

# William O'Brien State Park Management Plan



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**  
**Division of Parks and Recreation**

**March 2008**





## Department of Natural Resources Approval of Management Plan for William O'Brien State Park

Minnesota Statutes 86A.09, Subdivision 1, requires that a master plan be prepared for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks and state recreation areas. The Laws of Minnesota for 1947 established William O'Brien as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (MS 85.012, Subd. 60).

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources worked in partnership with Minnesota citizens and an interdisciplinary resource team to develop a management plan for William O'Brien State Park.

The management plan was approved by the Division of Parks and Recreation management team, and was approved through the DNR Regional Interdisciplinary Review Service (RIRS) during March 2007.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Holsten".

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Holsten, Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

A handwritten date in black ink, "3/25/08".

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# WILLIAM O'BRIEN STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN



## State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division Of Parks & Recreation

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 Recreation:

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The development of this plan was greatly assisted by the members of the William O'Brien State Park Citizen Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Team of MDNR and other resource professionals who committed time to help analyze and discuss the current park issues, and make management recommendations.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan documents the work of a 12-month planning process and sets the general direction for the management of William O'Brien State Park for the next 20 years. A Citizens Advisory Committee and a Technical Advisory Team provided input during the planning process on the development of recommended actions and review of the park management plan. Specific management and operational details may change as new information becomes available or technologies or budgets change. It is the responsibility of the Division of Parks and Recreation to determine the appropriate priorities and actions needed to implement these recommendations. The following is a summary of the major recommendations for the park management plan. A list of recommendations can be found within each section of the plan and a comprehensive list of all recommendations is included in Appendix A.

## *Natural Resource Management Recommendations*

- Maintain and/or improve the quality of William O'Brien's land cover, existing native plant communities and rare or listed plants in the park.
- Preserve or restore populations of wildlife such that  $\geq 85\%$  of native vertebrates occur in the park.

## *Cultural Resource Management Recommendations*

- Protect and preserve all cultural resources
- Protect resources from vandalism.
- Evaluate impacts of current and future development on cultural resources.

## *Interpretive Services Recommendations*

- Implement staffing recommendations from the Division of Parks and Recreation Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan by funding a seasonal interpretive support position and 2-3 interns.
- Continue to provide a wide variety of interpretive programming focusing on park themes including seasonal variety of recreational opportunities.
- Continue to develop outdoor exhibits and supporting material focused on the park's natural vegetative communities.
- Review visitor center and trail center functions and explore potential development of new facilities to resolve conflicting seasonal use patterns of the building.

## *Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations*

- Improve quality of experience for campers with varying needs and expectations.
  - Upgrade electric services and other amenities in campgrounds and at campsites as appropriate.
  - Review locations within the park to explore feasibility of adding an appropriate number of remote sites.
  - Explore possibility of adding an area with full amenities for RV camping.
  - Minimize conflicting uses/users.
  - Consider additional overnight facilities when land is added to the park.
- Re-design picnic/parking/beach areas to address pedestrian safety issues caused by the current need to cross through the parking lot when walking from the picnic area over to the beach.
- Develop a safe pedestrian (and bike where appropriate) network for campers and visitors to access facilities in the park to minimize use of motorized vehicles.
- Continue to provide high quality cross-country ski (skate and classic) opportunities regionally and within the state park system.
- Develop a biking/hiking (non-equestrian) connection between William O'Brien State Park and the Gateway State Trail.

### *Park Boundary Recommendations*

The Citizens Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Team developed a set of criteria to guide consideration of boundary changes. The criteria include: acquiring additional river frontage, protecting the river bluffs and their associated habitat and hydrology; buffering the park from impacts of future development; provide additional protection of significant native plant communities; protect view sheds that enhance the park experience and make connections to significant plant communities that extend beyond current boundary to protect habitat and wildlife corridors.

The general considerations for making boundary changes are:

- Continue to pursue opportunities to acquire parcels within WOB statutory boundaries.
- Adjust boundaries where appropriate and where willing landowners exist to:
  - Reduce fragmentation of parkland (for the management of resources and park administration).
  - Protect high resource values.



Jack in the Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)

# INTRODUCTION

## Park Description

William O'Brien State Park is located in Washington County on Highway 95, two miles north of Marine on St. Croix and 14 miles south of Taylors Falls. The park is within the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area.

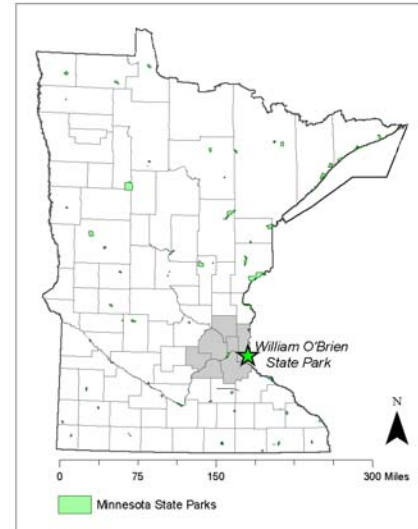
The park is located on the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway among rolling, wooded hills and flood plain forests. Camping, interpretive programs, hiking, fishing and swimming are visitor favorites. The St. Croix River provides anglers with the opportunity to catch pike, walleye, and bass. The natural scenery including meandering islands and the steep bluffs of the valley help make canoeing another popular pastime. The river is an important bird migratory flyway, offering an exciting diversity of sights and sounds in all seasons. During the winter, visitors also enjoy camping, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on 12 miles of trails within the park.

Dakota and Ojibwe Indian tribes utilized the resources of the valley for centuries. Eventually, the Ojibwe dominated the land rich in furbearing animals, wild game and useful plants. Lumberjacks followed trappers in 1839 seeking to harvest the "endless stands" of white pine which provided building materials for an expanding nation. Numerous sawmills were established along the St. Croix. The industry flourished in the mid-1800s until the valley was cleared of white pine. William O'Brien, a lumber baron, bought much of the land once owned by the lumber companies.

In 1945, Alice O'Brien, daughter of William O'Brien, donated 180 acres to be developed as a state park in memory of her father. In 1958, the family of S. David Greenberg donated Greenberg Island to the Park, in memory of his parents. Accessible only by canoe, the island has become a haven for wildlife and wildflowers.

The proximity to the metropolitan area, and the varied landscapes of the St. Croix River valley make William O'Brien an attractive destination for park users and an attractive area in which to live. In 1973, a large area west of the railroad tracks was added to expand the park's recreational trail system and protect the park from the imminent pressures of housing developments that continues to push up to the edge of the park. Throughout the years, privately owned parcels of land have been added to the park which now totals 2,026 acres with 446 acres remaining in private ownership.

William O'Brien State Park is one of several state parks along both sides of the St. Croix River. Minnesota Parks include St. Croix State Park (34,037 acres) in Pine County, Interstate State Park (298 acres) and Wild River State Park (6,803 acres) in Chisago County, and Afton State Park (1,695 acres) in Washington County. Parks and recreation areas on the Wisconsin side include: Interstate State Park (1,330 acres) in Polk County, Willow River State Park in St. Croix County and Kinnickinnic State Park in St. Croix County. William O'Brien State Park lies within the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which connects all of these parks and is managed by the National Park Service.



Location of William O'Brien State Park

## Legislative History

William O'Brien State Park was established by statute in 1947 (MN Stat. 85.176). Legislation to expand the park statutory boundary was enacted in 1955, 1959, 1963, 1964, 1973, 1986, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1999. A deletion from the statutory park boundary was made in 1979.

HIST: 1947 c 271; 1955 c 683 s 1(5); Ex1959 c 90 s 4 subd 2; 1963 c 790 art 5 s 1 subd 1(16); 1969 c 524 s 2; 1973 c 482 s 2; 1979 c 320 s 6; 1986 c 432 s 1 subd 4; 1994 c 448 s 1; 1995 c 215 s 1 subd 4; 1995 c 220, s 5; 1996 c 372 s 1 subd 6; 1999 c 157 s 2 subd 13

The Gateway State Trail is legislatively mandated to connect with William O'Brien State Park and then on to Interstate State Park (Chapter 85.015 subd. 14). The Gateway State Trail will provide the park with a connection to a network of regional trails. Currently, the trail extends from St. Paul to Pine Point Park in Washington County, approximately 7.25 miles south of William O'Brien. Potential corridors for the Gateway Trail to link with William O'Brien State Park were identified as part of the management plan process.

## Role of William O'Brien State Park in the Minnesota State Park System

Each state park plays a unique role in fulfilling the Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation's mission as each unit has a unique set of natural resources, facilities and recreational opportunities. William O'Brien State Park provides visitors with the opportunity to explore the rich diversity of the St. Croix Valley's natural resources and the histories of the people who have visited this landscape before them. Because of the proximity to the metropolitan area, the opportunity to explore significant natural landscapes, the number of recreational activities provided, the camping facilities and the interpretive services offered, William O'Brien State Park serves the role of providing visitors with an introductory experience to the Minnesota State Park System.

William O'Brien State Park contains five distinct natural communities that support rare, special concern, threatened, and endangered species. These communities are remnants of the variety of plant communities that adapted to the varied landscape features carved by the glaciers and river channels within the valley. Park visitors have the opportunity to experience the rolling terrain of hills and river terraces, walk through oak savannah, hardwood forest, or dry upland prairie, and explore a rare black ash seepage swamp, an extensive wetland complex and walk or paddle through a river floodplain forest.

The park provides unique bird and wildlife watching, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, camping, swimming, and many other outdoor recreation opportunities all within an hour's drive of a major metropolitan area. In the winter the park also provides premier cross-country ski trails.

The park offers a wide variety of recreational facilities including:

- An office with a Nature Store and exhibits, visitor center, interpretive exhibits featuring the park's cultural and natural features, and an amphitheatre
- A year-round naturalist program providing a variety of activities and environmental education opportunities
- 2 campgrounds with 124 sites (60 with electrical hookups), 2 group campgrounds and a camper cabin
- Canoe rentals and boat launch on the St. Croix River, and a swimming beach and fishing pier on Lake Alice
- Picnic grounds, three picnic shelters and restrooms
- 12 miles of hiking trails, including 2 miles of accessible trail and a self guided trail
- 12 miles ski trails groomed for classic and skate skiing. Snowshoeing available east of Highway 95 away from groomed ski trails
- 1.5 miles of paved bike trail

## Mission and Vision Statements

The following mission and vision statements provide a perspective on the roles of the Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Parks and Recreation and William O'Brien State Park fulfill within the park system for the next 20 years.

### *Department of Natural Resources Mission*

The mission of the Minnesota 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.

### *DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Mission*

We will work with people to provide a state park system, which preserves and manages Minnesota's natural, scenic and cultural resources for present and future generations while providing appropriate recreational and educational opportunities.

### *William O'Brien State Park Mission*

Protect and enhance the diverse landscapes, natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities found within the park and the St. Croix River Valley for the use, education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

### *William O'Brien State Park Vision*

Over the next 20 years, William O'Brien State Park will exemplify the very best in natural resource and recreation management to ensure the Park continues to serve as outstanding introduction to the Minnesota State Park System. The Park will further serve a statewide and regional role in providing high quality cross-country skiing opportunities.

We will work with the people of Minnesota to ensure that William O'Brien State Park is managed to meet the needs of current and future generations guided by the following principles:

- Manage and enhance the natural, cultural and scenic resources.
- Preserve and perpetuate populations of listed or special status plant and animal species and any other species of concern, which are discovered in the future.
- Continue to actively seek and adopt innovative, effective and efficient management practices.
- Preserve and enhance significant vistas within the park.
- Preserve the opportunity for park visitors to experience wildness, quiet and solitude.
- Provides access to park resources for people of varying abilities.
- Provide unique, rewarding and diverse educational opportunities to ensure that visitors will understand, value and enjoy the diversity of landscapes, natural features, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities found in the park.
- Develop our educational and interpretive programs to create a sense of stewardship among visitors.
- Develop partnerships and cooperative strategies for enhancing resource management, educational opportunities and tourism in the St. Croix Valley.
- Provide high quality public service.

## Planning Process

The William O'Brien State Park planning process began in the spring of 2006. Two planning teams were established to provide input into the process.

### *William O'Brien Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)*

The Citizens Advisory Committee provided public input throughout the planning process. This group was made up of representatives from recreational groups, neighboring communities, county and local

governments, and various stakeholder groups. Members represent a variety of perspectives and interests that are intended to serve as a representation of the diversity of park users and supporters. The committee met monthly during the summer and fall of 2006 to analyze current issues related to natural and cultural resource management, recreational needs, interpretive programming and the park boundary. Collectively, the committee provided a valuable perspective and recommendations on the development of management goals, objectives, and strategies for the future use and management of this park over the next 20 years.

Organizations that participated in the CAC included:

- Local residents and citizens at large
- Gateway Trail Association
- Ride & Glide Ski Club
- New Scandia Township Park and Recreation Commission
- Minnesota Off Road Cyclist (MORC)/International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)
- Friends of William O'Brien
- St. Croix River Association
- Scandia Riders/Minnesota Trail Riders Association (MTRA)/MN Horse Council

Public meetings during the planning process, including CAC meetings, were held at the William O'Brien State Park Visitor Center on the following dates:

April 17, 2006	Meeting with elected officials from Marine on St. Croix, Scandia, May
May 2, 2006	Open House – Official beginning of the planning process
June 3, 2006	Evening discussion with campers and the park manager
June 15, 2006	Introduction and Regional Analysis
July 13, 2006	Natural and Cultural Resource Management Issues
August 10, 2006	Recreation Resource Issues
August 24, 2006	Gateway State Trail issues, entrance, exit and alignment within park
September 28, 2006	Interpretive issues
October 12, 2006	Land Management, Boundary and Acquisition Issues
November 15, 2006	Neighbors and Adjacent Landowners Update
January 22, 2007	Open House -Start of public review period for Draft Management Plan

#### *Technical Advisory Team (TAT)*

In addition to the citizen committee, an intra-agency team met to assist in gathering data and technical expertise in the development of the revised management plan.

Participants in the TAT represented the following groups:

- Washington Conservation District
- Washington County - Parks and Recreation
- Tidd Tech Ski Trail Grooming Equipment
- St. Croix River Association
- National Park Service - St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resource staff from the following:
  - Lands and Minerals
  - Forestry
  - Waters
  - Trails and Waterways
  - Fish and Wildlife
  - Enforcement
  - Ecological Services
  - Parks and Recreation
  - Recruitment & Retention
  - Central Region Metro Wildlife Corridors & Greenways

TAT meetings during the planning process were held at the William O'Brien State Park Visitor Center on July 13, 2006 and October 9, 2006.

The William O'Brien State Park Management Plan is the result of the partnership efforts of these two planning teams and information gathered at additional public meetings and open houses. A draft of the management plan was made available for a 30-day public review beginning January 22, 2007. During the public review period, a public open house was held to provide citizens with the opportunity to review the plan and have questions answered and any concerns addressed. Copies of the draft plan were also distributed to individuals who had expressed an interest in the planning effort.

Following the public review, public comments were taken into consideration and the draft management plan was revised and then submitted for review by the Division of Parks and Recreation Director and staff. The William O'Brien State Park Management Plan was approved by the Commissioner of Natural Resources on March 25, 2008.

Copies of the William O'Brien State Park Management Plan (2008) and a planning process file which documents the planning effort are available at the William O'Brien State Park office as well as the MDNR Central Region Headquarters in St Paul and MDNR Central Office in St Paul. The plan is also available on Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website.



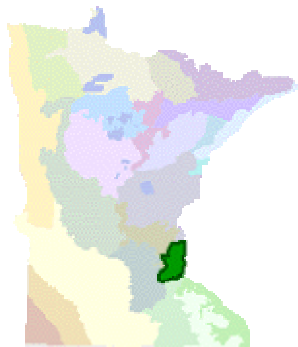


# REGIONAL ANALYSIS

This section of the plan describes both the ecological and socioeconomic regions in which William O'Brien State Park resides and the primary relationships between the park and these regions. The ecological region is discussed in terms of the Minnesota Ecological Classifications System (ECS). The socioeconomic region is described in terms of a regional population analysis and a description of regional recreation and tourism opportunities. Because William O'Brien State Park is located within 45 minutes of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, this section includes discussion of demographic trends in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Throughout this chapter, the plan will reference a 50-mile radius from the Park. This distance was chosen to represent an area roughly within a one-hour drive of the Park.

## Regional Landscape Description

Minnesota's Ecological Classification System (ECS) is part of a national classification system that separates and describes units of different landscapes. The approach stresses the interrelationships and resulting interactions among components of the ecosystem including climate, geology, geomorphology, parent materials, soil, vegetation, hydrology and historical land use. The ECS is a management tool that: (1) describes the extent and content of various ecosystems; (2) improves resource managers' abilities to predict how landscapes will change over time; (3) improves a managers' ability to manage all natural resources on a sustainable basis and (4) allows managers to communicate more effectively with one another.



### *Subsections*

Subsections are units within the provinces that are defined using glacial deposition processes, surface bedrock formations, local climate, topographic relief and the distribution of plants, especially trees. Minnesota has 25 subsections.

William O'Brien is part of the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines Subsection (See Figure 1: Ecological Subsections).

A large moraine and areas of outwash plain dominate the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines subsection. To the west, terraces associated with the Mississippi River separate this unit from the Anoka Sand Plain. The southern boundary consists of the Rosemount Outwash Plain. The St. Croix River forms the east boundary. The topography is rolling to hummocky on the moraine and level to rolling on the outwash.

Historically a mosaic of vegetative communities including oak forest and savanna, prairie, and maple-basswood forests covered this subsection. Maple-basswood flourished in areas of landscape with the greatest fire protection - either in steep, dissected ravines or where stream orientation reduced the frequency and severity of fire.

This subsection encompasses much of the seven county metropolitan area. Currently, there are many recreational opportunities available within the subsection along the large rivers, state and regional trail systems, within state parks and the scientific and natural areas, regional parks, and local nature centers. The natural communities and habitat that remain are under pressure from the expansion of urban development. The current challenge is to balance development with the preservation of those remaining green spaces and natural resources.

One hundred, forty-nine Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are known or predicted to occur within the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines Subsection, the second most species of all subsections within Minnesota.

At least 65 species of wildlife found at William O'Brien State Park are on the list of SGCN. This includes 51 birds, 2 fish, 1 reptile, 1 insect and 10 freshwater mollusks. Twenty-eight species have been documented within the park that are state or federally listed or are considered regionally uncommon by taxon experts.

The classification of the William O'Brien State Park Land Cover encompasses approximately 2,200 acres (lands inside the statutory boundary). One hundred, sixty acres are classified as developed or use areas (such as: administrative area, campground, recreational use areas, roads and trails). About 418 acres within the statutory boundary remain in private ownership. The remaining 2,026 acres of the park are further divided into undeveloped areas such as old fields and native plant communities.

