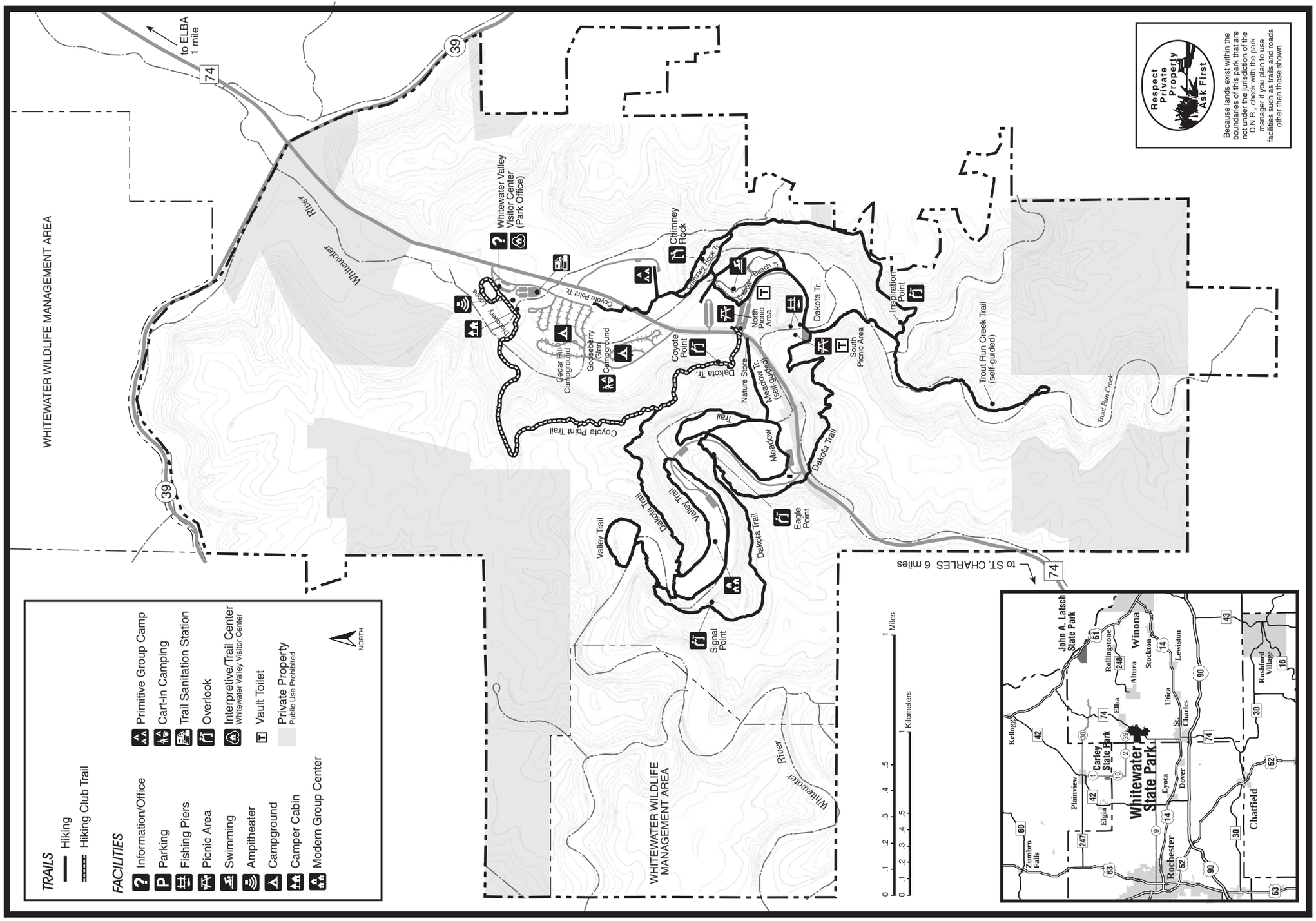
WHITEWATER STATE PARK

FACILITIES AND FEATURES

- Whitewater Valley Visitor Center
- 2 semi-modern campgrounds with a total of 110 campsites (47 electric sites and 6 cart-in)
- Sanitation station, showers, and flush toilets
- A modern group camp with cabins, dining hall, and sanitation building with showers and flush toilets (capacity 132)
- 3 primitive group camps
- 2 picnic grounds with an open shelter (capacity 75)
- Swimming beach with changing room
- 10 miles of hiking trail
- 2.5 miles of self-guided trail
- 6 miles of cross-country ski trail (see park staff for detailed map)
- Year-round interpretive program
- Elba Fire Tower

