fire rings, drinking water and vault toilets.

Lake Access

A popular boat ramp is available within the park. Canoes and kayaks are available for rent at the beach store. A public water access is also located near the western edge of the park on Games Lake. Parking is located near all of these locations.

Historic District

Numerous buildings and roads in the park were built by the Veterans Conservation Corps in the 1930s. These buildings are concentrated along the shoreline of Lake Andrew within the CCC/Rustic Style Historic District (see discussion under Cultural Resources). Some of the features in the historic district include the picnic shelter pavilion, the bath house, fish house, campground shelter and stone steps leading to the Cedar Hill picnic area.

Interpretive Center

A modern interpretive center has three exhibit rooms, a wetlands room, an oak savanna room, and a glacial geology and park orientation room. It also has an indoor auditorium with seating for 120 people, a big screen television and a large rear screen for videos, DVDs and computer presentations. Outside the interpretive center is an outdoor amphitheatre and stage area with seating for over 200 people and a native prairie garden with wildflower identification signs.

Other Day Use Facilities

- Fishing pier at the Inlet area (the inlet of the Henschien Lake channel)
- Swimming beach at Lake Andrew
- Mt. Tom overlook

Other Winter Facilities

- Sledding hill near interpretive center
- Warming house inside interpretive center

Access

State and local governments may not discriminate on the basis of disability (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 | 28 CFR Part 36). Access must be provided to services, programs, and activities. All services, when viewed in their entirety, must be useable by individuals with disabilities. This includes facilities such as parking, pedestrian access routes, restrooms, drinking water and recreation facilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidance for accommodating the natural environment's variable character when providing accessibility. ADA delineates modifications and exceptions that can be applied when necessary to maintain the integrity of an outdoor recreation setting, accommodating such elements as hydrology, terrain, surface characteristics and vegetation.

Information regarding accessibility will be available in brochures and on the DNR website to guide visitor expectations.⁸

Facilities in Sibley State Park have been developed consistent with the accessibility standards that were in place at the time of development, and may not meet all of today's standards. Future development will continue to comply with the most current ADA standards.

Recreational Use Issues

Trail Issues

The density of trails in the eastern half of the park is very high, and some of these trails are only used seasonally. Additionally, trail erosion has been a problem on the steep hiking trails. During the spring, summer and fall, some of the trails are shared between hikers and horseback riders. Conflict between trail users on shared trails has not been a concern for park visitors to date.

One way to improve trail maintenance would be to use some of the existing winter trails for summer hiking and to eliminate the poorly designed segments of the summer hiking trails. This plan (Figure 10) shows several options for these trail realignments.)

Many participants in the planning process have expressed the desire for additional miles of horseback riding trails. This plan recommends opening several miles of snowmobile trail to horse use, as well as connecting the park's trails to the Glacial Lakes State Trail, providing additional mileage for horseback riders.

Other park users have expressed strong interest in creating options for off-road biking opportunities on natural-surface trails that would give cyclists an alternative to the park roads and the relatively short paved bike trail. This plan recommends exploring options for shared use of certain hiking trails, ski and snowmobile trails by hikers and cyclists.

Campground Issues

The Lakeview Campground is very popular and is often filled during the summer months. The campground was redesigned in the 1990s to accommodate larger recreational vehicles. Because it is so heavily used, there are some issues regarding soil compaction and tree canopy cover. Many of the trees in the campground are dying, leaving hazardous branches and a lack of shade. Electric and water services are also nearing the end of their useful lives and will likely need to be replaced in the near future. One way to reduce the pressure on the Lakeview Campground would be to make improvements to the Oak Ridge

⁸ See http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/accessible_outdoors/index.html

Campground by adding additional sites and bringing electrical service to most sites. (Electrification of campsites would also likely result in an increase in revenues from camping reservations.)

Park users have also expressed the desire to improve the horse campground by adding electricity and water. These improvements will be evaluated in the context of potentially expanding horse trails within the park.