Table 1: William O'Brien State Park Land Cover Acreages

<b>Total Park Area</b>	2,200 acres	<i>416 acres remain in private ownership)</i>
<b>Total developed/use area</b>	174 acres	<i>7% of total park area</i>
<b>Total undeveloped area</b>	2,026 acres	
<b>Old fields, plantations, unclassified areas</b>	735 acres	<i>36% of undeveloped</i>
<b>Native plant communities</b>	1,291 acres	<i>64% of undeveloped</i>
(within the 1,291 acres of native plant communities)	653 acres	Have high quality plant communities
(within the 653 acres of High Quality Plant Communities)	530 acres	Have significant biodiversity <i>(as classified by the Minnesota County Biologic Survey)</i>

## Regional Population Analysis

Minnesota continues to be one of the fastest growing states in the Midwest. During the next 30 years (2000 to 2030) the state's population is estimated to grow another 28%.

William O'Brien State Park is located within Washington County, one of the seven counties that make up the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The Metropolitan Area is projected to grow 32% by 2030. The park draws a majority of its visitors (85%) from within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Population growth in the metropolitan area will likely increase the pressures on the park's resources, facilities and staff as more people look for places to recreate and land surrounding the park is converted from a rural, farming landscape to a more urbanized landscape.

The Minnesota State Department of Administration demographers now consider 13 counties to make up the Metropolitan Statistical Area of the Twin Cities. Seven of those counties are ranked in the top 100 Housing Unit Growth Counties in the United States. Included in those 13 counties is St. Croix County, Wisconsin. With the proximity and easy access to the metropolitan area, employment opportunities and urban amenities, coupled with transportation upgrades, such as the anticipated completion of a new Stillwater Bridge between 2012-2015, it is expected that St. Croix and other western Wisconsin counties will also contribute to the growth pressures of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region and demand for recreational opportunities.

In the 2000 Census, Washington County's population was estimated to be 201,130. With continued growth, Washington County expects to accommodate the addition of 164,440 new residents by 2030, an

increase in population of 82%. Most of the residents currently live in the cities of Forest Lake, Stillwater, Oakdale, Woodbury and Cottage Grove.

Chisago County is just four miles north of William O'Brien State Park. The 2000 Census estimated Chisago County's population to be 41,101 with a projected increase in population of 69% by 2030.

The growth rates for Washington County and Chisago County are more than double the projected 2030 population increase of 28% for the state overall. Only three other Minnesota counties are projected to have greater growth than Washington and Chisago Counties.

St. Croix County, Wisconsin, had a population of 63,155 as of 2000. The St. Croix County Development Management Plan projects a population growth of about 40% percent between 1995-2020 while the State of Wisconsin as a whole is projected to have a 14.7 % increase by 2030.

Table 2: Population Estimates and Projections for Counties Surrounding William O'Brien State Park.

County	2000	2005	% Change 2000-2005	2030 (Projected)	% Change 2000-2030
Washington	201,130	228,070	13.4%	365,570	82%
Chisago	41,101	46,650	13.5%	69,540	69%
Twin Cities Seven-County Metro Area	2,868,847	3,073,800	7.0%	3,784,100	32%

## Impacts of an Aging Population on Recreation

Recreational activities change dramatically throughout an individual's life. Changes are due not only to changes in physical abilities, but also social, economic, and other factors as well. Older adults may take on new recreational interests especially after their children have grown or when they retire. Demographic changes will affect levels of participation in various recreational activities. "Baby Boomers" are approaching retirement age, but as compared with previous generations these individuals are generally more active. Most park and recreational facilities will undoubtedly continue to undergo adjustments to accommodate an older recreational market.

Washington County is projected to have almost 3 times the number of citizens 60 years or older by 2030. The age change projections for the other counties adjacent to the park in both Minnesota and Wisconsin show similar trends.

Table 3. Comparison of Population Aged 60+ between 2000 and 2030

	% of population 60+ in 2000	% of population 60+ in 2030	% change in population 60+ from 2000 to 2030
Washington County	9.5%	23.8%	313% increase
Minnesota	15.9%	26.0%	108% increase

## Regional Land Use

Washington County is generally a rural county situated on the eastern edge of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. It is bounded on the east by the St. Croix River and on the south and southwest by the Mississippi River. Residents of the county have a fairly strong social and political sentiment in favor of retaining the county's rural or semi-rural environment by constraining growth and protecting open space. The landscape and the proximity of the metropolitan area make the county a desirable place to live. Land use changes continue at a rapid pace even with the efforts made to control development within the

county. The Metropolitan Council's Land Use Summaries illustrate the percentage change in land use that occurred between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, land use was divided into the following percentages:

Table 4: Washington County Land Use Change Between 1990 and 2000

Washington County Land Use Change	1990	2000	% change
Residential	11.7%	16.8%	+43%
Commercial/Industrial	2.2%	2.8%	+51%
Agricultural	71.6%	71.3%	-14%
Roadways/Right-of-Ways	0.8%	1.0%	+17%
Parks and Open Space	5.0%	8.7%	+81%

Table 5: Metro Area Land Use Change Between 1990 and 2000

Metro Area Land Use Change	1990	2000	% change
Residential land use	15.8%	19.4%	+22%
Commercial/Industrial	3.8%	4.6%	+24%
Agricultural	65.2%	57.8%	-11%
Roadways/Right-of-Ways	1.0%	1.3%	+23%
Parks and Open Space	8.2%	10.3%	+29%

A majority of land use in Chisago County remains undeveloped, primarily in agricultural use, woodlands or wetlands. The lakes area around Wyoming, Lindstrom, Chisago City and Center City has attracted significant residential development and continues to be an area of growth. Development also continues to occur along I-35, north to the county border. Commercial development is found primarily within incorporated cities in the county.

State-owned land accounts for a significant portion of land in the county. Within Chisago County, Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area covers about 8,000 acres, Wild River State Park 7,000 acres, Interstate State Park 295 acres and Chengwatana State Forest covers 250 acres.

In St. Croix County, Wisconsin, the predominant land use is agriculture, comprising 70% of unincorporated areas. Forested land is the second largest land use at 15 % and residential at 6%. Development in St. Croix County is occurring in the western areas of the county and those western communities are expected to experience continued residential development pressure, which will consume mostly agricultural lands.

## Regional Recreation and Tourism Opportunities

Numerous recreation and tourism opportunities can be found in the St. Croix River Valley and area around William O'Brien State Park. There are five state parks in Minnesota (St. Croix, Wild River, Interstate, Afton and Fort Snelling), three state parks in Wisconsin (Interstate, Willow River and Kinnickinnic) and numerous county parks and municipal parks. The National Park Service manages the St. Croix Scenic Riverway. Other public recreation areas include portions of the Chengwatana State Forest, Richard J. Dorer State Forest, Sand Dunes State Forest, Falls Creek Scientific and Natural Area and Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area. In Minnesota, recreational state trails include the Gateway State Trail and the Willard Munger State Trail. County and regional trails such as the Sunrise Prairie/Hardwood Creek Trail and the Swedish Immigrant Trail along with other county and municipal connections further fill out a regional trail network. Scenic Byways such as the St. Croix River Trail (Highway 95) provide vistas of the St. Croix Valley from Interstate Park through the river town of Stillwater. Further south, the Great River Road follows along the winding waters of Mississippi River (Trunk Highway 61). Stillwater, Hastings, and other river towns along these byways retain much of their history, culture, and scenic beauty (See Figure 2: 50-Mile Radius for Recreation Opportunities).

The St. Croix and Mississippi River corridors are home to some of the best bird watching in Minnesota. There are also numerous public water accesses for boaters that provide recreational and fishing opportunities along the St. Croix River as well as on many of the lakes. In addition there are 4 designated trout streams within the area.

## Visitor Use Patterns

An estimated 207,821 people visited William O'Brien State Park in 2005. Overnight stays totaled 33,696. William O'Brien ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in overall visitation and 6<sup>th</sup> in overnight visits within the State Park System. The park generated approximately 11% of the Central Region's total visitation and just over 10% of the revenues. Most park visits occur in the summer months but the quality of the cross-country ski trail system at William O'Brien attracted over 15,900 skiers during the season.

Visitation to William O'Brien State Park has been stable over the last decade. Overnight visitation has also been consistent with camping facilities being at or near capacity much of the summer during weekends. Skiers accounted for nearly 8% of park visitors. Although the park is among the highest in total attendance, opportunities still exist to increase visitation during weekdays and the shoulder seasons.

Table 6: Ten Year Comparison of Attendance at William O'Brien State Park

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Attendance (in 1,000's)	241.2	245.1	244.6	234.3	240.4	230.1	238.4	225.3	208.3	218.6	223.7	207.8

## Overnight Recreation Opportunities

There are 63 campgrounds located within a 50-mile radius of William O'Brien State Park. Additionally there are a limited number of National Park Service campsites available along the St. Croix River often accessible only by boat or canoe.



Table 7: Camping Opportunities within 50-mile Radius of William O'Brien State Park

Managing Agency	# of camp-grounds	Drive in w/out electric	Drive in w/ electric	Walk-in /Canoe-in	Group Camps (# of people)	Horse Camping (# of people)	Camper Cabins
<b>Minnesota</b>							
State Parks	5	472	141	54	7 (755)	3 (172)	11
State Forests	3	242	150	24		1 (15)	
Counties	13	346	293	39	16 (955)	8 (65)	
Municipal	4	195	101	63			
Private	30	2381	2308	284			8
<b>MN total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3,636</b>	<b>2,993</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>24 (1,710)</b>	<b>12 (252)</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>							
State Parks	2	157	157		1 (90)		
State Forests	3	31		4	1	1 (30)	
Counties	1	55	55				
Municipal							
Private	12	749	749	215			7
<b>WI total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>2 (90+)</b>	<b>1 (30)</b>	<b>7</b>
NPS-St. Croix Scenic Riverway	(To be determined, plan not yet finalized.)						
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>4,628</b>	<b>3,954</b>	<b>683</b>	<b>26 (1,800+)</b>	<b>13 (282)</b>	<b>26</b>

## Trail Opportunities

### *Hiking*

There are close to 500 miles of hiking trails within a 50-mile radius of William O'Brien State Park in Minnesota and an additional 181 miles of state trails facilities in Wisconsin.

### *Equestrian*

Currently there are 227 miles of equestrian trail within a 50-mile radius of William O'Brien State Park. Two thirds of those trails are provided by state parks or state trails. Horse trails are available at Wild River, Afton, Sand Dunes and St Croix State Parks. The Gateway Trail provides an equestrian tread way and is scheduled to be linked with the park and extend north to Interstate State Park. Washington County provides equestrian facilities at Pine Point Park and Lake Elmo Regional Park. There are no designated horseback riding trails within William O'Brien State Park.

### *Cross-Country Skiing*

William O'Brien State Park currently serves as a high quality cross-country ski park with 12 miles of groomed trail and serves close to 16,000 skiers during a season. This is a role the park will continue to fill into the future. There are over 220 additional miles of ski trails within 50 miles of the Park.

### *Bicycling (Surfaced Trail or Road Shoulder)*

An extensive network of state, regional and local biking trails exist within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Within 50 miles of William O'Brien State Park there are approximately 209 miles of trail. Currently, there are no bike trails within the park but a paved trail runs along Highway 95.

*Off-Road Bicycling*

There are 80 miles of off-road biking trails within 50 miles of William O'Brien State Park. Most of the off road biking opportunities are located within regional parks. No off-road biking opportunities exist within William O'Brien State Park.

*Wisconsin Trail Opportunities*

Within the 50-mile radius of William O'Brien State Park, the State of Wisconsin offers 181 miles of hiking trails, 67 miles of equestrian trails, 17 miles of ski trails, 81 miles of biking and 33 miles of snowmobile trails within their state parks, forests and state trails.

Table 8: Trail Opportunities within 50-mile Radius of William O'Brien State Park

Managing Agency	Hiking (miles)	Equestrian (miles)	Cross-Country Ski (miles)	Biking (miles surfaced)	Biking (off road)	Snowmobile (miles)
<b>Minnesota</b>						
State Parks	231	121	63	19.1	66	110
State Trails	48.3	39.7	39.7	39.7		30
Other Trails	209	64.7	133.1	151	14.5	27.5
<b>MN Total</b>	<b>488.3</b>	<b>225.4</b>	<b>232.8</b>	<b>209.8</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>167.5</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>						
State Parks/Forests	50	35	17			33
State Trails	159	32		81		
<b>WI Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>81</b>		<b>33</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>697.3</b>	<b>292.4</b>	<b>249.8</b>	<b>300.8</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>200.5</b>



Riverside trail along St. Croix River

## Revenue Generation and Economic Impact

William O'Brien State Park generated \$403,607.00 in revenue during 2005. Revenue was collected for park annual and daily permits, camping, concessions, rentals, nature store sales, firewood and other items. Roughly 41% of the revenue was from annual and daily permit sales and 37% came from camping.

William O'Brien State Park has a positive impact on the local economy. Visitors contributed to the state and local economies during trips to the park in 2005. Surveys of visitors to the state park system determined that day visitors spend \$24.11 per person per day and overnight visitors spend \$21.29 per person per day. These expenses include groceries, gasoline, and other items bought expressly for this trip as well as money spent at restaurants, shops and other places for non-state park lodging during the trip. These spending estimates do not include government payments – i.e. state park permits, camping reservation fees, fishing licenses, etc.

Table 9: Economic Impact of Visitors to William O'Brien State Park, 2005

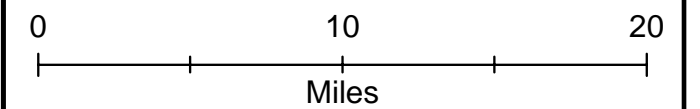
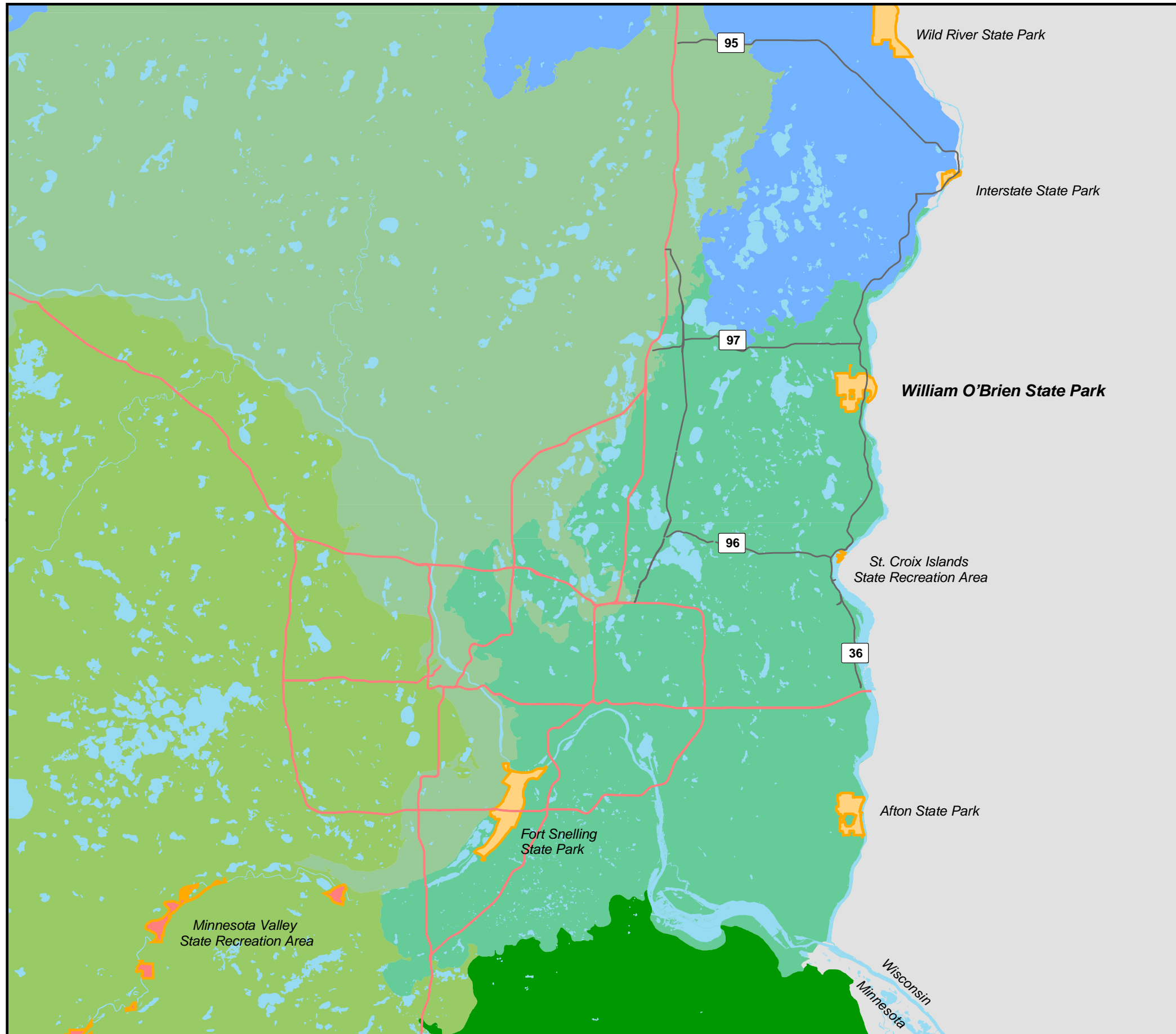
	# of Visitors 2005	Average Spending/Day	Subtotal
Day	174,122	\$24.11	\$4,198,081.00
Overnight	33,699	\$21.29	\$717,451.00
Total Economic Impact =			\$4,915,533.00



**Figure 1: Ecological Subsections**  
**William O'Brien State Park**

Ecological Subsection Type:

