

St. Croix State Park

Draft Management Plan Executive Summary

The St. Croix State Park management plan is a 20-year strategic plan to guide the management of park resources and development of facilities and programs for public use.

St. Croix State Park, established in 1943, is Minnesota's largest state park. With nearly 34,000 acres in its statutory boundary, St. Croix State Park encompasses a wide range of natural landscapes and wildlife habitats including forests, savannas, prairies, wetlands and river environments. The park borders on the St. Croix River – a National Wild and Scenic River – and the Kettle River – a state Wild and Scenic River, both of which are important resources and migration corridors for wildlife and historically for people as well.

St. Croix State Park also holds evidence of a long history of people living in the St. Croix River valley - prehistoric sites, historic Ojibwe habitation and fur trade sites, and sites of Euro-American exploration and settlement. The park contains a rich legacy of historic buildings and structures designed by the National Park Service and built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and 1940s.

Today, St. Croix State Park offers a wide range of opportunities for visitors to learn about the park's natural resources and history, and to recreate using the park's trails, campgrounds, group centers, water accesses and other facilities. Over 272,000 people visited the state park in 2015, the tenth most visits among Minnesota's state parks, with more than 45,000 overnight visitors, the third most among state parks.

The *Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan (2015)* designates St. Croix State Park as a *Destination State Park*. The System Plan identified 16 state parks and state recreation areas in the state park system in this category. These are high priority places for the division to make additional investments over the next 10 years to improve park facilities and amenities, and to offer enhanced experiences for park visitors.



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*The Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan identifies St. Croix State Park as a **Destination State Park**.*

Several overall themes describe the efforts identified in the management plan for pursuing St. Croix State Park's role as a *Destination State Park*:

- Greater diversity of experiences – make changes or improvements to park facilities and programs that create a wider range of experiences for park visitors.

Actions: add more hike-in campsites, renovate one of the park campgrounds to offer larger campsites and camper cabins, build an archery range.

- Get visitors out into the park – create opportunities that encourage park visitors to experience more of the state park than just those areas they are already familiar with.

Actions: work with the canoe rental concessionaire to organize interpretive programs on the rivers for park visitors, create more programs and self-guided experiences that utilize the trail network, create new amenities at locations like the fire tower.

- Get more out of what the state park has – find ways to better utilize the facilities that the state park already has to accommodate more visitors and offer more experiences.

Actions: improve trails by creating shorter loops and smoothing treadways, open St. John's Landing Group Center to more public use.

- Year-round opportunities – offer more opportunities for park visitors to experience St. Croix State Park in all seasons of the year.

Actions: designate some trails in the park for winter fat biking, consider offering more interpretive programming in the winter and shoulder seasons.

The management plan includes recommendations in each section of the plan that lay out the future directions for investments and management of the state park. A complete listing of the plan recommendations is also included in **Appendix A – Management Plan Recommendations**. Examples of the recommendations in each section of the plan are:

Natural and Cultural Resources– continue the pine barrens and oak savanna native plant community restoration efforts, manage invasive plant species, rehabilitate historic buildings at St. John's Landing and Head of the Rapids Group Centers, pursue a programmatic agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office to streamline the process for maintenance and repair projects on historic structures (see **Natural and Cultural Resources recommendations** – p. 27).



Improve campgrounds, trails and other park facilities.

*For a complete list of all the recommendations in the management plan, see **Appendix A – Management Plan Recommendations***

Interpretive Services – renovate the visitor center to update the interpretive displays, add more programs and opportunities for visitors to experience the St. Croix and Kettle Rivers, create more staff-led interpretive opportunities for existing groups of visitors (e.g. group centers); create signs, brochures and other tools that teach visitors about the historic buildings at the state park (see **Interpretive Services recommendations** – p. 40).

Recreational Use and Visitor Services – renovate Paint Rock Springs Campground to create more variety in camping experiences, add more remote hike-in campsites, develop new trails for hiking and horseback riding that create additional trail loops, designate trails for winter fat biking, open St. John’s Landing Group Center to more public use (see **Recreational Use and Visitor Services recommendations** – p.51).

Park Boundary – continue to purchase lands within the existing state park statutory boundary from willing sellers, monitor gravel operations adjacent to the state park for potential future development (see **Park Boundary recommendations** – p.60).

Operations – work with the canoe rental concessionaire to enhance education and recreation opportunities for park visitors, work with Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa on its facility needs to support its program at the state park (see **Operations recommendations** – p. 66).

Management Plans for state parks and state recreation areas are developed in an open process that includes public involvement. The division utilizes public meetings, online surveys, and park visitor surveys to gather input about the state park and comments on proposals for the management plan. A citizen advisory committee met four times during the planning process to help identify issues and review recommendations for the plan.

Recommendations in the management plan will be implemented over time, and are subject to the availability of adequate capital development and operational funding. The division utilizes these funds across the state park system following the priorities set out in the *Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan* (see page 5).



Add more interpretive programs and opportunities for visitors.

*For more information about the planning process, see the **Introduction and Appendix B – Public Input and Review Summary***