

# Destination Minnesota:

## *A New Direction for Minnesota State Parks and Trails*

A Report of the State Parks and Trails Future Strategies Committee



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### **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Mission Statement**

*Our mission 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.*

### **Division of Parks and Trails Vision Statement**

*Our vision is to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.*

Pursuant to *Minnesota Statutes*, section 3.197, the cost of preparing this report was \$70,200.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Purpose of the Committee**

The State Parks and Trails Future Strategies Committee was established by the Commissioner of Natural Resources to provide guidance and recommendations for ensuring a high-quality, sustainable state park and trail system as directed by the Legislature. The committee charge includes recommendations to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in the following areas:

1. long-term funding options to reduce reliance on General Fund appropriations for maintaining and operating state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest day-use areas;
2. criteria and considerations for optimizing the system of state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest day-use areas to ensure investment focuses on Minnesota's most important natural resources and the highest-quality recreational opportunities; and
3. recommendations for innovative programs and initiatives to increase outdoor recreation participation among Minnesotans and visitors to the state.

The committee's work is aligned with the directions contained in the *Division of Parks and Trail Strategic Plan* (2012).

### **Process and Schedule**

The State Parks and Trails Future Strategies Committee was chaired by former legislators Dennis Ozment and Becky Lourey, and included representation from tourism, state and regional park and trail organizations, health care and recreation providers. See Appendix C for more information about the committee members.

The Future Strategies Committee focused on developing recommendations around each of the three areas of the committee purpose. The committee began its work in May 2012, met monthly, and concluded in December 2012 with final review and approval of the recommendations. The committee spent considerable time discussing the issues and opportunities in each area, considering data presented by DNR staff and committee members. The committee operated on a consensus basis.

### **Committee Vision**

The challenges of today's fiscal climate provide an opportunity to re-evaluate, redefine and create an affordable and accessible state park and trail system to connect people to the outdoors, create a new generation of park and trail users, provide high-quality recreational opportunities, protect our natural and cultural resources, and support local tourism and jobs.

### **Committee Recommendations**

#### ***Long-term funding options to reduce reliance on General Fund appropriations***

The state's General Fund has historically been used to support state parks and trails, keeping them affordable and available. The popularity of Minnesota state parks and trails has steadily increased in recent years, but the quality of the experience is declining due to lack of adequate General Fund support for basic operations and maintenance. Cracks are appearing in popular state trails, locks are appearing on park bathroom facilities, and repairs to buildings and bridges are being deferred indefinitely.

General Fund support for basic operations and maintenance has trended downward to the point that it is no longer a reliable source of consistent operating revenues. The committee evaluated a number of funding options and alternatives in developing their recommendation. Legacy funding is not a solution because the Constitution directs Legacy funds be used only to supplement traditional funding. Raising park entrance fees is not a solution because it would create a barrier for some Minnesotans to enjoy the parks and trails.

Key factors in the committee's recommendations are the need to produce sufficient revenue to resolve the current funding shortfall, be strategic in providing for Minnesota's recreation needs, get more people involved in outdoor recreation, and move Minnesota state parks and trails into the future. Innovation and streamlining of park operations will need to continue.

The committee recommends increasing General Fund investments or establishing a new revenue source for the funding of Minnesota state parks and trails. Fully funding the unmet operations and maintenance needs of state parks and trails would require a General Fund increase of \$9.3 million per year over the FY 2012-13 General Fund base budget of \$17.3 million<sup>1</sup> for a total appropriation of \$26.6 million.