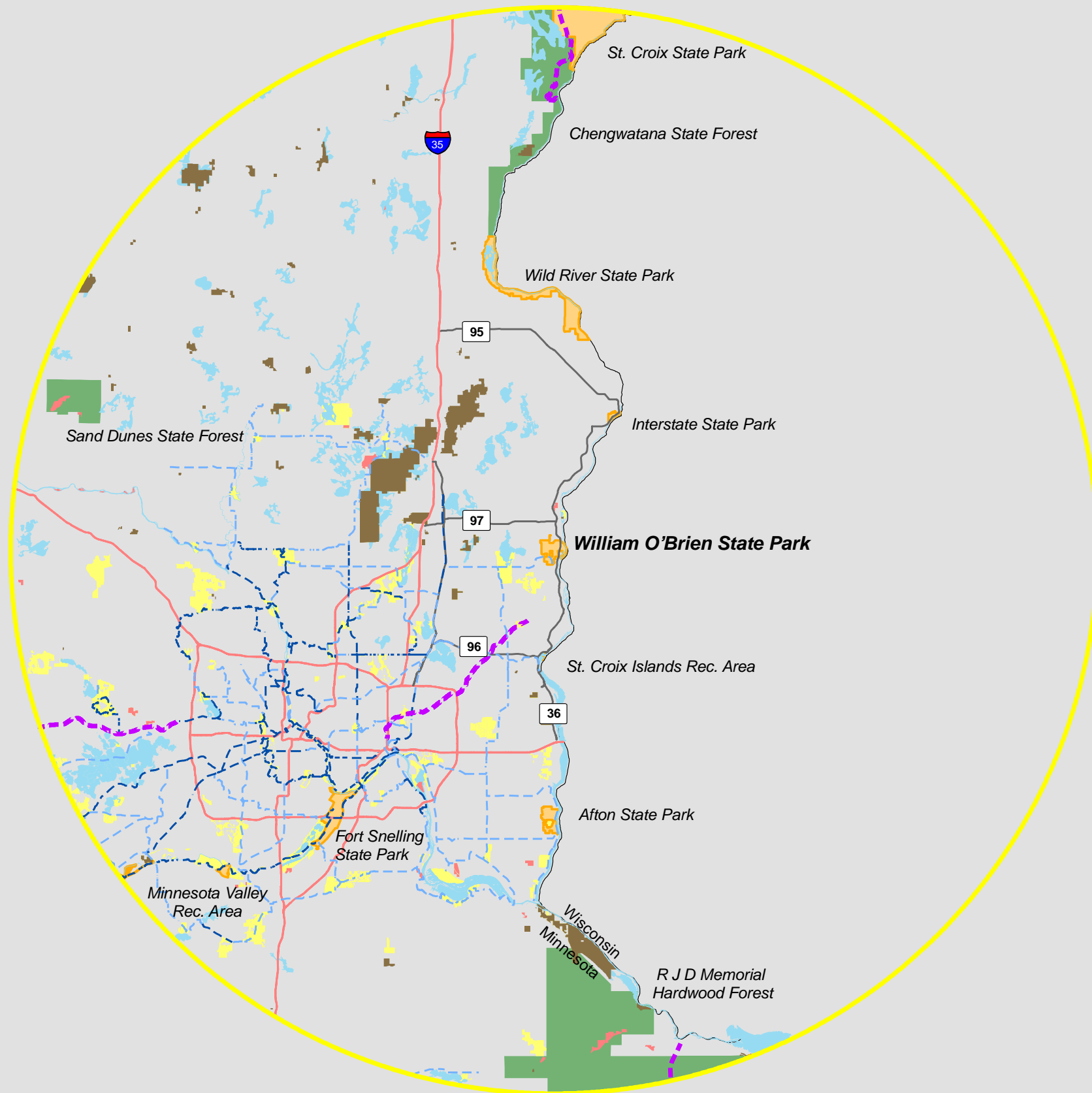
- Mille Lacs Uplands
- Anoka Sand Plain
- Big Woods
- St. Paul-Baldwin Plains
- Oak Savanna
- Minnesota State Park
- Minnesota State Recreation Area
- MN DOT Interstate Highway
- MN DOT Trunk Highways








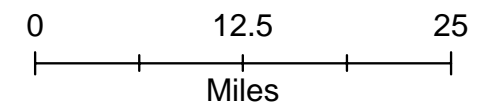
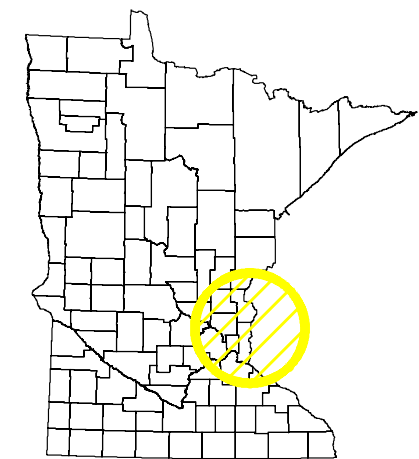
MN Department of Natural Resources  
 Division of Parks and Recreation

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**Figure 2: 50-Mile Radius for Recreation Opportunities  
William O'Brien State Park**



-  State Trails System
-  Regional Trail System - Existing
-  Regional Trail System - Proposed
-  MN DOT Interstate Highways
-  MN DOT Highways
-  State Parks
-  Scientific Natural Areas
-  Wildlife Management Areas
-  Regional Parks
-  State Forests



MN Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Recreation

December 2007

# NATURAL RESOURCES

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation Resource Management Program has the following resource management goals:

- Protect and perpetuate natural and cultural resources within state park system.
- Minimize damage to the natural and cultural resources of the state park system while providing appropriate recreational and educational activities.
- Restore natural communities and ecosystems in the state park system.
- Promote understanding and awareness of the natural and cultural resources within the state park system and their management and protection.
- Participate in landscape-level planning activities relative to the protection of the natural and cultural resources of the state park system.

The resource management program goals are derived from the state statutes that guide the development and operations of Minnesota's State Parks:

*State parks shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner, which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision to preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features that are present. Management shall seek to maintain a balance among the plant and animal life of the park and to reestablish desirable plants and animals that were formerly indigenous to the park area but are now missing. Programs to interpret the natural features of the park shall be provided. Outdoor recreation activities to utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality into the natural scene may be permitted. Park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved.*

Minnesota Statute 86A05. subd 2c

William O'Brien State Park staff has been actively working to protect, manage and restore the health and quality of the natural resources within the park since the last management plan was written in 1979.

The following information provides an overview of the current status of William O'Brien State Park's natural resources, the desired future conditions for the park and the management recommendations to be used as a guide for protection and restoration during the next 20 years.

## Climate

The St. Paul Baldwin and Moraines subsection has a continental-type climate that is characterized by winter temperatures cold enough to support a fixed period of stable snow cover each year, and relatively low precipitation occurring mostly in summer.

Although total precipitation is important, its distribution during the growing season is even more significant. For the most part, native vegetation grows for seven months (April to October) and row crops grow for five months (May through September). During the latter five-month period, approximately two-

thirds of the annual precipitation occurs. The average annual precipitation for William O'Brien State Park is 31.76 inches and the annual snowfall is 47.9 inches with heavy snowfalls of greater than 4 inches common from November through April.

Climate plays an important role in Minnesota's economy. The climate, in conjunction with some 15,000 lakes interspersed in forests and wooded areas, produces an almost ideal environment for a variety of recreational activities. The summer season (May - August), with its warm days and cool nights, attracts summer vacationers. Recreational activity in the autumn season (September - November) ranges from hunting to watching the change of the summer leaves and the annual migration of birds. In the winter season (December - March) the state generally receives sufficient snowfalls and low temperatures to maintain conditions for skiing, snowmobiling, and skating. William O'Brien State Park offers recreational opportunities throughout the seasons but has become regionally recognized as a high quality cross-country skiing destination.

## **Topography**

William O'Brien State Park topography varies from rolling hills in the west to steep ravines and a flat river terrace to the east within the St Croix River valley. There is a significant topologic change in elevation within the park reflecting three distinct river terraces formed during glaciations. The highest point in the park is at 1,130 feet. The riverbank is located at 690 feet above sea level (See Figure 3: Contour Elevations).

## **Geology**

William O'Brien State Park's landscape was shaped by glaciations from the Superior lobe and Grantsburg sub-lobe, of the Des Moines lobe. The result of the glaciations created the St. Croix Moraine complex and melt waters carved the St. Croix River Valley leaving behind several terraces as waters receded. The landforms left by glaciation and erosion over time has played a significant role in development of the soils and vegetation found within the park.

The park is generally covered by glacial drift, the deposits left behind by glaciations. These deposits are generally less than 100 feet thick. Ordovician and Devonian dolomite (some limestone, sandstone, and shale) is locally exposed within the park, especially in the dissected valleys. Precambrian bedrock is also exposed along and under the St. Croix River.

## **Soils**

Most of the park's upland soils consist of silt or sandy loams with diverse variations due to the rolling terrain. These soils are highly erodible and careful consideration should be made in selecting locations for future development. For specific details regarding the soils of William O'Brien State Park and Washington County, please refer to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (WSS).

## **Hydrology**

### *Surface Water*

Surface water features within William O'Brien State Park include Lake Alice, 9 Springs stream and wetland restoration, a large wetland complex covering much of the middle of the park, seeps and springs along the bluffs, and the St. Croix River.

### Lake Alice

Lake Alice was created by an impoundment of a small spring-fed creek. It is 25 acres in area and has a maximum depth of 9 feet. Water clarity remains high with an average sechi depth reading of 5 feet. The lake contains curly-leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*), an invasive species that has the potential to degrade the water quality. The lake provides both fishing and swimming opportunities for visitors. During spring flood the lake is prone to mixing with the St. Croix River because it is located within the 100-year flood plain.

### 9 Springs Stream/Wetland Restoration

The restoration area is in the southeast corner of William O'Brien State Park. In 1996, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources purchased the land formerly used to raise minnows and in 2000 began a partnership with Minnesota Department of Transportation to restore the site. In 2001, with the support and assistance of the local community, work was initiated to restore over three-fourths of a mile of trout stream and eight acres of riparian wetlands. The final phase of stream reconstruction and restoration was completed in 2006. The restoration provided an opportunity to improve a valuable brook trout fishery, create additional wildlife habitat and contribute to the protection of water quality for the Mill Creek watershed. The 9 Springs Stream/Wetland Restoration serves as a representative of the headwater streams that were once abundant within the St. Croix River valley.

### Wetlands

Wetland areas in the park include a 60-acre floodplain forest, a 155-acre marsh system and a rare black ash swamp. Wetlands cover almost 19% of the park. Wetlands help to protect surface water quality and provide important habitat for many species in the park, including several of the rare and sensitive plant and animal species of concern.

### St. Croix River

The river forms the eastern boundary of the park and provides additional recreational opportunities such as fishing, canoeing and kayaking. The St. Croix River valley is defined by a sharp elevation change between the upland and flood plain creating steep slopes and scenic panoramas. The slopes cut through the water table, resulting in numerous springs and seeps within the valley. This section of the St. Croix River is part of the Wild and Scenic River designation and co-managed with the National Park Service, United States Army Corp of Engineers and the Department of Natural Resources Division of Waters.

### *Groundwater*

Within the park, sandstone bedrock underlies the park and its aquifer serves as a drinking water source. There are five wells in the park that continue to provide an adequate water supply to meet current and future visitor and resource management needs.

## **Fisheries**

### *Lake Alice*

Lake Alice receives heavy fishing pressure during the open water season. During the spring of 2001 the river flooded into the lake, which allowed river species such as gizzard shad and sheephead to enter the lake. During the summer of 2001 the Section of Fisheries surveyed Lake Alice and found a range of species from golden shiners, black and yellow bullhead, sunfish, northern pike, black crappie, freshwater drum (sheephead) and gizzard shad.

Lake Alice is part of the Department of Natural Resources Fishing in your Neighborhood (FIN) children's fishing pond program. The DNR Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages these water bodies more intensively by stocking them annually with pan fish. Currently bluegills are the most abundant species in the lake. Their population is considered average when compared to similar lakes. The average size of bluegills sampled during the 2001 survey was only 4.78 inches in length. Black crappie numbers are lower than average but a few larger fish are present. Northern pike provide a bonus fishery and excitement for younger anglers. In addition to the species found in 2001

the FIN program has stocked rock bass, smallmouth bass, white bass and walleye in an effort to provide greater diversity of species to be caught by anglers.

#### *9 Springs Stream/Wetland Restoration Area*

In 2001, at the time of purchase, the 9 Spring's 18-acre parcel was being managed as a commercial minnow operation. The parcel contained 20 excavated ponds, numerous berms, spoil piles, ditches, concrete structures and thousands of feet of steel pipe buried between springs and interconnected basins. Wetlands and streams originally present on the site had been significantly altered by the commercial operation and no longer provided habitat for brook trout and native plant species that historically occurred on the site. Shortly after completion of the restoration projects the remaining native brown trout population moved into the stream channels.

#### *St. Croix River Fishery*

The section of the St. Croix River from Taylors Falls to Stillwater is a river filled with warm water sport fishing species such as bass, walleye, sauger, northern pike, muskellunge, catfish, and pan fish. Cold-water species such as rainbow trout, brown trout and brook trout are also present in the river. Overall, 111 different fish species have been recorded in the St. Croix River. There are 15 species such as the river herring, crystal darter and gilt darters and the American brook lamprey are listed as endangered, threatened, rare, or of special concern by state and/or federal agencies.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is currently conducting a long-term study to learn more about the life history and distribution of lake sturgeon in the St. Croix River system. It has been determined that with regulated harvest, cleaner water, and more access to habitat the population of lake sturgeon appears to be stable and growing slowly. Conservation success will be dependent on strict control of harvests, maintaining clean water, and protection of important habitat.

## **Wildlife**

William O'Brien SP is located in the St. Paul Baldwin Plains & Moraines Subsection of the Ecological Classification System (ECS). One hundred and forty nine of the 292 Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified for Minnesota occur in the St. Paul Baldwin Plains & Moraines Subsection. The park's existing plant communities provide habitat for many wildlife species including species of concern and threatened or rare species. At least 65 wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) have been found at William O'Brien State Park. This includes 51 bird, 2 fish, 1 reptile, 1 insect and 10 freshwater mollusk species. Twenty-eight rare species have been documented in the park, which are state or federally listed or are considered regionally uncommon by taxon experts.

Several species of wildlife that were present historically have vanished from the park due to extinction, changes in vegetation, and encroachment and fragmentation of habitat. Passenger pigeons and sharp tail grouse are two examples of wildlife that once lived in the Park. Several species now documented in the Park were not present prior to European settlement. Species such as the ring neck pheasant, house finch, Norway rat were introduced to the area through human intervention. Wild turkey, northern cardinal, and red-bellied woodpecker have expanded their ranges to include the park.

## **Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species**

Twenty-eight species have been documented in the park, which are state or federally listed or are considered regionally uncommon by taxon experts. The St. Croix snaketail dragonfly is one of the state endangered species. This snaketail was only discovered in 1997. Despite exhaustive surveys in the upper Midwest, in the past several years this species only has a small population on the lower Saint Croix River and sporadic occurrences in the lower Flambeau River. This species apparently limited in distribution by its distinct habitat requirements including the type of substrate the larvae can survive in. It is also one of the least tolerant groups of aquatic insects to changes in water quality.



Photo courtesy of Wisconsin DNR

Table 10: State or Federally Listed Species Documented at William O'Brien State Park

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
American Water-pennywort	<i>Hydrocotyle americana</i>	SPC
Virginia Water Horehound	<i>Lycopus virginicus</i>	NON
Cattail Sedge	<i>Carex typhina</i>	SPC
Gilt Darter	<i>Percina evides</i>	SPC
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	SPC
Monkeyface	<i>Quadrula metanevra</i>	THR
Pistolgrip	<i>Tritogonia verrucosa</i>	THR
Spectaclecase	<i>Cumberlandia monodonta</i>	THR
Snuffbox	<i>Epioblasma triquetra</i>	THR
Hickorynut	<i>Obovaria olivaria</i>	SPC
Round Pigtoe	<i>Pleurobema coccineum</i>	THR
Spike	<i>Elliptio dilatata</i>	SPC
Blue Sucker	<i>Cycleptus elongatus</i>	SPC
Blunt-lobed Grapefern	<i>Botrychium oneidense</i>	END
Long-bearded Hawkweed	<i>Hieracium longipilum</i>	NON
St. Croix Snaketail	<i>Ophiogomphus susbehcha</i>	SPC
Mucket	<i>Actinonaias ligamentina</i>	THR
Butterfly	<i>Ellipsaria lineolata</i>	THR
Black Sandshell	<i>Ligumia recta</i>	SPC
Purple Wartback	<i>Cyclonaias tuberculata</i>	THR
Bog Bluegrass	<i>Poa paludigena</i>	THR
Cerulean Warbler	<i>Dendroica cerulea</i>	SPC
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	SPC/Fed T
Hooded Warbler	<i>Wilsonia citrina</i>	SPC
Henslow's Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus henslowii</i>	END
Blanding's Turtle	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	THR

## Vegetation

### *Pre-European Settlement Vegetation*

William O'Brien State Park is located on the ecotone between prairie and deciduous forest. Due to climate changes, natural disturbance and human influences the vegetation in the park has most likely fluctuated, at one time representing prairie and at another point in time forest. Even though alterations have occurred, surveys completed by the Minnesota County Biological Survey and park staff have ranked 530 acres of the park's existing plant communities as being of outstanding, high or moderate quality and biodiversity. Those outstanding plant communities are present due in part to their location within the landscape where the topography or hydrology protected them from human impacts or are present as a result of significant restoration and management activities. The native plant communities in the park are important because they represent rare and threatened plant communities and habitat. They include: a black ash seepage swamp, a southern oak forest, a flood plain forest on Greenberg Island, the 9 Springs Stream/Wetland Restoration, and prairie and savanna reconstructions. The park's natural communities were adapted to fires. Bur oak savanna most likely grew in the dissected ravines and maple-basswood thrived in the portions of the landscape with the greatest fire protection, such as steep, dissected ravines or where stream orientation reduced fire frequency and severity.

### *Current Land Cover*

William O'Brien State Park statutory boundary encompasses approximately 2,200 acres. Because the landscape ranges from flat open fields, wetlands, rolling hills, steep slopes and ravines to a floodplain there is a wide variety of plant communities found within the park. Currently there is a mosaic of prairie, savanna, wetlands, hardwood forest, flood plain forest, and lake, stream and riverine habitats.

Disturbances such as fire, storms and flooding play an integral role in shaping and maintaining the vegetative patterns and natural community health. Historically, fire was one of the most important disturbance regimes for the park's natural communities. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation uses fire as a tool for management of natural plant communities and to control invasive plant species. Prescribed burns have contributed to the significant progress that has been made in restoring native plant communities and controlling invasive species in the park. Flooding in the St. Croix River valley periodically inundates the area of the park within the 100-year (500-year) flood plain, shaping and renewing the flood plain forest community. Flooding also contributes to the challenges of the short and long term management within the lower park (See Figure 4: Land Cover).

### *Natural Plant Communities*

The following native plant communities have been identified in the park:

#### **FDs27** - Southern Dry-Mesic Pine-Oak Woodland

Dry hardwood pine-hardwood woodlands on sand deposits.

#### **FFs68a** - Silver Maple – (Virginia Creeper) Floodplain Forest

Deciduous riparian forest on sandy/silty alluvium on low, annually flooded sites along large rivers. Community is characterized by evidence of flooding such as piles of debris, ice scars on trees or freshly deposited silt and sand.

#### **MRn83** - Northern Mixed Cattail Marsh

Emergent marsh typically dominated by cattails. Present on floating mats along river backwaters or rooted in mineral soil in shallow wetland basins.

#### **MRn93** - Northern Bullrush-Spikerush Marsh

Emergent marsh typically dominated by bulrushes or spikerushes. Present along lakeshores and stream borders.



**WFs57** - Southern Wet Ash Swamp

Wet hardwood forests on mucky or peaty soils in areas of groundwater seepage, most often on level river terraces at bases of steep slopes.

**WFs57a** - Black Ash – (Red Maple) Seepage Swamp

Wet hardwood forests. Canopy dominated by black ash, often with basswood.

**WMn82** - Northern Wet Meadow/Carr

Open wetlands dominated by dense cover of broad-leaved graminoids or tall shrubs. Present on mineral to sapric peat soils in basins and along streams.

**WMs83** - Southern Seepage Meadow/Carr

Open wetlands dominated by a dense cover of hummock-forming broadleaved sedges or tall shrubs. Present in areas of groundwater seepage along streams, on sloping terraces and at the bases of slopes.