VISITOR FAVORITES

- Chimney Rock – Access from North Picnic Area
- Elba Fire Tower – Two miles north of visitor center
- Nature Store – books, gifts, clothing, mugs, post cards, etc.
- Viewing the DVD on the 2007 flood in the visitor center
- GPS units and birding kits available for loan



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WHITEWATER STATE PARK

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Whitewater State Park
19041 Highway 74
Altura, MN 55910
(507) 932-3007

Department of Natural Resources
Information Center
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)
1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

TDD (Telecommunications
Device for Deaf)
(651) 296-5484 (Metro Area)
1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

WHITEWATER STATE PARK is located in southeastern Minnesota, three miles south of Elba on State Highway 74. State highway map index: M-20.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: The blufflands of southeastern Minnesota are well represented by Whitewater State Park with its dolomite cliffs, trout streams, and hardwood forests.

GEOLOGY: Five-hundred-million years ago, a shallow sea covered much of North America including southeastern Minnesota. On its bed, sediment accumulated which later turned into rock hundreds of feet thick. The ancient sea withdrew over 400 million years ago and ever since water erosion has been cutting through the bedrock creating the blufflands. Though most glaciers missed much of southeastern Minnesota, their melt waters helped sculpt the beautiful valleys and bluffs found in Whitewater State Park today.

PREHISTORY and HISTORY: The next chapter in Whitewater's story began about 12,000 years ago when the last glacier melted and the first people moved into Minnesota. Paleo (Big Game), Archaic, Woodland and Mississippian Indians all lived in the blufflands. Most recently the Mdewakanton Dakota farmed, hunted and gathered wild foods in the Whitewater area. They named the river Minneiska, which means 'white water,' because its water turned milky white in spring as high water eroded the light-colored clay deposits of its banks.

In 1851 a treaty opened up most of southern Minnesota, including the Whitewater area, for white settlement. By removing the original vegetation and farming, burning and often overgrazing of hillsides, erosion became an ever-increasing problem. In 1900 the floods began.

In 1919, spurred by local efforts to protect natural resources and promote tourism, Whitewater State Park was established.

As poor soil conservation practices continued, flooding increased leading to the abandonment of valley farms. In 1938, the nearby town of Beaver flooded 28 times.

In the 1940s state and federal conservation officials, with the support of local landowners and area elected representatives, implemented sweeping conservation measures. Richard Dorer, of the Minnesota Department of Conservation, designed a plan for the revival of the Whitewater River valley. Grass, shrubs, and trees were planted on the slopes. On the uplands, contoured fields and terraces were laid out. Dikes were built forming ponds. Burning was banned. Erosion-prone lands were purchased. Today, this land makes up the 28,000-acre Whitewater Wildlife Management Area adjacent to Whitewater State Park.

The recent trend in area agriculture away from dairy farms with their pasture and hay ground, to more row crops of corn and beans threatens to again increase erosion in the blufflands.

In a 24-hour period in late August 2007 over 11 inches of rain fell in the watershed upstream of the park. Impacts of this historic flood included 5 million dollars in damages to roads, bridges, group camps, campgrounds, picnic areas, trails and beaches, dozens of landslides and a changed river course. Infrastructure has been repaired, but you'll notice evidence of the flood in many places. To better understand this storm and flood, ask to see the "Sculpting the Blufflands – the Flood of 2007 in Whitewater State Park" DVD at the visitor center's touch screen.

VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE: When the settlers arrived, they found a great diversity of plant and animal life. In the valleys were rich bottomland forests and clean, spring-fed streams that produced an abundance of native brook trout. While oak savanna covered most of the park, tall grass prairie grew on some uplands and south facing slopes. On other hillsides, maple and basswood forests thrived on north slopes and oaks dominated the drier east and west-facing slopes.

Today remnant stands of white pine and other 'northern Minnesota plants' remain from a time when the climate was colder and glaciers were not far away.

In the various plant and animal communities are species found nowhere else in Minnesota. These plants and animals, like the shagbark hickory and timber rattlesnake, survive here on the fringe of their range. As many as 49 kinds of mammals and 237 kinds of birds use the Whitewater River valley in the course of a year. Checklists for many of the park's plants and animals are available at the visitor center.