*Table A: Annual Funding Needed to Operate and Maintain State Parks and Trails*

\$17.3 million <sup>1</sup>	General Fund base (average of FY 2012-13)	Maintain the system at a reduced-level of service.
\$9.3 million	Increased appropriation of \$9.3 million to operate and maintain "destination-quality" state parks and trails.	<p>Restore camping and day-use services at all state parks and state recreation areas, including those with low-use.</p> <p>Provide minimum funding to operate new units added to the system since 2006 (e.g., Lake Vermilion State Park, La Salle Lake State Recreation Area, Brown's Creek State Trail, and the mountain bike facilities at Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area).</p> <p>Significantly improve operations and maintenance at the most visited state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest recreation areas, and maintain operational efficiencies at lesser-used units.</p> <p>Increase the number of high-priority resource management projects.</p> <p>Maintain current interpretive services and outreach levels (planned projects to interpret major features along state trails and in state parks will be provided).</p> <p>Continue to seek operational efficiencies in the system and invest in innovation. Promote nature-based tourism, provide more programs for families, innovate state park and trail recreation facilities and services to be more relevant to the next generation and diverse cultures.</p>
<b>\$26.6 million</b>	<b>TOTAL General Fund</b>	
<b>\$4.0 million</b>	<i>If a recreation access fee alternative is implemented, funding will also need to include replacement of revenue from daily and annual state park vehicle permit sales.</i>	
<b>\$30.6 million</b>	<b>TOTAL, if vehicle permits are eliminated.</b>	

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<sup>1</sup> Does not include one-time funding of \$1.8 million each year in FY 2012-13 from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

The committee believes the General Fund continues to be the appropriate funding mechanism because of the broad public benefits state parks and trails provide.

As an alternative to a General Fund increase, the committee recommends creating a recreation access fee on license plate renewals. This recommendation has several significant benefits, including providing sufficient revenues to solve the General Fund problem and provide an ongoing stable source of revenue. It also would include elimination of state park entrance fees, increasing access to healthy, outdoor recreation opportunities for all citizens, without regard to economic status or ability to pay. This strategy has proven successful as a solution to long-term funding needs for state parks and trails in other states, including Montana, Washington, Michigan, Idaho, and Texas.

***Criteria and considerations for optimizing the system of state parks and trails***

Minnesota state parks and trails are a cornerstone of the state's \$11.3 billion tourism economy. New investments will not undo current business efficiencies (such as co-managed units) but encourage ongoing opportunities to redefine and create a state park and trail system that will connect people to the outdoors, provide recreational opportunities, protect natural and cultural resources, and support local tourism-based jobs.

The committee's primary recommendation is to move toward a more differentiated system that favors quality of facilities and opportunities over quantity or geographic distribution. This represents a shift from state park units that try to be "all things to all people" to state park units that specialize in certain experiences. It means the existing units in the system will not all be managed the same. The focus is on meeting demand with high-quality developments and experiences at the sites best suited to accommodate them, considering natural and cultural resources, and potential to increase use and revenue.

Other recommendations include:

- Continue to research recreational and outdoor education trends and evaluate public interests.
- Preserve physical assets (e.g., restrooms, paved trails, historic buildings) that fit the role of the park or trail.
- Coordinate closely with regional providers to develop complementary facilities that meet recreation needs within a region, and to acquire, develop, and maintain state trails.
- Continue to manage the natural and cultural resources in all units of the system.
- More narrowly define the criteria for state trail designation, and develop a priority list for DNR development and maintenance efforts.

***Recommendations for innovative programs and initiatives to increase outdoor recreation participation***

The committee recognized the need to understand, design and provide recreation opportunities to meet the needs of a new generation of park and trail users. The committee identified a wide range of ideas for programs and initiatives for getting more people involved in outdoor recreation at state parks and trails. The results of 2007 and 2013 research efforts on the barriers to outdoor recreation participation and strategies for overcoming barriers will guide the implementation of recommendations for innovative programs and initiatives.

- Enhance partnerships to deliver services and programs, develop recreation facilities, and provide outreach.
- Package programs and opportunities to help people plan their experiences.
- Connect to local and regional tourism organizations, businesses, and chambers of commerce to provide information on what is available in the area.
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive and integrated information source on parks and trails in collaboration with other providers (public, private, non-profit).