**WMs83a** - Seepage Meadow/Carr

Similar to WFs57. Communities often blend into one another but WMs83a favors openings where shade-intolerant species can grow.

**Ups13** - Southern Dry Prairie

Grass dominated herbaceous communities on steeply sloping sites with droughty soils. Historically fires probably occurred every few years.

**Ups14** - Southern Dry Savanna

Sparsely treed communities with grass-dominated herbaceous ground layer on nearly level to steeply sloping sites with droughty soils. Trees are open grown, typically small and gnarled.

## Natural Resources Recommendations

William O'Brien State Park is just 45 minutes from St. Paul and within the seven-county Metropolitan Area. The metropolitan population is projected to grow by over one million by 2030. Urban development is rapidly surrounding the park and encroaching on agricultural operations and remaining native plant communities within Washington County. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as the most important factors impacting SGCN in this subsection. Challenges will include working to buffer the park's vistas and sense of wilderness from encroachment, habitat fragmentation, severing of wildlife corridors, invasion of exotic species and impacts to water quality (See Figure 5: Desired Future Conditions).

### *Native Plant Communities and Rare Plants*

Goal: Maintain and/or improve the quality of William O'Brien State Park's land cover, existing native plant communities and rare or listed plants in the park.

- Preserve and protect plant communities with outstanding, high or moderate biodiversity designations.
- Reconstruct native plant communities on undeveloped areas (not planned for development) of the park such that they can be restored to assessed levels of potential biodiversity and then maintained.
- Preserve and perpetuate populations of the listed plant species documented in the park and any other rare plant species that are discovered in the future.
- Maintain old fields in herbaceous vegetation until reconstruction of native plant communities can begin.
- Land use can have detrimental effects on the quality and quantity and availability of groundwater in the future. Groundwater is an important component of many of the sensitive resources and plant communities within the park. Working in partnership with Washington County to monitor

water resources and implement the County Groundwater Plan will ensure water resources and the associated plant communities and habitat are protected far into the future.

### *Native Wildlife*

Goals: Preserve or restore populations of wildlife such that at least 85% of native vertebrates occur in the park.

Preserve and perpetuate populations of the invertebrate species and vertebrate species which are state-listed or otherwise considered rare. (More species will likely be added as further inventories are completed.)

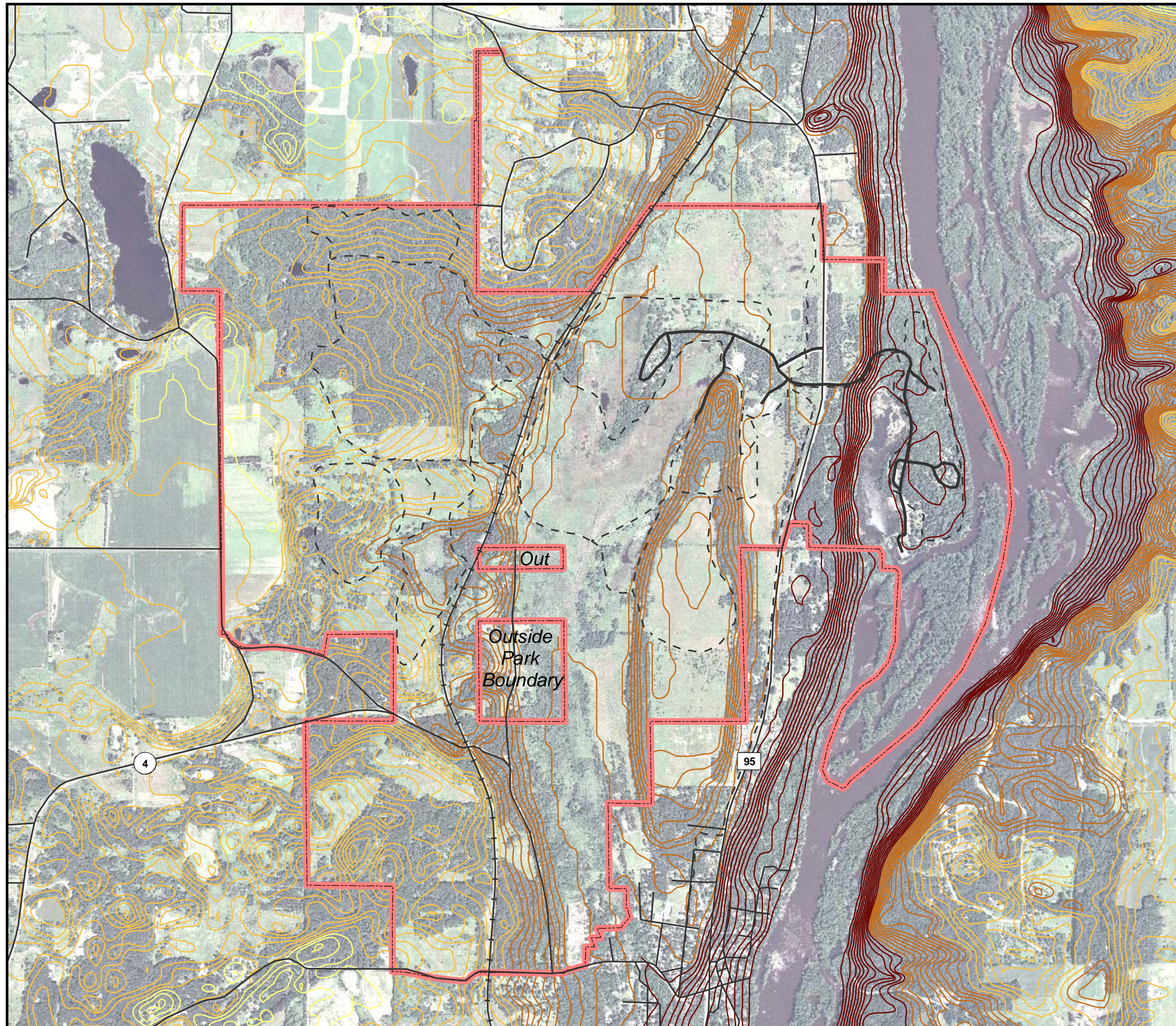
- Complete inventories of taxa have not been adequately inventoried.
- Manage populations of deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not adversely impacted.
- Improve habitat to assist with reintroduction of desirable species
- Use current methods and technologies to control exotic and invasive species (keeping current with new research and methodologies).
- Create a management plan in collaboration with the Division of Fish and Wildlife for Lake Alice to maintain a healthy sport fishery including the continued collection of data about the existing fish population - species, age classes, diversity. Challenges in maintaining the fishery include refining stocking program to ensure multiple age classes exist, and dealing with occasional spring flooding events where fish species adapted to the river environment are introduced back into Lake Alice from the St. Croix River.
- Maintain the 9 Springs Restoration area as an example of the unique ecosystem representing stream systems that were once abundant in the St. Croix valley.







Beaver dam next to Prairie Overlook Trail.








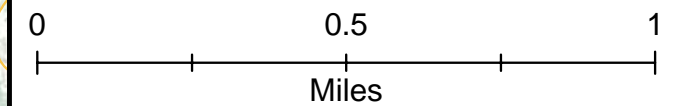
**Figure 3: Contour Elevations**  
William O'Brien State Park



Elevation Above Sea Level (Feet):  
(10 Foot Contour Interval)

-  690 - 790
-  791 - 890
-  891 - 990
-  991 - 1130

-  State Park Boundary
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad

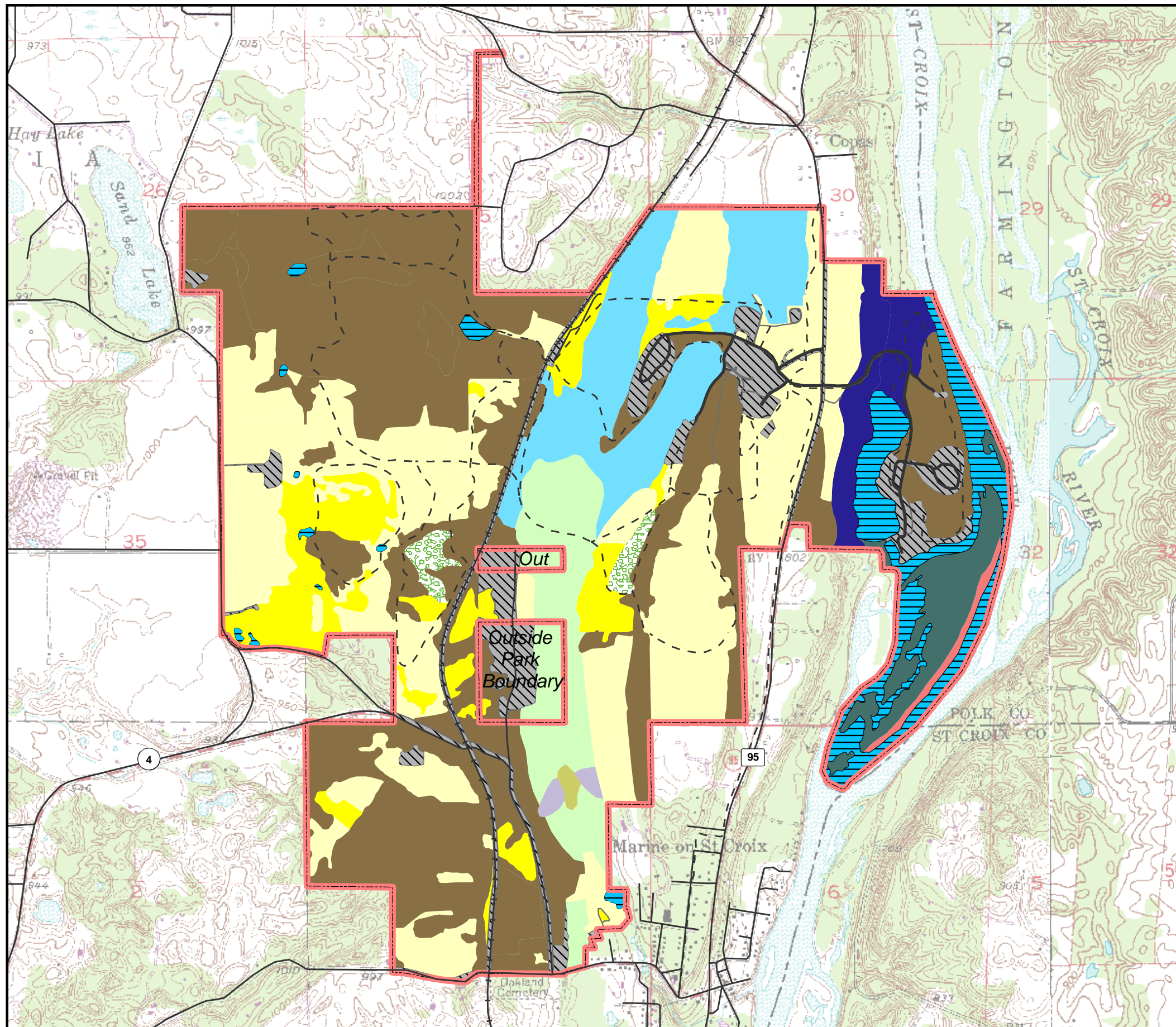











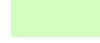








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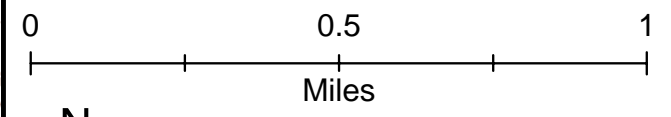
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**Figure 4: Land Cover**  
William O'Brien State Park



-  Fire-Dependent Woodland
-  Floodplain Forest
-  Forested Rich Peatland
-  MCBS Complex
-  Marsh
-  Open Rich Peatland
-  River Shore
-  Upland Prairie
-  Wet Forest
-  Wet Meadow/Carr
-  Water
-  Non-Natural (old fields, other)
-  Developed (park-related or private)
-  State Park Boundary
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad

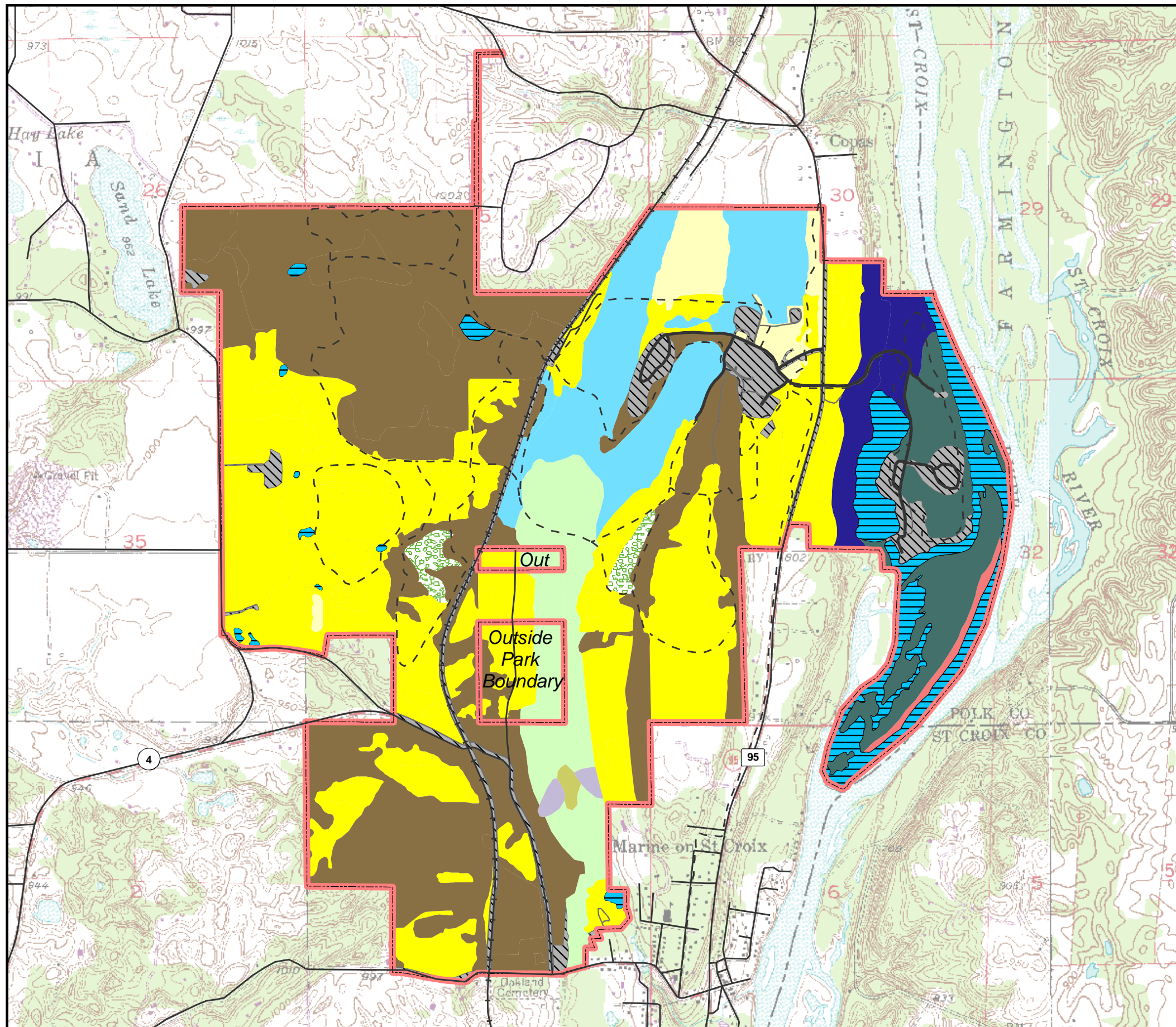













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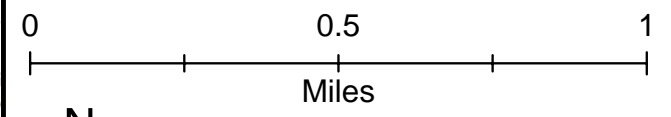
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**Figure 5: Desired Future Conditions**  
William O'Brien State Park



-  Fire-Dependent Woodland
-  Floodplain Forest
-  Forested Rich Peatland
-  MCBS Complex
-  Marsh
-  Open Rich Peatland
-  River Shore
-  Upland Prairie
-  Wet Forest
-  Wet Meadow/Carr
-  Water
-  Non-Natural (old fields, other)
-  Developed (park-related or private)
-  State Park Boundary
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad



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# CULTURAL RESOURCES

The St. Croix River valley in which William O'Brien State Park is located has been attractive to people for thousands of years. Archaeological work has uncovered evidence of cultures long before the written record. The Ojibwe, Dakota, European explorers, voyageurs and loggers all used the St. Croix River as a major transportation route before Minnesota became a state. The post-settlement cultural history of the park has left traces of early farmsteads and town sites.

Archaeological evidence indicates cultural affiliations ranging from Middle to Late Woodland and Mississippian periods. The rich natural resources of the river valley and river terraces provided abundant food and easy access to the river.

During later historic periods, both the Dakota and Ojibwe used this area. Generally, the St. Croix Valley was a border between the two nations with contested claims on hunting grounds and travel. This made it an unlikely area for village life. Interacting with the native populations were European explorers and fur traders who traveled the St. Croix and other major rivers of the region.

The Treaty of 1837 opened the triangle of land between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers to Euro-American settlement. In 1839, the Marine Lumber Company mill was in full operation. It was located in present day Marine on St. Croix. The trees that were milled in Marine were from pine stands further north. By the 1850s, immigrant farmers began settling the area. Agriculture had a significant impact on the character of the park's landscape and natural communities. The railroads enabled the establishment of towns and businesses along the river. Evidence of the historic railroad town of Copas can still be seen within the park. In 1968, the St. Croix River was one of the first rivers in the nation to be designated as a National Wild and Scenic River (See Figure 6: Cultural and Archaeological Resources).

The known cultural sites located in the park include:

## *Burial mound sites (21 WA18 & 21WA19)*

American Indian cemetery sites are located both within and outside of the park in the vicinity of TH 95. These are sensitive sites and must be protected from development and inappropriate visitor use. Many of the mounds at these sites are not readily visible. Keeping these sites in a natural setting is strongly desired.

## *Pre- Euro-American habitation site (21WA39)*

An American Indian archaeological site is located near the lower campground and picnic area of the park. This site is a habitation site utilized by American Indians during the Woodland period some 800 to 2000 years ago. Visitor use and park development has affected this site to some extent. Future development in this area of the park must consider this archaeological resource.

## *Copas Town Site (21WA102)*

Beginning as an offshoot of the town of Marine in 1856, it was originally platted under the name of Vasa. In 1886, a railroad depot was built for the Soo Line and the area began to attract businesses and some residences. It was named Copas in 1904. Although businesses failed sometime during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the last residence was not removed until the early 1990s.

## *Marine on St Croix Historic District (74001043)*

Also known as the Marine Mills, this site was added as a Historic District in 1974. The district is approximately 4,500 acres in area and contains 60 buildings. The community was inhabited first by the Dakota and Ojibwe and then by Scandinavian and Swedish immigrants. Marine was named in 1839 with the opening of its first industry, the sawmill. Marine grew as a busy lumber town through the 1870s, and later was settled for agricultural reasons, as well as for a summer getaway.