Wild turkeys were successfully reintroduced into the Whitewater Wildlife Management Area in the early 1980s. These wary birds are now common in many areas including Whitewater State Park.

FISHING: Fishing is allowed in Whitewater State Park, subject to Minnesota fishing laws.

The Middle Branch of the Whitewater River provides good habitat for the introduced brown and rainbow trout. A smaller number of native brook trout are also found in the park. Most of the river is open for the winter catch-and-release season.

HIKING: Park trails provide visitors with great opportunities to explore the natural and historic features of the park.

Trails in Whitewater State Park meander along the river on the valley floor and climb 200 feet to the bluff tops. Trail length and difficulty varies greatly. Use the "Take a Hike" grid above to select the trail that's right for you. Care must be taken on hiking trails as soils are slippery when wet and there are many overlooks and steep drop-offs.

The timid and rare timber rattlesnake does live in Whitewater State Park. If you are one of the lucky few that sees one while hiking, leave it alone, take a picture from a safe distance and promptly report your sighting at the visitor center.

Please help protect the park's sensitive soils, slopes and plant and animal communities by hiking only on designated trails.

Take a Hike!

Trail Name	Access From	Time in Hours (leisurely pace)	Distance Miles (kilometers)	Blufftop Overlook	Self-Guided Brochure Available	Difficulty Level E = Easy M = Moderate D = Difficult
1. Dakota Trail (Coyote Point Loop)	Visitor Center	2	2.7 (4.2)	X		D
2. Dakota Trail (entire trail)	Nature Store	3.5	4.2 (6.7)	X		D
3. Meadow Trail (and optional loop)	Nature Store	1.5	1.7 (2.7)		X	E
4. Valley Trail (South Loop)	Angler's Parking	1	1.5 (2.4)			E
5. Valley Trail (North Loop)	Modern Group Center	.75	.9 (1.4)			E
6. Chiminey Rock Trail	North Picnic Area	1	.7 (1.1)	X		M
7. Beach Trail (Oxbow Trail)	North Picnic Area	.5	7 (1.1)			E
8. Trout Run Creek Trail	South Picnic Area	1.5	2.0 (3.1)		X	E
9. Inspiration Point Trail and overlook	South Picnic Area	.75	1.2 (2.0)	X		D
10. Chiminey Rock to Inspiriation Point	North Picnic Area	1	1.0 (1.6)			M

Some park trails are suitable for cross-country skiing and shoeshoeing. Snowmobiling and horseback riding are not allowed.

INTERPRETIVE SERVICES: Through Whitewater's year-round naturalist programs visitors make maple syrup, explore caves, observe wintering eagles and find fossils of animals that predate dinosaurs. Through walks, field trips, demonstrations, evening programs, self-guided trails, fire tower climbs, auto tours, exhibits, radio shows, podcasts, DVD's, printed materials and even games, visitors hear the many stories the Whitewater River Valley has to tell. Schedules of interpretive activities appear on the park's Web page, local newspapers and park bulletin boards.

Whitewater Valley Visitor Center serves as a park office, interpretive center and orientation facility for the entire valley. The visitor center has a Discovery Room with displays, an auditorium/-classroom area, a large-screen interactive exhibit, and a trail center with a view of the wooded valley and the excellent bird feeding station.

Leaders of organized groups interested in scheduling interpretive activities should contact the park naturalist to make arrangements. Lists of possible activities are available at the visitor center. Most interpretive services are provided free of charge.

SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK...

- The park belongs to all Minnesotans. Please treat it with respect and help us to protect it by following the rules.
- The park is open year-round. On a daily basis, the park is closed from 10 P.M. to 8 A.M. the following morning except to registered campers.
- Camp only in designated locations.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and arrows, and all other weapons are prohibited in state parks.
- Pets must be restrained on a leash no longer than six feet. Pets are not allowed in park buildings.
- Park in designated areas only.
- Motor bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on park roads, not on trails.
- Enjoy park wildlife and plants but please respect them. Do not pick or dig up plants, disturb or feed animals. Visitors can collect edible mushrooms, nuts and berries for their personal use.
- Build fires only in designated locations – fire rings or fireplaces. To protect the park's vegetation, do not collect firewood. To protect Minnesota's ash trees from the emerald ash borer, firewood can only be purchased from the park or an approved vendor.
- Daily or annual permits are required for all vehicles entering a state park. They may be purchased at the park headquarters or the Information Center in St. Paul (see *"FOR MORE INFORMATION"* to left).

This information is available in alternative format upon request.

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