Lake Andrew Shoreline Issues

The popular beach area is in need of redesign and shoreline stabilization. The retaining wall near the beach store building is deteriorating and is threatened by ice damage and erosion. Because of Lake Andrew's predominantly sand substrate in the near-shore areas, the beach is also susceptible to erosion and ice ridges. Because the entire beach area is within the historic district, any improvements will need to be consistent with the character of the district. The boat access west of the beach is also highly susceptible to ice damage. The popular shore fishing area at the Lake Henschien inlet is in need of improvements to parking, pedestrian circulation and accessibility.

Recommendations for Recreational Use and Visitor Facilities

Trail improvements and alterations

- Balance protection of the relatively undisturbed native plant communities and other resources of the park's west side with low-impact visitor access. The goal is to provide a variety of park experiences, including limited access to more remote trails and sites for hiking, birding, and fishing.
- Develop a natural-surface hiking trail linking the "portage trail" with various points on Swann and Henschien lakes and connecting to the informal "County Park" trail on the park's western edge. Trail and surroundings would need to be carefully monitored to avoid spreading invasive plants or otherwise degrading resources.
- Evaluate the potential for developing (classic) ski trails on the west side, if they can be accommodated without degrading resources.
- Improve the portage trail landing sites, especially the Henschien Lake access, with a structure such as boardwalk or floating dock, to improve access for boaters.
- Reduce trail density on the east side of the park by consolidating and eliminating poorly designed segments (see Figure 10 for several options). Maximize year-round use of existing seasonal trails where

feasible (i.e. snowmobile trails and horse trails, ski trails and hiking trails).

- Expand horse trails to provide more options for riders and to increase use of the horse camp. The park's size and sensitive resources create challenges for much expansion of the horse trail network within current park boundaries. About three miles of additional horse trail are shown on Figure 10. In addition, the following options will be explored:
 - Realign and expand horse trails to the west & north of Henschein Lake if privately-owned land becomes available in the future.
 - Extend the horse trail to the southeast to connect with the Glacial Lakes State Trail extension to the park.
 - Explore options for trail easements on private properties north of Highway 9 and elsewhere around the park.
 - Explore options for horse trail expansion to the south of the current statutory boundary, in conjunction with boundary expansion.
 - Evaluate the feasibility of additional horse trail connections from the horse camp to the Oak Ridge campground, using existing ski trails.
- Explore options for shared use of certain trails by hikers and off-road cyclists. There is increasing interest in off-road biking options in the park – not technically demanding mountain bike trails but rather natural-surface trails with gentle gradients. The loop of classic ski trails that extends from the Oak Ridge Campground to the primitive group camp is one potential route. The area identified for a potential new group camp (see below) also has possibilities for trail development.
- Complete the Glacial Lakes State Trail connection to the park. Completing this link will require additional land or easement acquisition, as well as a safe crossing of MN Highway 71.
- Determine a preferred route for the Glacial Lakes State Trail through the park. The trail as currently planned would terminate at the Interpretive Center. One option might involve a separated path paralleling County Road 48 through the park to County Highway 9. (The trail alignment to the west of the park has not been determined, and future development prospects are uncertain since most of the proposed route to Glacial Lakes State Park is in private ownership.)

Campground recommendations

- Reduce the density of campsites at Lakeview Campground to improve circulation and reduce pressure on infrastructure.

- Remove hazard trees and replant shade trees.
- Add overflow parking and improve options for group camping by reconfiguring sites.
- Plan on renewing infrastructure, such as electric and water service, recognizing that these systems are likely to need replacement in the near future.
- Consider development of several canoe-in campsites, primarily in the western half of the park, if appropriate sites can be located.
- Expand group camping opportunities, which are in high demand. Specifically, there is a high demand for the “Class II” type group campgrounds, which include a sanitation building. The existing group camp is a Class III, or “Primitive” camp, and is in an environmentally sensitive location that would be difficult to serve with central water and sewer facilities. A potential site for a new Class II group camp is identified on Figure 10 at a location just south and downslope from the existing horse camp.

One option to consider would be to provide a central sanitation building that could serve both the existing horse camp and a new group camp.