## Cultural Resources Recommendations

Goal: A long-term goal for William O'Brien State Park is to protect, restore and interpret these resources for park users today and for generations to come.

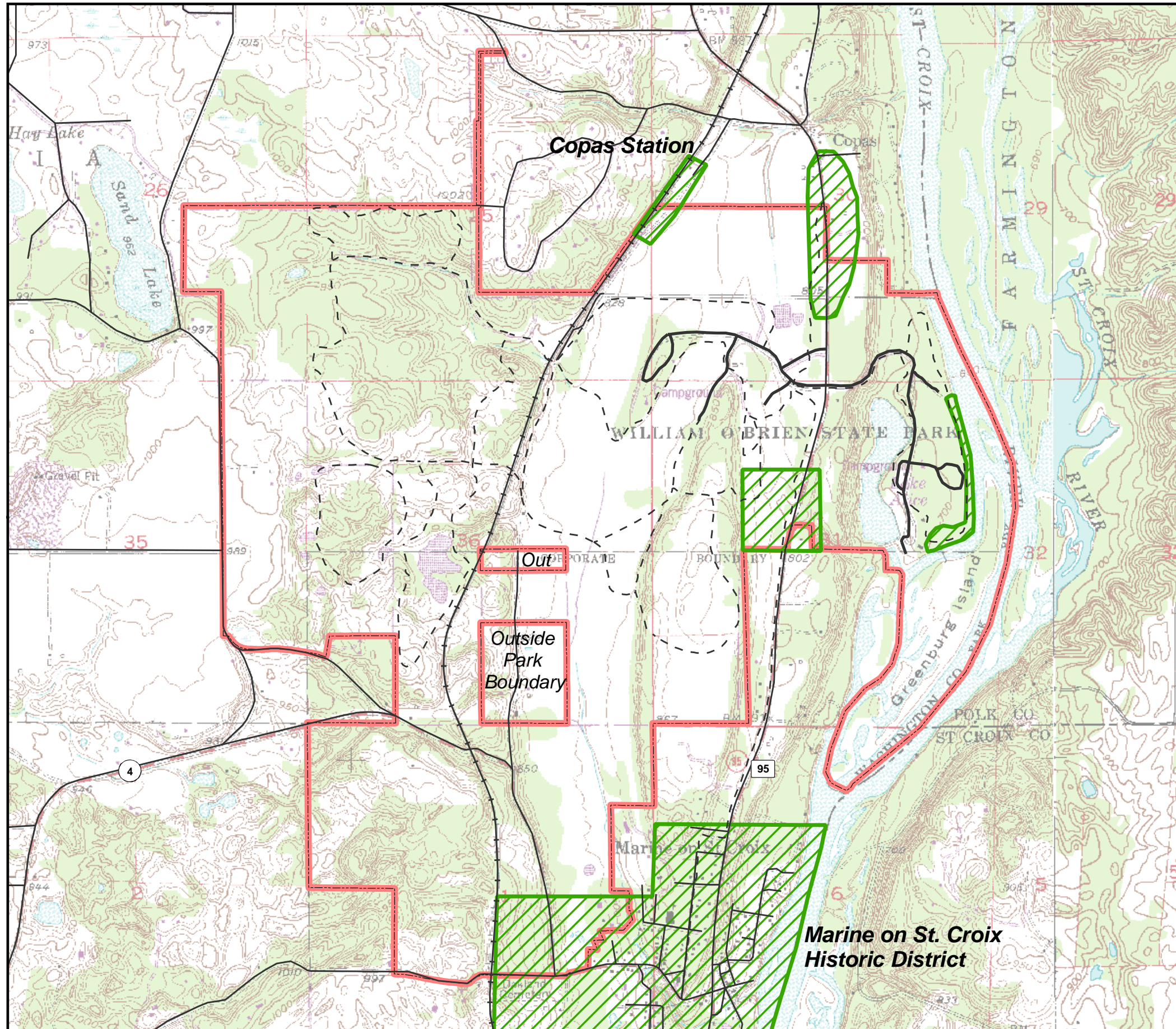
- Protect all cultural resources from vandalism.
- Evaluate impacts of current and future development on cultural resources.
- Locate trails and other development so as not to impact cultural resources. In those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, conduct mitigation so as to preserve the artifacts and information.




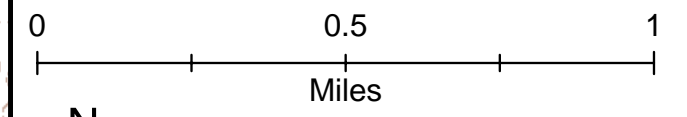
Copas Station, Copas (ca. 1910)  
(Minnesota Historical Society Photographic Collections  
Location No. MW4.9 CP p2 and Negative No. 22107).



**Figure 6: Cultural and Archaeological Resources**  
William O'Brien State Park



-  Cultural or Archaeological Features
-  State Park Boundary
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad



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# INTERPRETIVE SERVICES

The purpose of interpretative services is to provide first-hand, resource-based accessible programs and activities that work to create a sense of connection with and stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage by telling of the park's unique stories and illuminating the changing relationship between people and landscapes over time. DNR Division of Parks and Recreation 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 the natural and cultural resources.

## DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Interpretive Services Goals

The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation views interpretation as a site specific, MDNR sponsored, communication process using recreational and environmental experiences to reveal the meanings and relationships of our natural and cultural heritage. To fulfill its statutory obligation to provide environmental education and interpretation in state parks, the Division's interpretive programs aims at four goals:

- Promote increased understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources in Minnesota
- Assist in protecting each State Park's resources
- Promote public understanding of and support for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and its Division of Parks and Recreation
- Increase public awareness of critical environmental problems on a local, state, national and worldwide scope.

## Goals and Objectives for Interpretive Services at William O'Brien State Park

Through the management plan process involving the Citizen Advisory Committee and the technical advisory team of interagency staff, the following goals for William O'Brien State Park interpretative serves were developed.

### *Goals*

Serving visitors primarily from the metropolitan area, William O'Brien will act as an exemplary introduction to the State Park System, providing varied recreational and educational experiences in a diversity of native landscapes.

Visitors to William O'Brien State Park will understand, value and enjoy the diversity of landscapes, natural features, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities found in the park.

### *Objectives*

- A diversity of interpretive programming will be offered, covering all primary themes during the year.
- Visitors will have opportunities to learn about native plant and animal communities in the park.
- Visitors will be offered opportunities each season to learn outdoor recreational skills that teach appropriate use of the environment and promote stewardship for natural and cultural resources.
- Visitors will receive tips and reminders to recreate in a safe and respectful manner.
- Visitors will be offered interpretive programs that encourage life-long recreational pursuits that promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Programs and services will be offered that will attract new users, youth and special populations.
- Schools using the park for environmental education purposes will be offered interpretive services based upon the park interpretive themes and incorporating the teacher's educational objectives as requested.

## **Interpretive Themes**

The main themes for William O'Brien State Park are outlined in the park's unit interpretive plan and included below.

### *Overarching Interpretive Theme*

William O'Brien State Park contains a mosaic of the native plant and animal communities that thrive within the St. Croix River Valley.

### *Landscape and Natural Communities*

There are five major natural communities within the park: river floodplain, wetlands, upland prairie, hardwoods and oak savanna. The upland native plant communities of the park include prairie, oak savanna, oak woods, and maple-basswood forest. The wetland communities include floodplain forest, hardwood swamps, and extensive marshes and a rare black ash seepage swamp. Several of the plant communities are fire dependent meaning that fire was a part of a naturally occurring cycle that maintained the health and characteristics of the community. The St. Croix River valley is also an important corridor for migrating birds and other wildlife.

### *Recreation*

William O'Brien State Park offers a variety of healthy recreational opportunities in all seasons. Varied topography, scenic vistas and a mosaic of natural communities provide interesting recreational opportunities such as walking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing as healthy ways to get out and enjoy the park. Lake Alice and the St. Croix River also provide high quality water-based recreational experiences such as canoeing and fishing.

### *Wildlife Watching*

Looking and listening for wildlife in the park is a rewarding, life-long recreational hobby. The park sits within the migratory flyway and provides a unique opportunity to catch a glimpse of hundreds of bird species as they move between their summer and winter nesting areas. Other species that the park may reveal include river otters, beaver, woodpeckers, red-shouldered hawk, muskrats, frogs, turtles and many types of waterfowl.

### *Historical*

People have used the St. Croix River Valley for thousands of years. The Ojibwe, Dakota, European explorers, voyageurs and loggers all used the St. Croix River as a major transportation route before Minnesota became a state. Agriculture had a significant impact on the character of the park's landscape and natural communities. The railroads enabled the establishment of towns and businesses along the River. Evidence of the historic railroad town of Copas can still be seen within the park. In 1968, the St. Croix River was one of the first rivers in the nation to be designated as a National Wild and Scenic River.

## **Existing Interpretive Services**

### *Personal and Guided Interpretive Services*

There is one full time year-around naturalist position. Volunteers assist with programs and special events, and guest speakers are used as budgets allow.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, weekend public programs include Friday evening campfire programs and three to four programs on Saturday. Weekday programs are offered for schools and organized groups such as scouts, church groups, recreational day camps, summer schools, home schools and day care programs. Teacher workshops are held for environmental education certification programs such as Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, Project WET and MinnAqua. Outreach programs are provided off-site for service organizations, schools and local libraries as time allows.

Weekend programs for the general public are offered year-round. They include a wide variety of resource based recreational and educational activities. Special program offerings have included a narrated historic train ride, a weekend voyageur encampment, a fly-fishing workshop, Halloween party, firearms and snowmobile safety classes and a spring bluebird workshop. Special events in the winter have included the Marine Ski Race and a candlelight ski event.

#### *Non-personal Interpretation*

The Visitor Center contains a display room, a trail orientation area, and an audio/visual-equipped classroom. Seasonal exhibits, brochures and maps are available at all times. An outdoor council ring provides small group campfire programs near the Visitor Center.

An amphitheater in the lower picnic area provides space for large group orientation and campfire programs.

A fishing pier in the lower area is used for MinnAqua educational fishing clinics.

Other non-personal interpretive opportunities include a self-guided interpretive trail, kiosks and native plant and wildlife community outdoor exhibits. The Park Office provides a display offering timely brochures and activity kits such as the Jr. Park Naturalist Booklets, State Park Explorer Activity Books and Birding Kits.

## **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

#### *Personal Interpretive Efforts*

- Fund a seasonal interpretive support position in order to provide increased public information and education.

**Discussion:** William O'Brien has significant resources and visitor use is high throughout the year with high seasonal peaks. According to the division's statewide interpretive plan, William O'Brien is placed in the Group 4 Category for level of interpretive effort. Parks in this category merit programming 4 to 7 days a week during heavy use periods throughout the year. This category also merits a full-service visitor center, usually open year-round, audio-visual programming; indoor displays and exhibits; supporting interpretive facilities such as information stations, self-guiding trails, wayside exhibits at multiple, developed interpretive locations. Specifically for William O'Brien, the Statewide Interpretive Plan currently recommends 1 year-round park naturalist, 1 seasonal support interpreter and an increased non-personal effort.

- Continue to provide a wide variety of interpretive programming focusing on park themes and offering a seasonal variety of recreational opportunities.

**Discussion:** Skill-based outdoor recreation activities combined with education about the resources of the park helps to build a supportive clientele and protects park resources. Interpretive programming aims to accomplish this as well as to introduce and encourage healthy outdoor activities such as bird watching, wildlife viewing and plant identification. In addition to hiking, skiing and biking these activities keep visitors coming back with minimal impact on park resources. Target audiences should include the growing senior population and also under-represented youth.

#### *Non-Personal Interpretive Efforts*

- Update displays and exhibits for the Visitor Center and Park Office.

**Discussion:** Exhibits should reflect and interpret the major themes developed for the park. Exhibits should be updated as new information is acquired and resource management progresses.

- Improve the public entrance, visitor flow and information services as well as staff office and storage space.

**Discussion:** The entrance and the approach to the exhibit room need to be made more welcoming and easier to identify. Improvements to visitor flow and a more efficient use of the second floor should be explored. A remodel of the former concession area to make a staff office and storage is recommended. A larger classroom space is also needed. These changes will improve visitor experience, information services and group programming. They should also take into account the need for winter program space that is now insufficient in the Visitor Center due to heavy use by skiers.

- Continue to develop non-personal outdoor exhibits and supporting material focused on the park's natural communities.

**Discussion:** A series of outdoor exhibits will interpret the natural communities of the park and expand interpretation beyond the visitor center, bringing it to trail users in the far reaches of the park. Continue to develop brochures, recreational opportunities, environmental education materials and activities that reinforce the major interpretive theme: William O'Brien State Park contains a mosaic of native communities in the St Croix River valley.

- Rehabilitate and update existing self-guided interpretive trail signage and brochures that focus on the park's primary resources, themes and recreational opportunities.
- Develop new non-personal interpretive signs, brochures and new methods of interpretation that may be accessed by electronically.

**Discussion:** As new interpretive media is developed, consider using computer technology. Update the park web site to include interpretive offerings and additional recreational information. The use of digital files may replace or supplement brochures, enhance existing displays, add an audio element to non-personal interpretation or make interpretation available for users to access from off-site. Development of this type of materials may be useful to schools and others as preparation or follow up to a field trip to the park. This type of interpretation is cost effective and less costly to change or update.

#### *Outreach Efforts*

- Promote and increase awareness of the facilities and programs at William O'Brien State Park. Also promote increased visitation of park during weekdays and shoulder seasons when numbers of visitors are lower.

# RECREATIONAL USE AND VISITOR SERVICES

Providing a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities is central to the mission of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation. The park management plan process provides the opportunity to assess what types of recreation people have an interest in and then evaluate whether these options fit appropriately within the park's resource management strategies and complement what is available within the surrounding region.

## Access

State and local governments may not discriminate on the basis of disability (Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 a28 CRF Part 36). Access must be provided to park services, programs and activities. All services when viewed in their entirety must be usable 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 for accessibility. ADA delineated modifications and exceptions that can be applied when necessary to maintain the integrity of an outdoor recreation setting includes such elements as hydrology, terrain, surface characteristics and vegetation. Information regarding accessibility will be available in brochures and on the DNR website ([www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)) to guide visitor expectations.

## Existing Recreational Resources and Facilities

### *Day Use*

#### Picnic and Beach Parking Area

William O'Brien State Park currently offers a large picnic area that includes a swimming beach and fishing pier on Lake Alice. There are 100 picnic tables available as well as three reservable picnic shelters. An amphitheatre for interpretive programming is located near the picnic grounds. The park provides a boat launch on the St Croix River and a concession operation for canoe rental. Currently visitors must cross through the parking lot when walking from the picnic area to the beach. Redesign of this area will address pedestrian safety issues and provide the opportunity to incorporate effective storm water management practices to protect water quality of Lake Alice and the St. Croix River (See Figure 7. All Season Recreation Opportunities).

#### 9 Springs Restoration Area

In 2006, an 18-acre parcel previously managed as a commercial minnow farm operation was restored to a large wetland complex with a network of cold-water stream channels that now support brook trout and native plant species that historically occurred on the site. The area provides interpretive opportunities about wetlands and cold-water streams as well as an insight into the processes used for the restoration. The streams provide a marginal opportunity for fishing.

#### Open Space for Active Recreation

A ball field and horseshoe pits are available for open unprogrammed recreation near the Savanna Campground.

### *Overnight Use*

#### Campgrounds

William O'Brien State Park has two campgrounds. The Riverway Campground has 60 sites (42 with electric service) and a sanitation building. The campground is open seasonally. The Savanna

Campground has 64 sites (18 with electric service) and a sanitation building. This campground is open year round. Campsites in both campgrounds have typical state park amenities including a picnic table, fire ring and parking pad.

Group Camps

William O'Brien State Park contains two Class III Group Camps. The Riverside Group Camp has one site that will accommodate up to 50 people. The Wedge Hill Group Camp has three sites, each accommodating up to 35 people. Water and vault toilets are provided at both group camps.

Hike-in Sites

There are two hike-in sites located at the Wedge Hill Group Camp area.

Camper Cabin

The Savanna Campground currently has one camper cabin. Two additional single cabins and a double-cabin are to be added during 2007.

Contact Station/Park Office

This facility opened in 2005. The building serves as a contact station for visitors entering the park and registering for camping, and offers visitors the opportunity to purchase items from a small Nature Store. The building also provides office space for park staff, a meeting room, a public restroom and storage space. In addition to gift items offered at the Nature Store, visitor can also purchase firewood and ice at the park office. Exhibits provide orientation and information. A public telephone is located at the office - cell phone service is not reliable within the park.

Visitor Center

The visitor center contains an exhibit room, displays, a trail orientation area, and an audio/visual equipped classroom. Seasonal exhibits, brochures and maps are available at all times, as are rest rooms and vending machines. An outdoor council ring provides for campfire programs just outside the center. During the ski season, the center also functions as a trail center and warming house.

Table 11: William O'Brien State Park Visits and Overnight Stays from 1994 to 2005

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total Attendance (in 1,000's)	241.2	245.1	244.6	234.3	240.4	230.1	238.4	225.3	208.3	218.6	223.7	207.8
Total Overnight Attendance (in 1000's)	37.6	36.1	37.2	35.7	38.3	36.5	37.6	35.2	34.0	38.4	38.4	38.3

*Trails*

There are a variety of trail experiences available for park visitors. The trails also provide visitors with the interpretive opportunity to learn about the natural communities within the park.

- 12 miles of hiking trails with varying levels of difficulty
  - 1.5 miles of paved trail
  - 2 miles of handicapped accessible trail
  - 1.5-mile self-guided interpretive trail
  - 1.6-mile trail along the St. Croix River
- 12 miles of skate and classic cross country ski trails
- Snowshoeing is allowed east of Highway 95



Camping at William O'Brien State Park

### Gateway State Trail

Legislation for the Gateway State Trail mandates that a dual tread route (hiking/biking and equestrian) that will link with the park. The state trail will provide a long distance trail opportunities for park visitors. Several potential routes from the state trail were considered during the planning process (See Figure 8: Potential Corridors for Gateway State Trail). Possible spur trails routes were also identified to connect the potential corridors to the state park use areas, including the campground and park office.

Natural and cultural resource impacts were a significant factor for considering possible trail routes. Using existing corridors such as Highway 95 or the Trap Rock rail corridor would reduce the need to create a new corridor through the park. However, the railroad line is unlikely to be abandoned for rail use in the foreseeable future. Where the trail will intersect the park from north and south is also an important concern, although at this time no route outside the park has been determined. Property owned by the City of Marine on the St. Croix and an easement owned by Scandia Township are possible connecting points into the west side of the park. However, portions of the land within the park boundary on the west side of the park have not yet been acquired. Further natural and cultural resource investigations will be the primary consideration for choosing the final route for the trail.