## Legislative Authorization

The 2012 Minnesota Legislature directed the commissioner of the DNR to develop a report that provides recommendations on alternative funding sources, system refinement, and new initiatives:

Laws of Minnesota, Chapter 272, Section 87. LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON STATE PARKS, RECREATION AREAS, TRAILS, AND STATE FOREST DAY-USE AREAS

- (a) By January 15, 2013, the commissioner of natural resources shall prepare and submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate legislative committees with jurisdiction over environment and natural resource policy and finance concerning the long-term funding, use, expansion, and administration of Minnesota's system of state parks, recreation areas, trails, and state forest day-use areas.
- (b) At a minimum the report shall include:
  - (1) long-term funding options to reduce reliance on General Fund appropriations for maintaining and operating state parks, recreation areas, trails, and forest day-use areas;
  - (2) criteria and considerations for optimizing the system of state parks, recreation areas, trails, and state forest day-use areas to ensure investment focuses on Minnesota's most important natural resources and the highest-quality recreational opportunities; and
  - (3) recommendations for innovative programs and initiatives to increase outdoor recreation participation among Minnesotans and visitors to the state.

The DNR Division of Parks and Trails manages a variety of units, as defined by the Outdoor Recreation Act (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A) and *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 85. The units that this report addresses are state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest day-use areas (see map in Appendix E). This system is referred to throughout this report as Minnesota state parks and trails.



*The units that this report addresses are state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest day-use areas.*

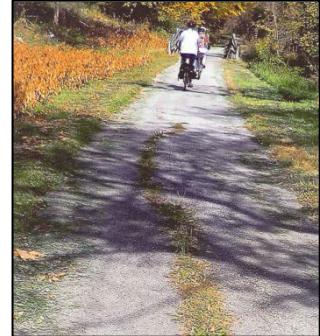
## Problem Statement

### Use of the system is increasing while General Fund support is declining.

Minnesota state parks and trails are a cornerstone of the state's \$11.3 billion tourism economy. Minnesota has a reputation as a national leader in providing top-quality outdoor recreation experiences.

The popularity of Minnesota state parks and trails has steadily increased in recent years, but the quality of the experience is declining due to the lack of adequate General Fund support for basic operations and maintenance. Cracks are appearing in popular state trails, locks are appearing on park bathroom facilities, and repairs to buildings and bridges are being deferred indefinitely.

Meanwhile, over the past three biennia (FY 2008-09, FY 2010-11 and FY 2012-13), General Fund support for basic operations and maintenance has declined by 25 percent (see Figure 1, p. 6).



The Division of Parks and Trails has responded to this trend by:

- creating system efficiencies by reducing staff by 11 percent over the past decade, creating “administrative hubs,” and increasing the number of state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest recreation areas that are co-managed (see Appendix E);
- reducing camping opportunities at low-use units (see Appendix E); and
- reducing facilities maintenance, resource management, programs, and tours.



However, at the same time, market conditions and recreation demand have continued to drive up operations and maintenance costs. In addition to these cost increases, Legislative action in recent years has expanded the size of the Minnesota state park and trail system. For example:

- In 2002, the Division of Parks and Recreation (now the Division of Parks and Trails) was given responsibility, without sufficient funding, for operating and maintaining state forest campgrounds and day-use areas.
- In 2010, the legislature authorized Lake Vermilion State Park. The following year it authorized La Salle Lake State Recreation Area. These two units alone added 3,855 acres of additional land for staff to develop, map, sign and manage.
- In recent years, the legislature also has authorized more miles of state trails than the Division of Parks and Trails can possibly acquire and develop in the foreseeable future.

### Did you know?

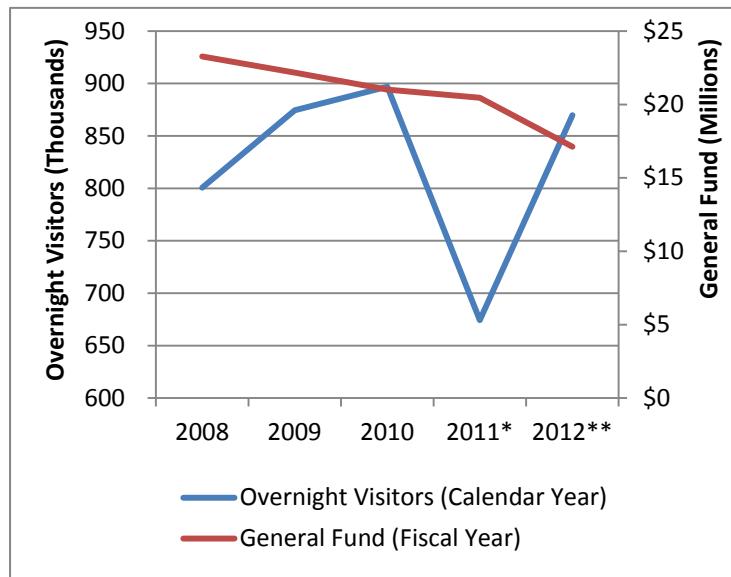
*Attendance at Minnesota state parks has been steadily increasing for a decade, in contrast to the national trend of declining participation in nature-based outdoor recreation.*