- Explore the option of upgrading lodging facilities at the Group Center to accommodate user requests and enhance lodging options. Consider adding a few camping sites in the group center for recreation vehicles for groups that wish to also bring RVs. Consider replacing the existing staff quarters building with a year-round accessible lodging/ guesthouse facility. Campsites and guest house could be rented individually during the fall and winter months.
- Add electric sites and additional camper cabins to the Oak Ridge Campground to increase its attractiveness to visitors (compared to the popular Lakeview Campground).
- Explore potential for adding electrical sites to the horse camp, within the context of potential horse trail expansion and the creation of a new Class II group camp nearby.
- Explore additional lodging opportunities such as camper cabins at all campgrounds; evaluate the desirability and maintenance requirements of scattered hike-in and boat-in sites elsewhere in park.

Lake Andrew beach / Cedar Hill recommendations:

- Repair and improve the beach area. A comprehensive redesign of the beach area is needed, within the context of the historic district, to include:
 - Design of a context-sensitive retaining wall around the historic camp store building to protect it from erosion and ice heaving;
 - Shoreland stabilization and restoration around the beach area, focusing on the use of native plant materials and other best management practices for erosion control;
 - Possible redesign of the parking area, potentially reducing its size and moving it further from the lake in order to expand the picnic area;
 - Evaluate stability of the bluff at the Cedar Hill picnic area and reinforce if necessary. Seek a more context-sensitive option to replace the existing wire fence, if needed.

Lake-related recommendations:

- Consider re-orientation of the Lake Andrew boat access to avoid ice damage. A more southerly orientation may be preferable.
- Improve the shore fishing area at the Henschien – Lake Andrew inlet area, where a fishing pier was recently installed. Currently, off-street parking is scattered in a few small lots on the west side of County Road 38, forcing visitors to cross the road to reach the fishing pier. Improvements would include centralizing parking on the east side of County Road 38, as well as improved accessibility and pedestrian safety improvements such as a crosswalk and signage.
- Evaluate options for adding a connection between Norway Lake and Middle Lake, to create a six-lake water trail for canoes and kayaks. (The existing five-lake portage trail system includes Lake Andrew and Henschien, Swan, Games and Norway lakes.) Two major concerns are 1) managing invasive species such as Eurasian milfoil; and 2) establishing a safe crossing of County Road 5 between Norway and Middle lakes.