### Equestrian Trails Discussion

During the planning process the Citizens Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Team recommended that equestrian trails not be considered for inclusion within the park due to the potential impacts to natural and recreational resources and the availability of existing equestrian facilities within 50 miles of the park.

The committees noted that the current density of trails is at the carrying capacity of the park. Additional trails within the current park boundary would potentially impact native plant communities and restoration sites and have a negative impact on park experience for trail users. Due to the erodible soils within the park, allowing equestrian use on segments of the existing trail network would cause wear on the trails. The additional use of the trails by horses would require additional funding for staff time and maintenance to ensure the trails are not damaged and will continue to accommodate grooming equipment for cross-county ski trails. It is important to note the planning process recommended that William O'Brien State Park continue to fill the role of serving as a premier cross county ski facility.

Other equestrian opportunities exist in the area surrounding William O'Brien State Park. Wild River State Park has a 20 site equestrian campground (100 person capacity) with 18 miles of trails. St. Croix State Park provides an equestrian loop for camping and 25 miles of trail (as well as 25 miles of the 80 mile Willard Munger Boundary Section Trail that runs through the park). Afton State Park

offers 5 miles of horse trails. The Gateway State Trail currently provides 9.7 miles of horse tread way and will provide an additional 20+ miles when the trail is extended to Interstate State Park. Washington County Parks and Recreation provides 8 miles of trail and equestrian camping facilities at Lake Elmo Regional Park and 5 miles of trail at Pine Point Park. Pine Point Park currently serves as a node on the Gateway State Trail.

## Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations

*Goal:* Improve quality of experience to meet current and future needs and expectations of visitors and overnight guests.

### *Day Use*

#### Picnic/Beach/Boat Launch Area Redesign

Re-design picnic/parking/beach areas to address pedestrian safety issues caused by the current need to cross through the parking lot when walking from the picnic area to the beach.

- Redesign will address safety issues by eliminating existing pedestrian pattern of crossing road and parking lot when leaving picnic area to get to beach area.
- Redesign provides opportunity to incorporate effective storm water management practices to protect water quality of Lake Alice and the St. Croix River.
- The project will be a major redevelopment that will require substantial funding, resource assessment and a new landscape design.

#### Lake Alice

Improve and maintain fishery to provide quality introductory fishing experience for all ages.

- Manage fishery to provide opportunity to catch multiple species and multiple size class fish.
- Provide opportunity for additional fishery education programming.
- Continue to participate with DNR Division of Fisheries and Wildlife *Fishing In Your Neighborhood* (FIN) program.
- Consider utilizing Shelter 3 as a fishing clinic staging area, including placement of an adjacent fishing pier.
- Ensure future development does not impact the existing natural vistas of lake and bluff.

#### 9 Springs Restoration Area

- Define role that the area will serve for visitors, i.e. fishing and outdoors learning center for water resource education.
- Determine level of access for this area when land acquisitions allow direct access from main portion of the park.
- Provide appropriate level of access and support facilities (i.e. parking) for determined use level.

#### Open Space for Active Recreation

- Plant vegetation to screen area from Highway 95.
- Continue to explore options for an alternative recreational use of the area. Alternatives that may be considered include a trailhead and parking area to connect to the Gateway State Trail, or a new campground.

#### Playground

- Explore the opportunities to provide this recreational facility. Locations to consider include both campgrounds and beach/picnic area.
- Use playgrounds to provide interpretive opportunity as well as active play for young campers/visitors.
- Follow Division policy for design and placement of equipment.



## Trails

- Maintain current mix of recreational trail uses – hike, bike, ski, and snowshoeing.
- Continue to have William O'Brien State Park fill the role as one of the high-level ski parks within the state park system. Continue to provide appropriate development that will ensure the park maintains this role including exploring the feasibility of providing snow-making capability and a lighted ski trail segment.
- Develop a safe pedestrian (and bike where appropriate) network for camper and visitors to access facilities in park to minimize use of motorized vehicles.
- Explore feasibility of providing a trail route that connects Savanna and Riverside campgrounds and other activity centers.
- Develop new trails within areas of future acquisitions where appropriate.
- Create trail connection to 9 Springs Restoration site (including interpretive opportunities along trail that highlight hydrologic regime of wetlands, springs and stream).
- Develop a biking/hiking (non-equestrian) link/spur to connect William O'Brien State Park contact station and facilities with the Gateway State Trail, with primary consideration given to minimizing natural and cultural resource impacts.

## *Overnight Use*

### Campgrounds

- Improve quality of experience for current and future needs and expectations of overnight visitors.
- Rearrange current campground layouts to create separation of camping styles, i.e., tenters and camping rigs with generators should have some separation; develop group sites for family/social campers. Look for opportunity to arrange campsites so that visitors with similar camping styles are grouped together.
- Upgrade electric services and other amenities at campsites as appropriate.
- Minimize conflicting visitor uses.
- Consider additional overnight facilities within areas of future acquisitions

### Group Camps

- Investigate opportunities to realign the Wetland Trail that currently passes through the Wedge Hill group camp to create separation of day use and overnight use.
- Explore potential of adding additional campsite to the Wedge Hill group camp.
- Consider planting a vegetative screen to better separate the Riverside group camp overnight use from day use on the Riverside Trail.
- Explore potential of utilizing other areas of the park as additional group camp sites with enhanced amenities while addressing resource management concerns and maintaining separation of day use and overnight use.

### Camper Cabins

- Review potential opportunities to add additional camper cabins in appropriate locations.

### Remote Campsites

- Explore the feasibility of adding hike-in/ski-in sites in proximity of the three existing trail shelters while maintaining separation of day use and overnight use.
- Review other locations within the park to explore feasibility of adding an appropriate number of remote campsites.

### RV Campsites/Loop

- Explore possibility of adding an area with full amenities for RV camping. Areas discussed with potential to accommodate this use include the ball field area which would require vegetative screening and installation of utilities, or the redevelopment of a portion of an existing campground.

### Lodging

- Explore potential for adding housekeeping style accommodations, which currently are not available in the area.

### Additional Facilities

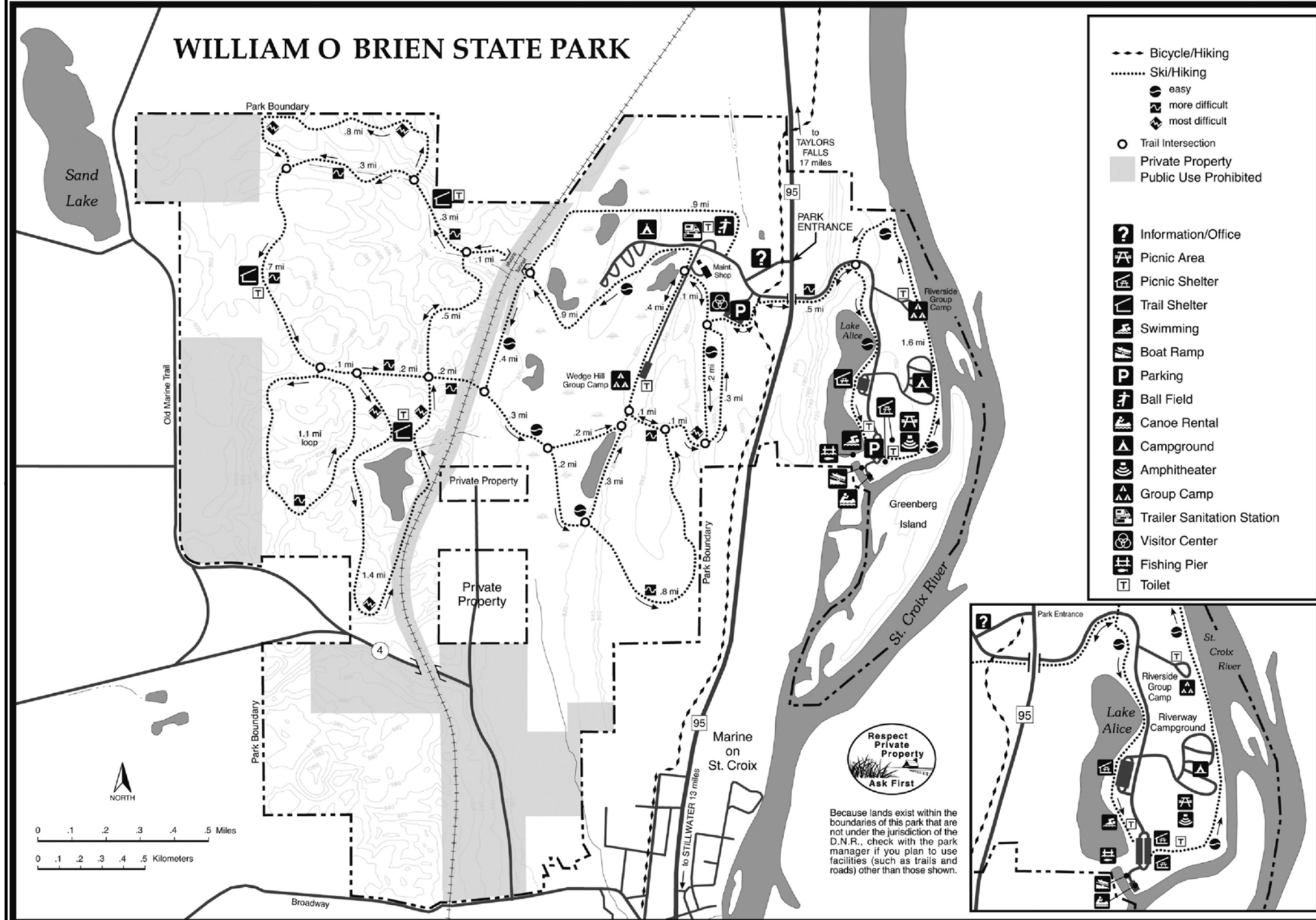
- Consider adding showers facilities for use by campers using remote or group sites, for skiers and for overnight guests in seasons when the campground showers are closed.

### *Potential Recreational Uses for Future Acquisitions*

For newly acquired lands within current statutory park boundary or other lands added to the boundary in the future, the following uses were supported for inclusion in the park during the planning process

- Retreat Center
- Hostel
- Environmental Center
- Group Camp – Class I
- RV Campsites
- Additional Hiking/Ski/Biking Trails
- Accommodate the Gateway State Trail alignment in cooperation with DNR Division of Trails and Waterways

**Figure 7: All Season Recreation Opportunities**  
William O'Brien State Park



Note:

The figure illustrates the range of recreational opportunities and related facilities that are available at William O'Brien State Park.

Summer opportunities include swimming, fishing, boating and canoeing, picnicking, hiking, and camping.

Winter opportunities include hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

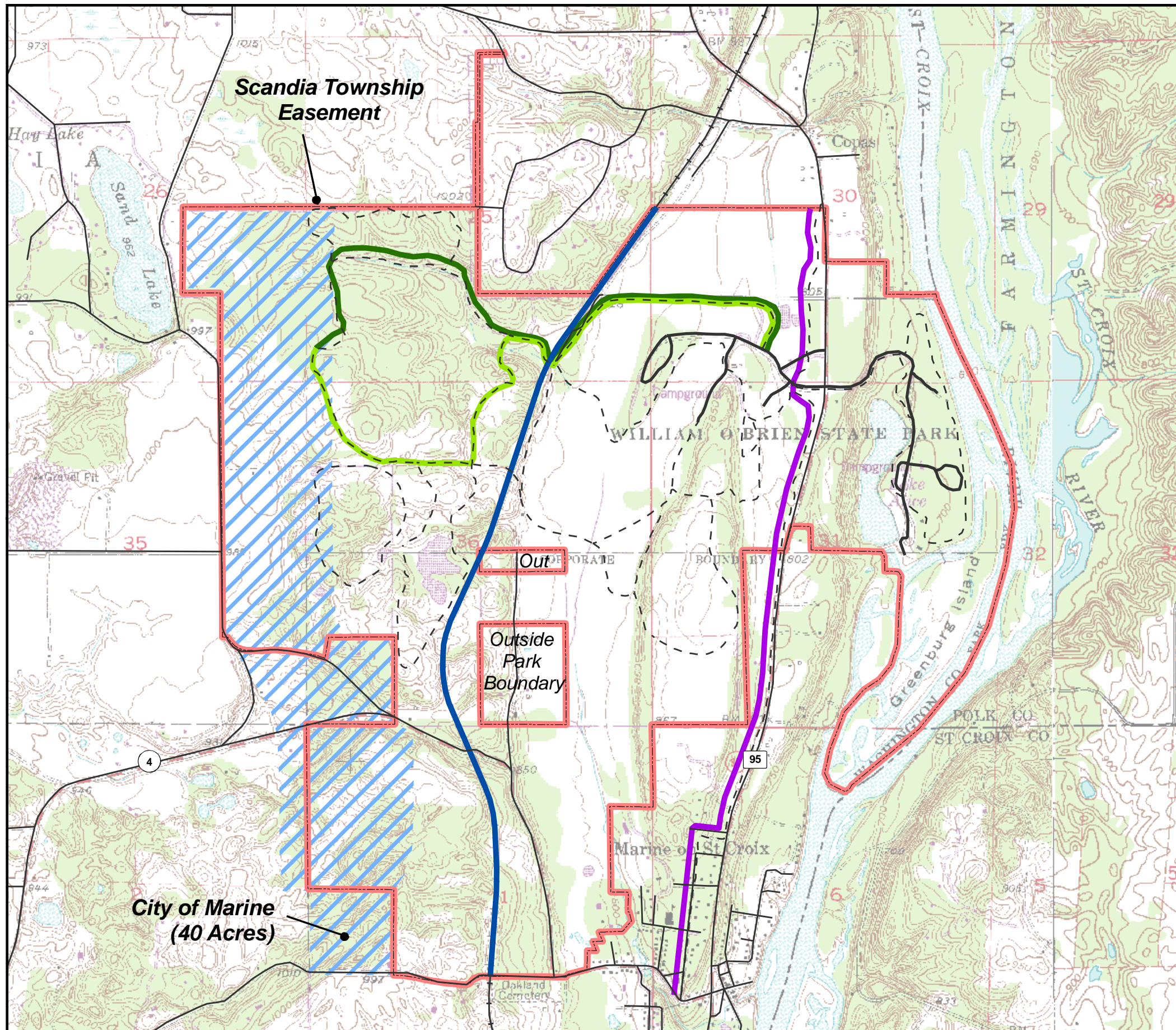


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**Figure 8: Potential Corridors for Gateway State Trail William O'Brien State Park**








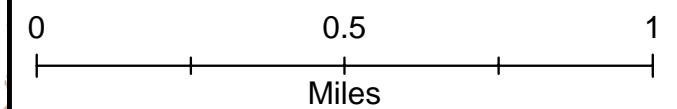
DNR Gateway Trail Corridor Options:

-  Highway 95 Corridor
-  Trap Rock Rail Corridor
-  Western Corridor

Park Spur Trail Connection Options:

-  Northern Option
-  Southern Option

-  State Park Boundary
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad



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# PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This section collects the recommendations from all the chapters of the management plan that involve capital development projects, for example, facility or infrastructure improvements. Other projects not listed below may be initiated that are consistent with the goals of the management plan and are necessary for implementing the recommendations therein.

The Division of Parks and Recreation will follow the Minnesota Sustainable Building Guidelines (MSBG) for the design and construction of new facilities at William O'Brien State Park. Sustainable design is a means to reduce energy expenditures, enhance the health, well-being and productivity of the building occupants, and improve the quality of the natural environment. All new state buildings funded with state bond money since 2004 are required to follow MSBG guidelines. Among the requirements set out in the guidelines:

- Exceed the energy code in effect in January 2004 by at least 30 percent
- Achieve lower possible lifetime cost for new buildings
- Encourage continual energy conservation improvements in new buildings
- Ensure good indoor air quality
- Create and maintain a healthy environment
- Facilitate productivity improvements
- Specify ways to reduce material costs
- Consider the long-term operating costs of the building including the use of renewable energy sources and distributed electric energy generation that uses a renewable source of natural gas or a fuel that is as clean or cleaner than natural gas.

## Proposed Development Projects

### *Visitor Center*

- In the short term, improve the public entrance, visitor flow and information services as well as staff office and storage space.
- Review visitor center and trail center functions and explore potential development of new facilities to resolve conflicting seasonal use patterns of the building.

### *Overnight Use*

- Upgrade electric services and other amenities at campsites as appropriate.
- Consider adding showers as a trail center function for use by skiers and campers using remote and group sites where showers are not currently available.

### *Day Use*

- Consider placement of an additional fishing pier.
- Explore the opportunities to provide playground facilities.
- Relocate current road and parking functions within existing picnic area to integrate picnic area with beach facilities, provide for visitor safety, and improve storm water management.
- At the Ball Field Area, plant vegetative screening to make area less visible from Highway 95 in order to accommodate existing or future uses.

### *Trails*

- Resolve existing and potential trail maintenance and safety issues while minimizing resource impacts.
- Investigate opportunities to realign the Wetland Trail that currently passes through the Wedge Hill group camp to create separation of day use and overnight use.
- Explore feasibility of providing a trail route that connects Savanna and Riverside campgrounds and other activity centers.



- Create a trail connection to 9 Springs Restoration site from the main portion of the park.
- Develop a biking/hiking (non-equestrian) link/spur to connect William O'Brien State Park and facilities with the Gateway State Trail.

*Infrastructure*

- Upgrade existing water lines, roads, electrical systems, other infrastructure and campsites as needed to ensure that William O'Brien State Park continues to serve as an example of a quality state park experience.
- Relocate power lines that cross Lake Alice to improve viewshed.



St. Croix River Canoe Trail

# **PARK BOUNDARY**

The Minnesota State Legislature establishes state park boundaries. A legal park boundary defined in Minnesota Statutes provides staff, citizens and policy makers with a common understanding of which lands are appropriate for inclusion in the park. It is the policy of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation to include within a statutory boundary only those lands where the landowner has agreed to inclusion. The DNR is then authorized to negotiate with willing sellers for acquisition of lands contained within that statutory boundary. Being within a statutory park boundary does not affect the landowner's use of their property. They retain full ownership and rights to the land until they sell their land to the state or another private owner.

As a part of the planning process, the Citizen Advisory Committee reviews the existing state park land base, and considers what boundary alterations should be considered to ensure that natural and cultural resources are protected, and recreational and educational opportunities consistent with the park's mission can be provided. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation reviews those suggestions and at such time as a boundary modification is recommended the Division contacts the affected landowners and ask for their documented support. Local units of government are also contacted at that time.

## **Land and Water Conservation Fund**

Federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (L&WCF) have been used to acquire land or construct recreational facilities in this park. L&WCF grants have contributed to outdoor recreation throughout the US since 1966. By using these funds, the state has agreed to maintain recreational facilities in a manner that promotes safe use and invites public use, and to retain the land in this park solely for outdoor recreation and related support facilities. If the DNR decides that it is essential that lands that were part of a L&WCF project be used for another purpose, it may be possible to replace those lands with other lands that have at least the same fair market value and provide equivalent recreational opportunities. This conversion can only be done with the approval of the National Park Service (NPS) Regional Director (pursuant to Section 6(f)(3) of the L&WCF Act and 36 CFR Part 59). Conversions are coordinated through the Minnesota State Liaison Officer to the NPS. The NPS Regional Director has authority to approve or disapprove conversion requests and/or to reject proposed property substitutions. The Minnesota State Liaison Officer who administers the L&WCF program should review all actions that would cause a significant change of use or park boundary change.