Managing more with less is unsustainable over time. The inability to provide basic operations and maintenance threatens to decrease the number of residents and tourists who visit Minnesota state parks and trails. A decline in tourism will reduce business at nearby cafes, resorts, gas stations, bait shops, and other small businesses, resulting in job loss and negatively impacting the state's economy and quality of life.

The Division of Parks and Trails has limited ability to reallocate other funding within its budget to offset the operations and maintenance shortfall. Much of the remaining funding within the Division's budget is constitutionally or otherwise legally dedicated to specific activities and programs, or to fund grants.

The Future Strategies Committee does not support using the Legacy funds approved by voters in 2008 for operations and maintenance because the Constitution directs that Legacy funds be used only to *supplement* (not *supplant*) traditional funding. Further, Legacy funds are not a permanent solution to the problem. Legacy funding is allocated every two years, and is only guaranteed through the year 2034. Meeting ongoing needs with temporary funding brings uncertainty to the operations and maintenance of the state park and trail system.

*Figure 1: General Fund Support and State Park Visitation*



\*Attendance declined in 2011, primarily due to the three-week government shutdown in July.

\*\*Through Dec. 7, 2012

*The inability to provide basic operations and maintenance threatens to decrease the number of visitors to state parks and trails.*

### ***Minnesota State Parks and Trails add vitality to local businesses and communities.***

*"The trails are an essential part of the mix of businesses and activities that make Lanesboro a special place. Outdoor recreation brings in a huge number of visitors every spring, summer, and fall. We employ about 10 people through the winter and about 45 through the summer season."*

- Scott Taylor, co-owner with Angie Taylor of Pedal Pushers Café since 2004, Lanesboro



## Revenue Needs

### Revenue is needed for Minnesota state parks and trails

The Division of Parks and Trails' General Fund appropriation has been in significant decline over the last six years. The Division has been responsive to this trend, increasing efficiency and cutting costs. At the same time, recreational demand and use are on the increase, and new state park and trail opportunities have been created. This sets up an unsustainable future where system needs outweigh revenues available.

*Table A: Annual Funding Needed to Operate and Maintain State Parks and Trails*

\$17.3 million	General Fund base (average of FY 2012-13). <i>Does not include one-time funding of \$1.8 million each year in FY 2012-13 from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.</i>	Maintain the system at a reduced-level of service.
\$9.3 million	Increased appropriation of \$9.3 million to operate and maintain "destination-quality" state parks and trails.	Restore camping and day-use services at all state parks and state recreation areas, including those with low-use.  Provide minimum funding to operate new units added to the system since 2006 (e.g., Lake Vermilion State Park, LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, Brown's Creek State Trail, and the mountain bike facilities at Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area).  Significantly improve operations and maintenance at the most visited state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest recreation areas, and maintain operational efficiencies at lesser-used units.  Increase the number of high-priority resource management projects.  Maintain current interpretive services and outreach levels (planned projects to interpret major features along state trails and in state parks will be provided).  Continue to seek operational efficiencies in the system and invest in innovation. Promote nature-based tourism, provide more programs for families, innovate state park and trail recreation facilities and services to be more relevant to the next generation and diverse cultures.
<b>\$26.6 million</b>	<b>TOTAL General Fund</b>	
\$4.0 million	<i>If a recreation access fee alternative is implemented, funding will also need to include replacement of revenue from daily and annual state park vehicle permit sales.</i>	
<b>\$30.6 million</b>	<b>TOTAL, if vehicle permits are eliminated</b>	

## **Local park and trail grants are underfunded**

Local parks and trails play a critical role in providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Minnesotans. These opportunities are primarily close-to-home and serve as gateways to state and regional opportunities. Parks and trails of local significance are not eligible for Parks and Trails Legacy funds, unlike parks and trails of state and regional significance.