Traffic management recommendations

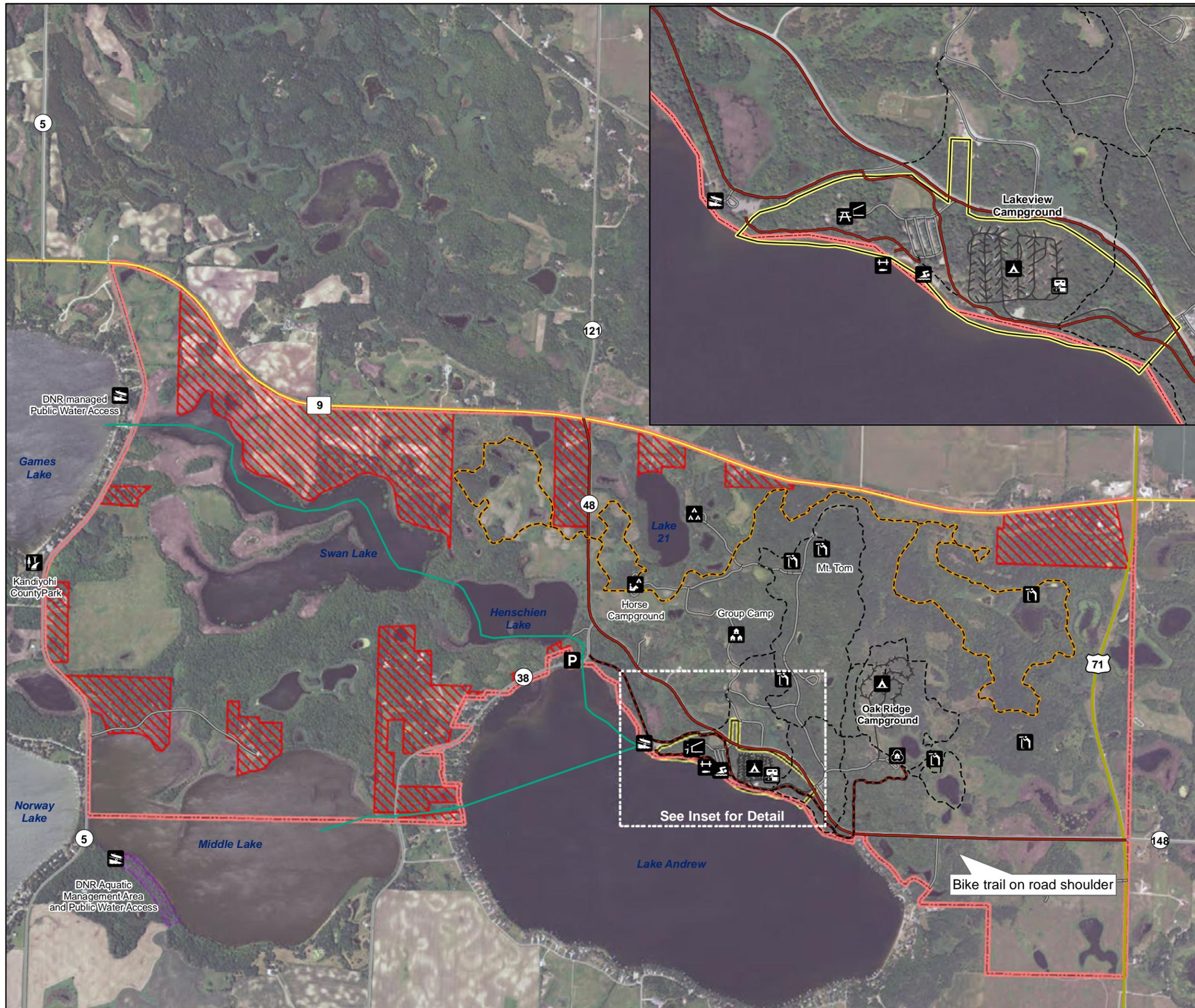
- Improve traffic management within the park. Because the park is crossed by several county roads used by area traffic, traffic management is a challenge. Options for calming and slowing traffic in congested areas such as along County Road 38 on the western shore of Lake Andrew should be considered. Options include adding caution signs, striped pedestrian crossings, pedestrian-activated signal lights,

and narrowing the striping of travel lanes, a common traffic-calming method.

- Work with MnDOT to install a left turn lane at the US 71/County 148 intersection and a right turn lane at the Trunk Highway 9/County Road 48 intersection. High traffic speeds on the two state highways make it difficult to safely turn onto these two primary entrances into the park.

Sibley State Park

Figure 9:
Existing Visitor Facilities and Trails



Legend

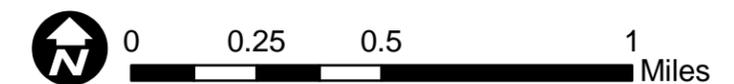
- State Park Statutory Boundary
- Private Property within State Park Boundary
- CCC/Rustic Style Historic District

Visitor Facilities

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|--------------|
| | Visitor Center | | Beach |
| | Campground | | Fishing Pier |
| | Primitive Group Camp | | Boat Ramp |
| | Group Center | | Picnic Area |
| | Horse Campground | | Shelter |
| | Overlook | | Parking |
| | Trailer Sanitation Station | | |