## **Current Park Statutory Boundary**

The existing statutory boundary of William O'Brien State Park includes 2,200.61 acres of which 1,784 acres are owned by the State of Minnesota. The remaining 416 acres remain in private ownership (See *Figure 9: Land Ownership*).

## **Proposed Boundary Modifications**

As Washington County continues to develop, preserving natural areas, wildlife habitat, and water resources will serve an important role in preserving the communities' quality of life. In 2006 the residents of the County passed a 10-year bond referendum that will fund the Open Space Preservation of Water Quality, Woodlands, and other Natural Areas Program. William O'Brien State Park serves as part of the existing open space and parkland in the county, providing natural and cultural resource protection and recreational opportunities. The park is also a part of the St Croix National Scenic Riverway and migratory flyway providing important conservation of resources on a national level.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) carefully considered the opportunities for boundary adjustments for William O'Brien State Park. Committee members were very interested in preserving and buffering the view sheds and habitat within the park to ensure that surrounding development does not intrude into the sense of solitude or impact natural resource values. The CAC used the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's boundary criteria as a guide and developed their own list of criteria to use in looking for potential boundary adjustments that will ensure the natural resources, interpretive and recreational opportunities are protected or enhanced within William O'Brien State Park. The criteria included; buffering the park from impacts of future development, protecting important view sheds that provide the sense of a wilderness experience, protect the river bluff and associated habitat and hydrology, acquire additional river frontage, and work to make connections to significant plant communities and habitat that extends outside current boundary.

Park staff and the Technical Advisory Team reviewed the extensive list of areas identified by the Citizen Advisory Committee and other interested citizens to be considered for park expansion. All of the recommendations were reviewed and the following list of opportunities that meet DNR Division of Parks and Recreation criteria for boundary expansion was developed.

### *Potential Boundary Expansion Areas*

The following parcels should be evaluated to determine if there are natural or cultural resource, recreational or administrative reasons that they should be added to the park statutory boundary (See Figure 10: Proposed Boundary Adjustments).

Area 1: Approximately 40 acres, or at minimum the 20 acres north of Old Marine Trail

- Provides resource protection
- Protects St. Croix Valley viewshed upstream towards Osceola, Wisconsin
- Serves administrative purpose of better defining park boundary

Area 2: Sixteen-acre parcel currently for sale along Highway 95 southeast edge of park boundary

- Serves administrative purpose of better defining park boundary
- Protects viewshed into park from Highway 95

Area 3: Quant Avenue area (approximately 50 acres)

- Serves administrative purpose to better define park boundary with roads serving as borders
- Provides resource protection for springs and headwaters of Mill Stream

Area 4: Approximately 80 acres directly north of the park

- Provides Buffer for high quality woodland community currently within park
- Provides protection of recreation resources (trail) from existing erosion problems

Area 5: Forty-acre parcel owned by the City of Marine on the St. Croix

- Buffers high quality resources
- Provides resource management opportunity to enhance quality of existing forest plant community and control of invasive species

Area 6: Wetlands area north of the park and east of railroad line (approximately 33 acres)

- Provides management opportunity of wetland community and control of invasive species
- Buffers existing wetland plant community

An additional area for future consideration is river frontage. Additional river frontage for the park would be desirable to provide additional public access and to preserve or restore river shoreline along the St. Croix. The Division of Parks and Recreation will work with interested private landowners to evaluate riverfront parcels for inclusion in the park boundary and acquisition for the state park.



### *Potential Boundary Deletion Area*

The following area should be evaluated to determine if there are natural or cultural resource, recreational or administrative reasons that they should be retained within the park statutory boundary (See Figure 11: Proposed Boundary Adjustments).

#### Northern access: "periscope"

A narrow corridor was acquired as part of the purchase of a larger parcel. The corridor extended north to provide access from the parcel to a public road. The southern half of the corridor is fee title owned by the state, while the northern half connecting the road is an easement. At one time the corridor was a potential access route into park property west of railroad. However, other access points to western edge of park are now available and the corridor is no longer needed. If the Division does not acquire the lands described as Area 4 above, the corridor could be sold to the adjacent property owners.

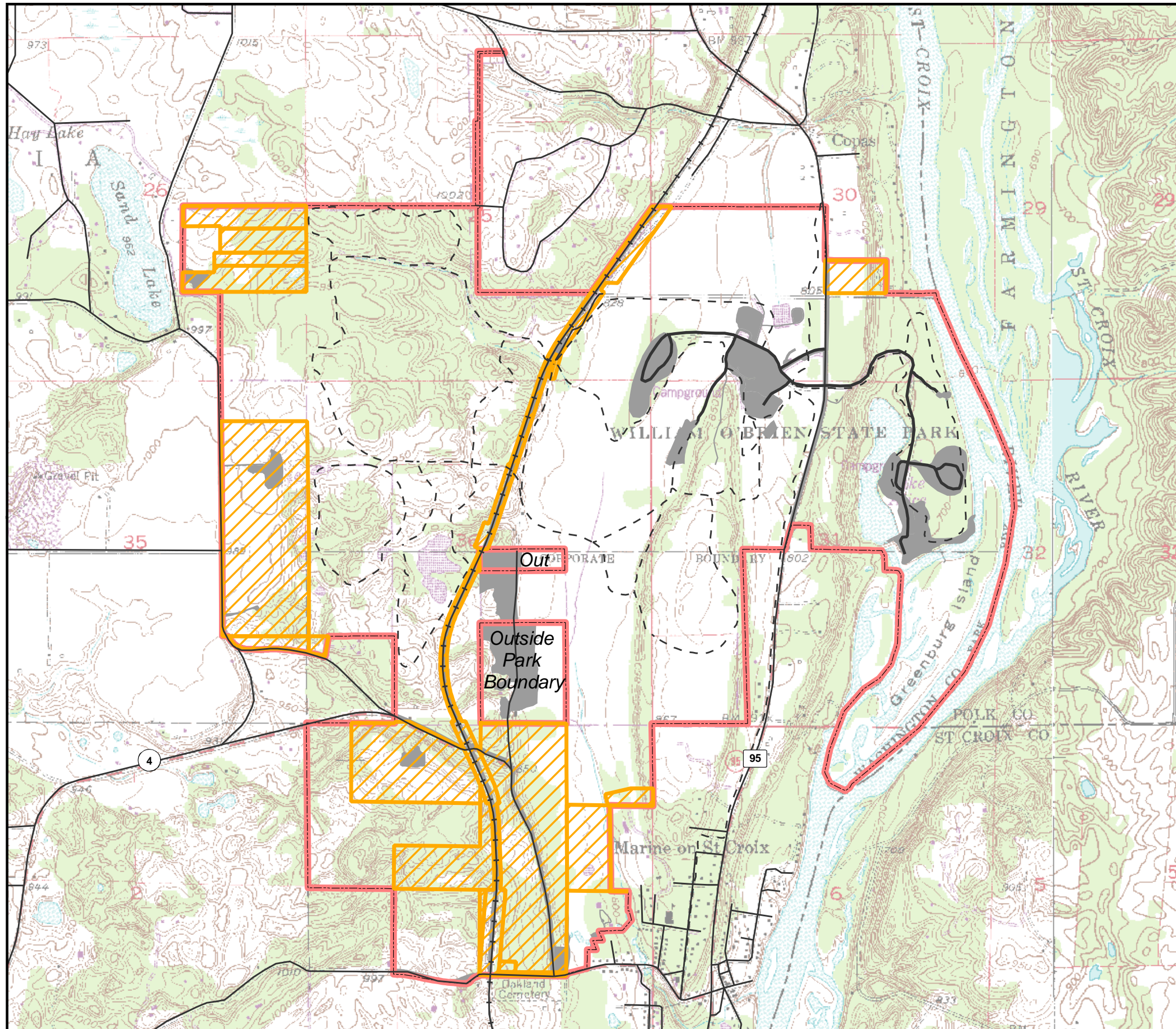
Within the potential expansion and deletion areas described above, the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation will seek to work cooperatively with neighboring landowners to preserve natural and cultural resources, recreational opportunities and important view sheds. Conservation easements, coordinated resource management efforts and other actions will be investigated for achieving Division goals in cooperation with continued private ownership. The Division would focus any acquisition efforts on undeveloped lands and parcels with important natural resource qualities or restoration potential. The Division will seek to avoid or minimize purchase of homes or other development that would increase acquisition costs.








### **Park Boundary Recommendations**

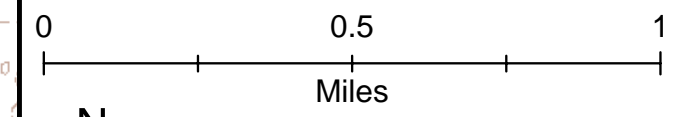
- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the current park statutory boundary that support the Division's mission to protect and perpetuate the diverse natural, scenic, and cultural resources of the landscape's within the St. Croix Valley for low impact use, education and enjoyment of park visitors.
- Consider park statutory boundary changes as described in the plan and supported by the property owner.
- Work with special interest groups and local and county units of government to develop education and stewardship opportunities to be implemented by surrounding land owners and park neighbors on their property to buffer and protect and enhance significant natural resources and important view sheds.
- Support the use of a range of conservation tools in working with neighboring communities, special interest groups, county and regional units of government, and property owners; as they implement conservation measures including conservation easements, cooperative resource management projects, and expansion of the park statutory boundary for acquiring high resource value lands.
- Collaborate with Washington County's Open Space Preservation of Water Quality, Woodlands, and Other Natural Areas Program, when appropriate, to add lands that protect park's natural and cultural resources and view sheds.
- Add land that will potentially provide opportunities to achieve resource protection and management goals, preserve view sheds, improve park administrative management or accommodate the Gateway State Trail.



**Figure 9: Land Ownership**  
William O'Brien State Park



-  Privately-Owned Parcels
-  William O'Brien Statutory Boundary
-  Developed Land
-  State Park Hiking Trails
-  State Park Roads
-  MN DOT Roads
-  MN DOT Railroad

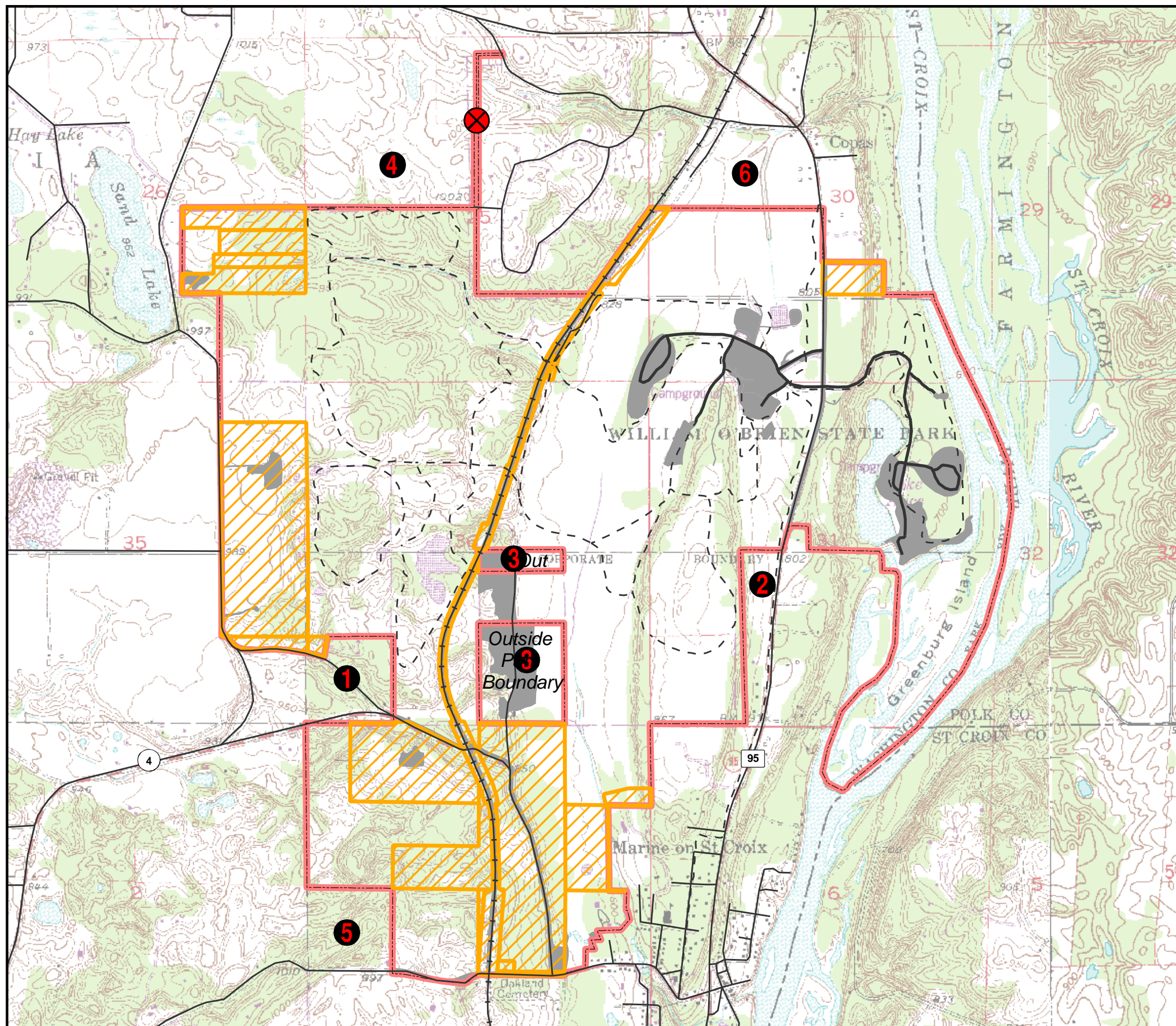


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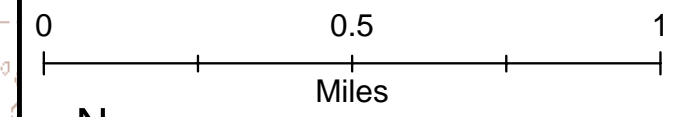
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**Figure 10: Proposed Boundary Adjustments**  
William O'Brien State Park



- 1 - 6** Proposed Boundary Addition Areas
- X** Proposed Boundary Deletion
- Privately-Owned Parcels
- William O'Brien Statutory Boundary
- Developed Land
- State Park Hiking Trails
- State Park Roads
- MN DOT Roads
- MN DOT Railroad



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# SIGNIFICANT AREAS MAPPING

Significant Areas Mapping (SAM) is an integrated approach by which the natural and cultural resources in a park are first identified in terms of their significance and then assessed in terms of their capacity to provide opportunities for visitor experiences.

The SAM process has two parts – assessing present conditions and assessing desired future conditions. First, the park's significant natural and cultural resources are identified and then potential recreational and interpretive opportunities and conflicts from visitor uses are assessed for impacts to the resources.

The purpose of the SAM process is to help identify areas for improvement in the way the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation manages how people interact with resources in state parks. It aids in addressing existing problems as well as in planning how to avoid new ones. It can also take better advantage of where the interaction between visitors and resources are positive – through interpretation and education.

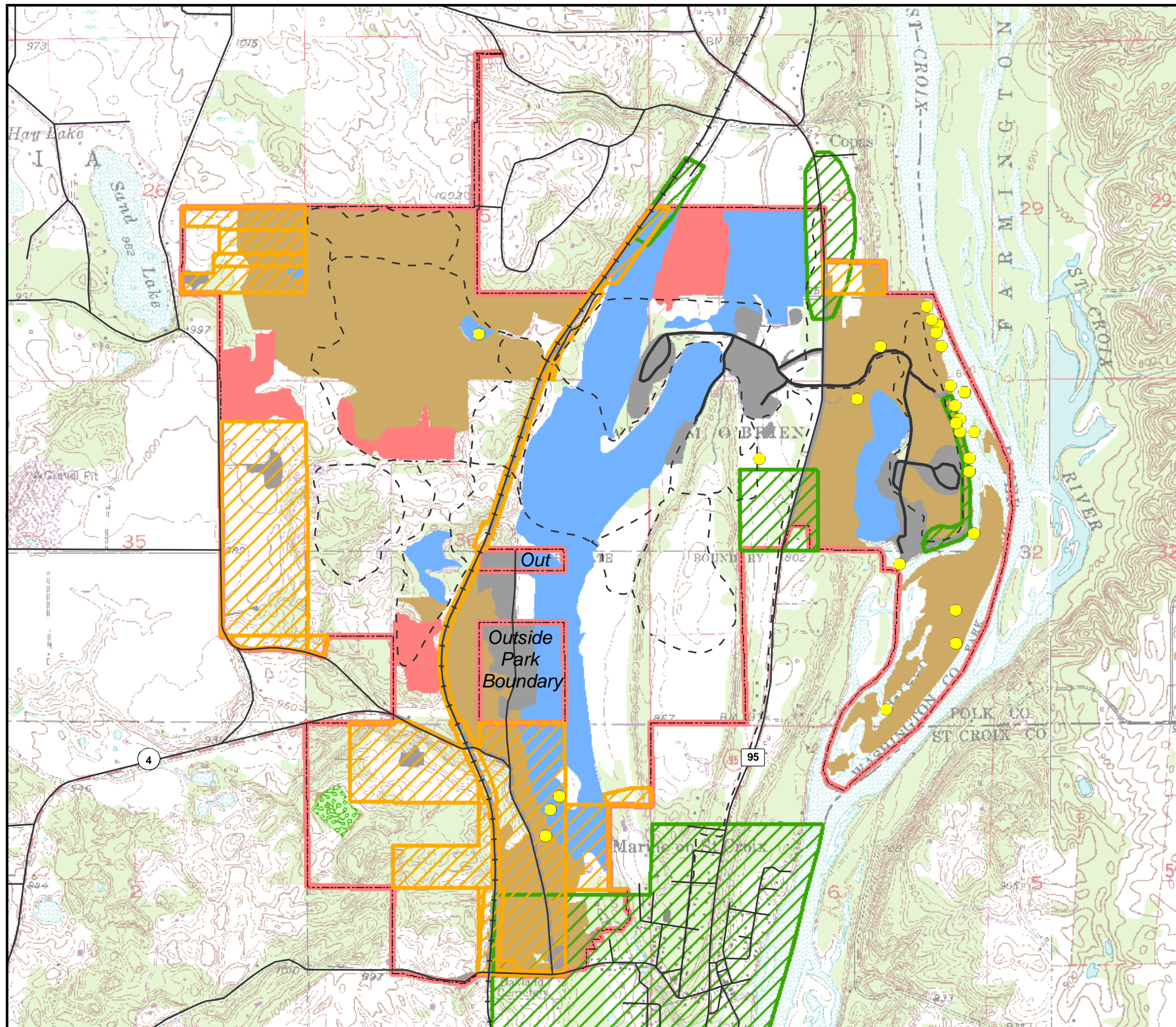
With input from the Citizens Advisory Committee and the public, the SAM process led to a discussion of how to locate visitor uses and monitor resource impacts and define management strategies for resource protection and recreational use within the park.