### ***Outdoor Recreation Grant Program***

The purpose of the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program is to increase and enhance outdoor recreation facilities in local and community parks throughout the state. Funds can be used for park acquisition and/or development/redevelopment, including internal park trails, picnic shelters, playgrounds, athletic facilities, boat accesses, fishing piers, swimming beaches and campgrounds. Matching grants are awarded to local units of government for up to 50 percent of the cost of acquisition, development and/or redevelopment of local parks and recreation areas. Lottery-in-lieu and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund are the current sources of funds for this grant program.

*Table B: Outdoor Recreation Grant Program*

	Applications Received	\$ Requested	Projects Funded	\$ Allocated
FY 2011	18	1,081,972	10	327,224
FY 2012	27	3,237,713	1	369,713

### ***Local Trail Grant Program***

The purpose of the Local Trail Grant Program is to provide grants of up to 75 percent of total eligible costs to local units of government to promote relatively short trail connections between where people live and desirable locations (e.g., historical areas, open space, parks and/or other trails). Eligible projects include acquisition and development of trail facilities. Projects must result in a trail linkage that is immediately available for use by the general public. Lottery-in-lieu and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund are the current sources of funds for this grant program.

*Table C: Local Trail Grant Program*

	Applications Received	\$ Requested	Projects Funded	\$ Allocated
FY 2009	34	2,370,494	9	385,000
FY 2010	25	1,602,490	8	397,000
FY 2011	23	1,906,777	9	655,000
FY 2012	51	4,083,649	13	971,666

***Minnesota State Parks and Trails add vitality to local businesses and communities.***

*"We opened in 2005, across the road from the Paul Bunyan State Trail. After the trail was paved from Walker to Guthrie in 2010, we added a shuttle service for bikers, and since then our business has nearly tripled."*

- Charlyne LaVoie, co-owner with Dennis LaVoie, Embracing Pines Bed and Breakfast, Walker



## **Committee Recommendations**

### **Long-term Funding Options to Reduce Reliance on General Fund Appropriations**

*Committee Vision: The challenges of today's fiscal climate provide an opportunity to re-evaluate, redefine and create an affordable and accessible state park and trail system to connect people to the outdoors, create a new generation of park and trail users, provide high-quality recreational opportunities, protect our natural and cultural resources, and support local tourism and jobs.*

#### **Strategic Direction**

One of the strategies in the *Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2012) is to seek new funding sources to reduce general fund dependency and create new opportunities.

The committee evaluated a number of funding options and alternatives in developing their recommendation. Legacy funding is not a solution because the Constitution directs Legacy funds be used only to supplement traditional funding. Raising park entrance fees is not a solution because it would create a barrier for some Minnesotans to enjoy the parks and trails.

***Recommendation: Increase General Fund spending for Minnesota state parks and trails, or identify a new revenue source.***

To ensure the long-term viability of Minnesota state parks and trails, the Future Strategies Committee recommends fully funding the unmet operations and maintenance needs with a General Fund allocation of \$26.6 million each year of the next biennium. This represents an increase of \$9.3 million per year over the FY 2012-13 General Fund base budget of \$17.3 million. The committee believes the General Fund continues to be the appropriate funding mechanism because of the broad public benefits state parks and trails provide.

***Recommendation: As an alternative to a General Fund increase, the committee recommends creating a recreation access fee on license plate renewals.***

This strategy has proven successful as a solution to long-term funding needs for state parks and trails in other states, including Montana, Washington, Michigan, Idaho, and Texas. Under this proposal, state park vehicle permits would be eliminated, providing "free" access to all Minnesota state parks and trails. An additional \$4 million would be necessary to replace revenue from state park vehicle permit sales, so total revenue would need to be \$30.6 million.