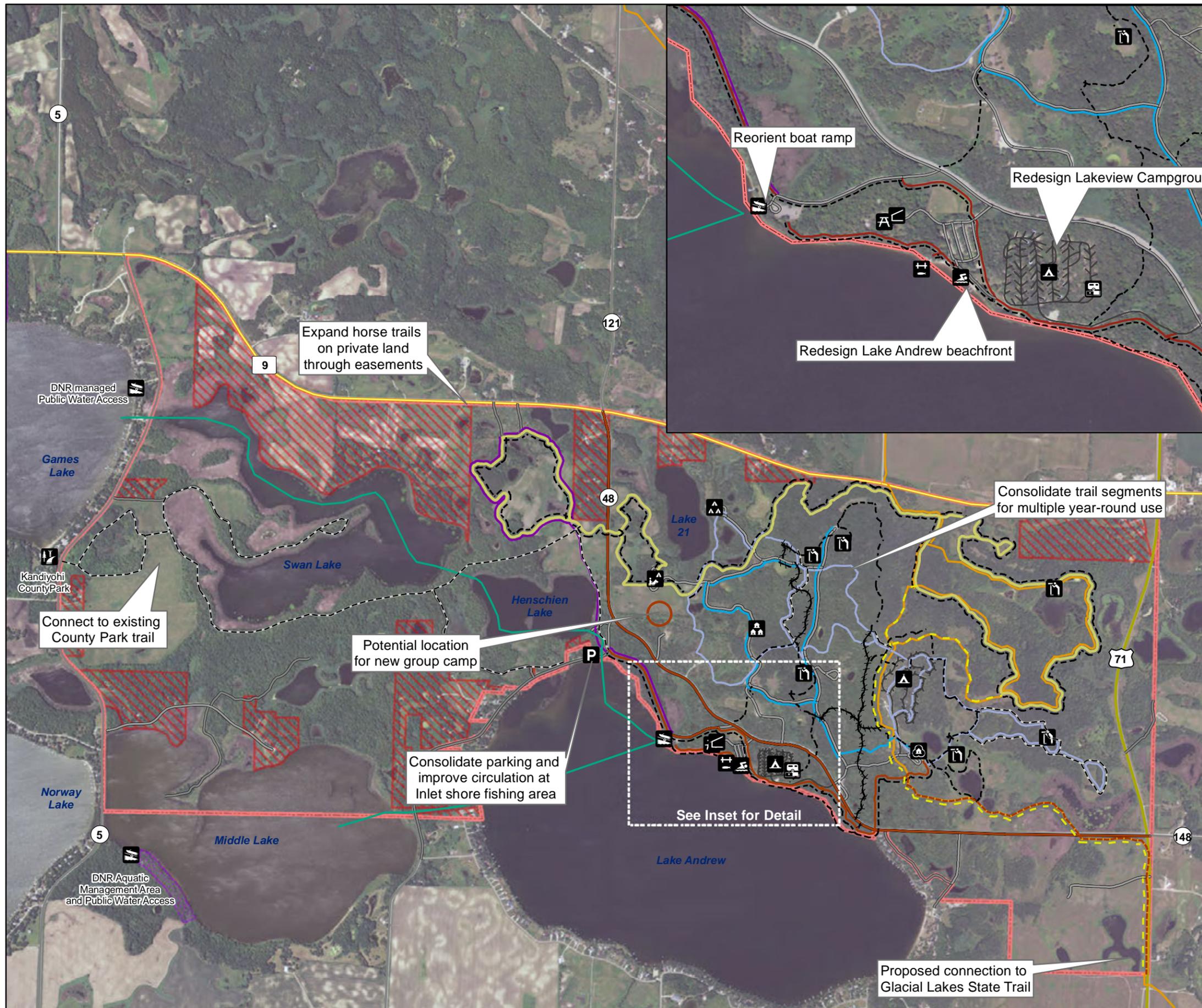
Summer Trails

- Bicycling Lane
- Hiking Trails
- Horse/Hiking Trails
- Bicycling/Hiking Trails
- Canoeing Route



Sibley State Park

Figure 10:
Proposed Development



Legend

- State Park Statutory Boundary
- Private Property within State Park Boundary

Visitor Facilities

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|--------------|
| | Visitor Center | | Beach |
| | Campground | | Fishing Pier |
| | Primitive Group Camp | | Boat Ramp |
| | Group Center | | Picnic Area |
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| | Trailer Sanitation Station | | |

Potential Trail Changes

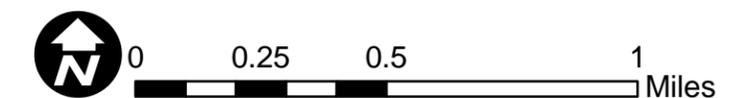
- Potential Trails to Remove
- Potential New Hiking Trails
- Potential New Horse Trails
- Potential New Bicycling/Hiking Trail

Summer Trails

- Canoe Route
- Hiking Trails
- Horse Trails
- Bicycling Trails

Winter Trails

- Classic Ski Trails
- Skate Ski Trails
- Snowshoe Trails
- Snowmobile Trails



MN Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails

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