The recommendations within the Recreation section and the Desired Future Conditions under the Natural and Cultural Resource sections are the results of using the SAM process during the William O'Brien State Park management planning process (See Figure 11. Significant Area Map).

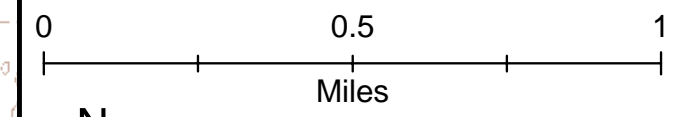




**Figure 11: Significant Areas Map**  
William O'Brien State Park



-  Rare and Natural Feature
  -  Cultural or Archaeological Feature
  -  Private Land Ownership
  -  Developed Land
  -  Re-invest in Minnesota (RIM) Easement
- Important Plant Communities:
-  Native Plant Community
  -  Restoration Site
  -  Wetlands
-  State Park Boundary
  -  State Park Hiking Trails
  -  State Park Roads
  -  MN DOT Roads
  -  MN DOT Railroad



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# PARK OPERATIONS

Current staffing at William O'Brien State Park includes:

- Park Manager (full-time)
- Assistant Park Manager (full-time)
- Naturalist (full-time)
- OAS Intermediate (full-time)
- Buildings and Grounds Workers (3 full-time, one serves as security)
- Parks Workers (seasonal, April – October)
- Natural Resource Workers (seasonal, May – August)
- Green View Workers
- Interns

## Enforcement

Law Enforcement within the park will comply with guidelines in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Enforcement Manual (March 2001) and Minnesota State Park Rules (2000).

The park manager and assistant park manager have limited enforcement authority within the William O'Brien State Park boundary. For assistance, they may call on other law enforcement agencies including Minnesota Department of Natural Resources conservation officers, the Washington County Sheriff's Department and the National Park Service. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation will continue to work with local authorities to assure effective law enforcement in the park.

## Operating and Staffing Issues

William O'Brien State Park has relatively few operational or staffing issues. Providing and continuing to improve quality interpretive services was identified as an important goal during the planning process.

## Park Operations Recommendations

- Bring naturalist staffing up to full funding as called for in the Statewide Interpretive Plan by funding a seasonal interpretive support position and 2-3 interns (See also Interpretive Services).
- Upgrade existing water lines, roads, electrical systems, other infrastructure and campsites as needed to ensure that William O'Brien State Park continues to serve as an example of a quality state park experience (See also Proposed Development).
- Relocate power lines that cross Lake Alice to improve viewshed (See also Proposed Development).





# PLAN MODIFICATION PROCESS

DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's management plans document a partnership-based planning process, and the recommended actions resulting from that process. These comprehensive plans recognize that all aspects of park management are interrelated, and that management recommendations should also be interrelated.

Over time, however, conditions change that effect some of the plan recommendations or even an entire plan. Plans need to acknowledge changing conditions, and be flexible enough to allow for modifications as needed.

There are two scales or types of plan modifications: plan revisions and plan amendments. Minor plan revisions concern less controversial issues and can generally be made within the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation as plan modifications. Larger issues that represent changes in management direction or involve other portions of the Department or other state agencies are addressed as plan amendments. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Planning Manager will make the decision of whether a plan amendment or plan revision is appropriate.

To maintain consistency between plans and processes, all revisions and amendments will be coordinated through the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning section. Requests for planning assistance should be directed to the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Planning Manager in the Central Office, St. Paul.

## Plan Amendments

### *Plan Amendment Criteria*

The criteria outlined below will be used to determine whether the proposed change warrants a plan amendment:

The proposed change:

- Alters the mission, vision, goals, specific management objectives, or proposed development plans outlined in the plan;
- Is controversial between elected officials and boards, park user groups, the public, adjacent landowners, other DNR divisions or state agencies; or
- Directly affects other state agencies (e.g., Minnesota Historical Society).

### *Plan Amendment Process*

The plan amendment process has a series of steps.

1. Review the proposed change at the state park and regional level. Determine which stakeholders potentially have a major concern and how those concerns should be addressed. If the major concerns are within the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation, the issue should be resolved within the Division, with input from the public. The proposed change is then reviewed with the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Management Team
2. If the proposed change involves other DNR Divisions, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the affected Division Directors. This may require one or two area/regional integrated resource management team meetings. The proposed change will be reviewed through the DNR Regional Interdisciplinary Review Service (RIRS).
3. If the proposed change issue involves other state agencies, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Management Team - with input from the public - and reviewed by RIRS.

4. If the proposed change is potentially controversial among elected boards, park user groups, adjacent landowners or the public, an open house will be held that is advertised in the local and regional area.
5. All plan amendments should be coordinated, documented, and distributed by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning staff.

## **Plan Revisions**

If a plan change is recommended that does not meet the amendment criteria above, and generally follows the intent of the management plan, the Department has the discretion to modify the plan without a major planning process.

### *Revisions related to Physical Development Constraints and Resource Protection*

Detailed engineering and design work may not allow the development to be completed exactly as it is outlined in the plan. A relatively minor modification, such as moving a proposed building site to accommodate various physical concerns, is common. Plans should outline a general direction and document the general "areas" for development rather than specific locations. For the most part, plans are conceptual, not detail-oriented. Prior to development, proposed development sites are examined for the presence of protected Minnesota Natural Heritage Program elements and historical/archeological artifacts. If any are found, the planned project may have to be revised to accommodate the protection of these resources.

### *Program Revisions*

The resource management and interpretive services plan sections should be updated periodically as needed. The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's Resource Management and Interpretive staff will determine when an update is needed, and coordinate the revision with the Division planning section. Program sections should be rewritten in a format consistent with the plan as originally approved by the Department. To retain consistency, DNR Division of Parks and Recreation planning section will be involved in the revision review, editing and distribution.

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Quinn, Ed. 2005. *Preventing the Spread of Terrestrial Exotic Species on DNR Managed Lands: Best Management Practices (Site Level Guidelines) to Control the Spread of Noxious Weeds Draft # 4*. Division of Parks and Recreation, MNDNR St. Paul, MN

Wisconsin Department of Administration. 2004. *Final Population Projections for Wisconsin Counties by Age and Sex: 2000-2030*. Demographics Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration, Madison, WI.

Additional on-line sources of information used in this plan are listed below.

Explore Minnesota – Minnesota Office of Tourism  
<http://www.exploreminnesota.com/home.aspx>

Marine on St. Croix Historic District – Marine Mill  
National Register of Historic Places <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com> and Minnesota  
Historical Society <http://events.mnhs.org/media/kits/sites/mm/>

Metropolitan Council – Land Use in the Twin Cities Region.  
<http://gis.metc.state.mn.us/landuse/tables.asp>

Minnesota Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis/Land  
Management Information Center <http://www.lmic.state.mn.us/chouse/soil.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Minnesota County Biological Survey  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Ecological Classification System  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecs/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Natural Heritage Information System  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nhnrp/nhis.html>

National Climatic Data Center and Illinois State Water Survey - Midwestern Regional Climate Center  
[http://mcc.sws.uiuc.edu/climate\\_midwest/mwclimate\\_data\\_summaries.htm#](http://mcc.sws.uiuc.edu/climate_midwest/mwclimate_data_summaries.htm#)

NOAA Satellite and Information Service – National Climatic Data Center, U.S. Department of Commerce  
[http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climatenormals/clim60/states/Clim\\_MN\\_01.pdf](http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climatenormals/clim60/states/Clim_MN_01.pdf)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (WSS).  
<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/>



# APPENDIX - PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

## Natural Resources Recommendations

### *Native Plant Communities and Rare Plants*

- Preserve and protect plant communities with outstanding, high or moderate biodiversity designations.
- Reconstruct native plant communities on undeveloped areas (not planned for development) of the park such that they can be restored to assessed levels of potential biodiversity and then maintained.
- Preserve and perpetuate populations of the listed plant species documented in the park and any other rare plant species that are discovered in the future.
- Maintain old fields in herbaceous vegetation until reconstruction of native plant communities can begin.
- Land use can have detrimental effects on the quality and quantity and availability of groundwater in the future. Groundwater is an important component of many of the sensitive resources and plant communities within the park. Working in partnership with Washington County to monitor water resources and implement the County Groundwater Plan will ensure water resources and the associated plant communities and habitat are protected far into the future.

### *Native Wildlife*

- Complete inventories of taxa have not been adequately inventoried.
- Manage populations of deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not adversely impacted.
- Improve habitat to assist with reintroduction of desirable species
- Use current methods and technologies to control exotic and invasive species (keeping current with new research and methodologies).
- Create a management plan in collaboration with the Division of Fish and Wildlife for Lake Alice to maintain a healthy sport fishery including the continued collection of data about the existing fish population - species, age classes, diversity. Challenges in maintaining the fishery include refining stocking program to ensure multiple age classes exist, and dealing with occasional spring flooding events where fish species adapted to the river environment are introduced back into Lake Alice from the St. Croix River.
- Maintain the 9 Springs Restoration area as an example of the unique ecosystem representing stream systems that were once abundant in the St. Croix valley.

## Cultural Resources Recommendations

- Protect all cultural resources from vandalism.
- Evaluate impacts of current and future development on cultural resources.
- Locate trails and other development so as not to impact cultural resources. In those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, conduct mitigation so as to preserve the artifacts and information.

## Interpretive Services Recommendations

### *Personal Interpretive Efforts*

- Fund a seasonal interpretive support position in order to provide increased public information and education.

**Discussion:** William O'Brien has significant resources and visitor use is high throughout the year with high seasonal peaks. According to the division's statewide interpretive plan, William O'Brien is placed in the Group 4 Category for level of interpretive effort. Parks in this category merit programming 4 to 7 days a week during heavy use periods throughout the year. This category also merits a full-service visitor center, usually open year-round, audio-visual programming; indoor displays and exhibits; supporting interpretive facilities such as information stations, self-guiding trails, wayside exhibits at multiple, developed interpretive locations. Specifically for William O'Brien, the Statewide Interpretive Plan currently recommends 1 year-round park naturalist, 1 seasonal support interpreter and an increased non-personal effort.

- Continue to provide a wide variety of interpretive programming focusing on park themes and offering a seasonal variety of recreational opportunities.

**Discussion:** Skill-based outdoor recreation activities combined with education about the resources of the park helps to build a supportive clientele and protects park resources. Interpretive programming aims to accomplish this as well as to introduce and encourage healthy outdoor activities such as bird watching, wildlife viewing and plant identification. In addition to hiking, skiing and biking these activities keep visitors coming back with minimal impact on park resources. Target audiences should include the growing senior population and also under-represented youth.

#### *Non-Personal Interpretive Efforts*

- Update displays and exhibits for the Visitor Center and Park Office.

**Discussion:** Exhibits should reflect and interpret the major themes developed for the park. Exhibits should be updated as new information is acquired and resource management progresses.

- Improve the public entrance, visitor flow and information services as well as staff office and storage space.

**Discussion:** The entrance and the approach to the exhibit room need to be made more welcoming and easier to identify. Improvements to visitor flow and a more efficient use of the second floor should be explored. A remodel of the former concession area to make a staff office and storage is recommended. A larger classroom space is also needed. These changes will improve visitor experience, information services and group programming. They should also take into account the need for winter program space that is now insufficient in the Visitor Center due to heavy use by skiers.

- Continue to develop non-personal outdoor exhibits and supporting material focused on the park's natural communities.

**Discussion:** A series of outdoor exhibits will interpret the natural communities of the park and expand interpretation beyond the visitor center, bringing it to trail users in the far reaches of the park. Continue to develop brochures, recreational opportunities, environmental education materials and activities that reinforce the major interpretive theme: William O'Brien State Park contains a mosaic of native communities in the St Croix River valley.

- Rehabilitate and update existing self-guided interpretive trail signage and brochures that focus on the park's primary resources, themes and recreational opportunities.
- Develop new non-personal interpretive signs, brochures and new methods of interpretation that may be accessed by electronically.

**Discussion:** As new interpretive media is developed, consider using computer technology. Update the park web site to include interpretive offerings and additional recreational information. The use of digital files may replace or supplement brochures, enhance existing displays, add an audio element to non-personal interpretation or make interpretation available for users to access from off-site. Development of this type of materials may be useful to schools and others as preparation or follow up to a field trip to the park. This type of interpretation is cost effective and less costly to change or update.

#### *Outreach Efforts*

- Promote and increase awareness of the facilities and programs at William O'Brien State Park. Also promote increased visitation of park during weekdays and shoulders seasons when numbers of visitors are lower.

## **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations**

#### *Day Use*

##### Picnic/Beach/Boat Launch Area Redesign

Re-design picnic/parking/beach areas to address pedestrian safety issues caused by the current need to cross through the parking lot when walking from the picnic area to the beach.

- Redesign will address safety issues by eliminating existing pedestrian pattern of crossing road and parking lot when leaving picnic area to get to beach area.
- Redesign provides opportunity to incorporate effective storm water management practices to protect water quality of Lake Alice and the St. Croix River.
- The project will be a major redevelopment that will require substantial funding, resource assessment and a new landscape design.

##### Lake Alice

Improve and maintain fishery to provide quality introductory fishing experience for all ages.

- Manage fishery to provide opportunity to catch multiple species and multiple size class fish.
- Provide opportunity for additional fishery education programming.
- Continue to participate with DNR Division of Fisheries and Wildlife *Fishing In Your Neighborhood* (FIN) program.
- Consider utilizing Shelter 3 as a fishing clinic staging area, including placement of an adjacent fishing pier.
- Ensure future development does not impact the existing natural vistas of lake and bluff.

##### 9 Springs Restoration Area

- Define role that the area will serve for visitors, i.e. fishing and outdoors learning center for water resource education.
- Determine level of access for this area when land acquisitions allow direct access from main portion of the park.
- Provide appropriate level of access and support facilities (i.e. parking) for determined use level.

##### Open Space for Active Recreation

- Plant vegetation to screen area from Highway 95.
- Continue to explore options for an alternative recreational use of the area. Alternatives that may be considered include a trailhead and parking area to connect to the Gateway State Trail, or a new campground.

### Playground

- Explore the opportunities to provide this recreational facility. Locations to consider include both campgrounds and beach/picnic area.
- Use playgrounds to provide interpretive opportunity as well as active play for young campers/visitors.
- Follow Division policy for design and placement of equipment.

### Trails

- Maintain current mix of recreational trail uses – hike, bike, ski, and snowshoeing.
- Continue to have William O'Brien State Park fill the role as one of the high-level ski parks within the state park system. Continue to provide appropriate development that will ensure the park maintains this role including exploring the feasibility of providing snow-making capability and a lighted ski trail segment.
- Develop a safe pedestrian (and bike where appropriate) network for camper and visitors to access facilities in park to minimize use of motorized vehicles.
- Explore feasibility of providing a trail route that connects Savanna and Riverside campgrounds and other activity centers.
- Develop new trails within areas of future acquisitions where appropriate.
- Create trail connection to 9 Springs Restoration site (including interpretive opportunities along trail that highlight hydrologic regime of wetlands, springs and stream).
- Develop a biking/hiking (non-equestrian) link/spur to connect William O'Brien State Park contact station and facilities with the Gateway State Trail, with primary consideration given to minimizing natural and cultural resource impacts.

## *Overnight Use*

### Campgrounds

- Improve quality of experience for current and future needs and expectations of overnight visitors.
- Rearrange current campground layouts to create separation of camping styles, i.e., tents and camping rigs with generators should have some separation; develop group sites for family/social campers. Look for opportunity to arrange campsites so that visitors with similar camping styles are grouped together.
- Upgrade electric services and other amenities at campsites as appropriate.
- Minimize conflicting visitor uses.
- Consider additional overnight facilities within areas of future acquisitions

### Group Camps

- Investigate opportunities to realign the Wetland Trail that currently passes through the Wedge Hill group camp to create separation of day use and overnight use.
- Explore potential of adding additional campsite to the Wedge Hill group camp.
- Consider planting a vegetative screen to better separate the Riverside group camp overnight use from day use on the Riverside Trail.
- Explore potential of utilizing other areas of the park as additional group camp sites with enhanced amenities while addressing resource management concerns and maintaining separation of day use and overnight use.

### Camper Cabins

- Review potential opportunities to add additional camper cabins in appropriate locations.

### Remote Campsites

- Explore the feasibility of adding hike-in/ski-in sites in proximity of the three existing trail shelters while maintaining separation of day use and overnight use.
- Review other locations within the park to explore feasibility of adding an appropriate number of remote campsites.

### RV Campsites/Loop

- Explore possibility of adding an area with full amenities for RV camping. Areas discussed with potential to accommodate this use include the ball field area which would require vegetative screening and installation of utilities, or the redevelopment of a portion of an existing campground.

### Lodging

- Explore potential for adding housekeeping style accommodations, which currently are not available in the area.

### Additional Facilities

- Consider adding showers facilities for use by campers using remote or group sites, for skiers and for overnight guests in seasons when the campground showers are closed.

### *Potential Recreational Uses for Future Acquisitions*

For newly acquired lands within current statutory park boundary or other lands added to the boundary in the future, the following uses were supported for inclusion in the park during the planning process

- Retreat Center
- Hostel
- Environmental Center
- Group Camp – Class I
- RV Campsites
- Additional Hiking/Ski/Biking Trails
- Accommodate the Gateway State Trail alignment in cooperation with DNR Division of Trails and Waterways

## **Park Boundary Recommendations**

- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the current park statutory boundary that support the Division's mission to protect and perpetuate the diverse natural, scenic, and cultural resources of the landscape's within the St. Croix Valley for low impact use, education and enjoyment of park visitors.
- Consider park statutory boundary changes as described in the plan and supported by the property owner.
- Work with special interest groups and local and county units of government to develop education and stewardship opportunities to be implemented by surrounding land owners and park neighbors on their property to buffer and protect and enhance significant natural resources and important view sheds.
- Support the use of a range of conservation tools in working with neighboring communities, special interest groups, county and regional units of government, and property owners; as they implement conservation measures including conservation easements, cooperative resource management projects, and expansion of the park statutory boundary for acquiring high resource value lands.
- Collaborate with Washington County's Open Space Preservation of Water Quality, Woodlands, and Other Natural Areas Program, when appropriate, to add lands that protect park's natural and cultural resources and view sheds.
- Add land that will potentially provide opportunities to achieve resource protection and management goals, preserve view sheds, improve park administrative management or accommodate the Gateway State Trail.



## **Park Operations Recommendations**

- Bring naturalist staffing up to full funding as called for in the Statewide Interpretive Plan by funding a seasonal interpretive support position and 2-3 interns (See also Interpretive Services).
- Upgrade existing water lines, roads, electrical systems, other infrastructure and campsites as needed to ensure that William O'Brien State Park continues to serve as an example of a quality state park experience (See also Proposed Development).
- Relocate power lines that cross Lake Alice to improve viewshed (See also Proposed Development).