The Future Strategies Committee recommends extending the benefit of the recreation access fee to other unmet park and trail needs in Minnesota. Since local parks and trails are not eligible for Parks and Trails Legacy funds, the committee recommends \$2 to \$3 of the recreation access fee be used for two existing and significantly underfunded local grant programs—the Outdoor

*The Future Strategies Committee recommends fully funding the unmet needs of Minnesota state parks and trails with a General Fund allocation of \$26.6 million each year of the next biennium.*

*As an alternative, the committee recommends creating a recreation access fee on license plate renewals, as has been done in Montana, Washington, Michigan, Idaho, and Texas.*

Recreation Grant Program and the Local Trail Grant Program. An estimated \$8.6 million to \$12.9 million would be generated for these programs.

Revenue generated by a recreation access fee would result in significant, statewide benefits, including:

- **Stable, long-term funding for Minnesota state parks and trails—** Predictable revenue of \$30.6 million annually from recreation access fees would keep the gates open at all currently authorized Minnesota state parks and state recreation areas, and reduce the DNR's reliance on the General Fund for operations and maintenance support.
- **Free entry to all Minnesota state parks and state recreation areas—** State park vehicle permits (\$5 per day and \$25 per year) could be eliminated, increasing access to healthy, high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities for all citizens, without regard to economic status or ability to pay.
- **Support for local park and trail projects that are not currently eligible for Legacy funding—** Just as operations and maintenance expenses at state parks and trails are ineligible for Legacy funds, so are parks and trails of local significance. Expanded grant funding would go a long way toward addressing unmet needs of local parks and trails and a perceived inequity in statewide outdoor recreation funding.

*Up to \$12.9 million could be generated for parks and trails not eligible for Legacy funds.*

*Table D: Recreation Access Fee Revenue and Purposes*

<b>Recreation Fee</b>	<b>Revenue Generated</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
\$5 - \$7	\$21.5 million to \$30.1 million*	Augment or replace General Fund support for state parks and trails.
\$2 - \$3	\$8.6 million to \$12.9 million *	Provide funding for local park and trail grants.
Cost of implementation by Department of Public Safety	To be determined by Department of Public Safety	Cover cost of implementation by Deputy Registrars (Department of Public Safety).
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	
<b>\$ 7 - \$10 (plus Deputy Registrar's costs)</b>	<b>\$30.1 million to \$43.0 million (plus Deputy Registrar's costs)</b>	

\* This estimate is based on 4.3 million passenger vehicles, pickup trucks and recreational vehicles registered in 2011.

## **Supplemental Funding Options**

The Future Strategies Committee also identified some additional options for increased revenues, but these options do not generate the level of funding needed to fulfill the long-term funding needs for state parks and trails identified by the committee. In combination with other resources, however, they could provide short-term solutions to funding state parks and trails.

*Table E: Supplemental Funding Options*

Option	Revenue (estimated)	Legislation Needed
Income tax check-off on tax forms	Unknown – could be up to \$1 million per year	Yes
Specialty license plates	\$500,000 to \$1 million	Yes
Increase camping fees \$5 per night for out-of-state campers (from \$18 to \$23)	\$200,000 to \$300,000	No

The Future Strategies Committee also considered the following options for solving the General Fund problem, but determined these options would not generate sufficient revenue to address the problem:

- Raising state park fees (beyond fees for out-of-state campers) – State park entrance fees and camping and lodging fees could be raised to generate additional revenue, but with negative repercussions. Higher entrance fees could create additional barriers to participation, especially for lower-income residents. State park camping and lodging fees are already at the top of the range in comparison to fees charged by surrounding states. Even an increase as significant as doubling state park entrance fees and camping/lodging fees would not generate enough revenue to address the long-term funding need, yet would create significant barriers to attracting more people to participate in outdoor recreation and negatively impact tourism.
- Trail or wheel pass – Establishing a trail or wheel pass for use of state trails would not deliver sufficient revenue to impact the long-term funding need, and would create a disincentive to use state trails. The additional operational costs associated with enforcing the pass would further reduce any revenue gain.
- Hotel/lodging tax – As currently structured in legislation, the hotel and lodging tax revenues collected are dedicated toward promotion and marketing efforts. Extending the hotel/lodging tax to state park camping and lodging would not generate sufficient revenue to address the long-term funding need.
- Corporate sponsorships, naming rights, public-private partnerships – The Division of Parks and Trails has established several partnerships with private entities to support specific program or promotional opportunities. Although opportunities for additional public-private partnerships focused on revenue generation may exist, potential partners are unlikely to find a partnership directed at funding day-to-day operations and maintenance activities appealing (i.e., sponsors are more likely to fund capital projects).

*By themselves – or even in combination – none of the other options considered by the committee would come close to covering the shortfall in funding.*

## Committee Recommendations

### Criteria and Considerations for Optimizing the System of State Parks, Recreation Areas, Trails and State Forest Day-use Areas

*Committee Vision: The challenges of today's fiscal climate provide an opportunity to re-evaluate, redefine and create an accessible state park and trail system to connect people to the outdoors, create a new generation of park and trail users, provide recreational opportunities, protect our natural and cultural resources, and support local tourism and jobs.*

#### New Opportunities

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and the *Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2012) emphasize taking care of what we have, assessing the state park and trail system to provide high-quality opportunities at priority locations, and expanding partnership opportunities.

New investments will not undo current business efficiencies (such a co-managed units), but encourage ongoing opportunities to redefine the state park and trail system and create new ways to recreate.

***Recommendation: Move toward a more differentiated system that favors quality of facilities and opportunities over quantity or geographic distribution.***

This represents a shift from state park units that try to be "all things to all people" to state park units that specialize in certain experiences. It means the existing units in the system will not all be managed the same. The focus is on meeting demand with high-quality developments and experiences at the sites best suited to accommodate them, considering natural and cultural resources, and potential to increase use and revenue.

It means the goal is not to have the same amenities (i.e. showers and flush toilets) at every park. The goal is for each unit to have a niche; rock climbing and mountain biking at some, fishing and kid-friendly programming at others. "High-quality" doesn't have to be "high-amenity." For example a rustic unit can offer high-quality seasonal birding and backpacking experiences without the cost of full-time staffing.

This approach will result in a greater focus on providing high-quality visitor experiences to maximize the number of visitors served. It should also guide new investments and operational decisions into the future. This new approach will allow the Division of Parks and Trails to gain efficiencies to maximize visitor experiences and connections to the outdoors.

The values of all units will be explored as well as options for specialized opportunities and niches. New opportunities are unlikely to be provided at lower-use units unless they are the most appropriate site for a particular program or development. Differences in units will be reflected in visitor experiences tailored to the outdoor landscape in:

#### ***Did you know?***

*State parks are 32 of the top 50 tourist attractions in the state, as reported by Explore Minnesota Tourism (see Appendix D).*

*The units that this report addresses are state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest day-use areas.*

- The types of recreation opportunities offered.
- The types and frequency of interpretive services.
- The type and level of services (primarily regarding visitor contact and administration) and support facilities (types of sanitation facilities).

The following criteria should be considered when making selective investments (not necessarily in order of importance):

- Outdoor recreation trends and demand.
- Visitation.
- Revenue.
- Natural resource significance.
- Cultural resource significance.
- Diversity of recreation resources.
- Existing level of interpretive services.
- Proximity to population centers and/or tourism destinations.
- Administrative role of the unit.
- Quality.
- Appropriateness of unit for specialty development.

There may be some existing units that don't have the potential to play a role in the future differentiated system, and alternatives should be explored. These potential alternatives include having another DNR division or local unit of government manage the unit through mutual agreement.



***Recommendation: Continue to research recreational and outdoor education trends to evaluate public interests.***

Research should be conducted to identify the optimal role for each unit. Some units will be rustic with self-service camping registration, limited or specialized recreation opportunities, and few, if any, modern sanitation facilities. Other units may provide specialized opportunities (e.g., mountain bike trails); staff for campground registration, interpretive programming and other activities; a diversity of recreation opportunities; and modern sanitation facilities.

Conducting research is essential if the Division of Parks and Trails is to be relevant and customer-focused. Understanding the state's changing demographics and meeting the recreational needs of demographic segments is critical to future success. The Division may coordinate research efforts with other recreation providers.

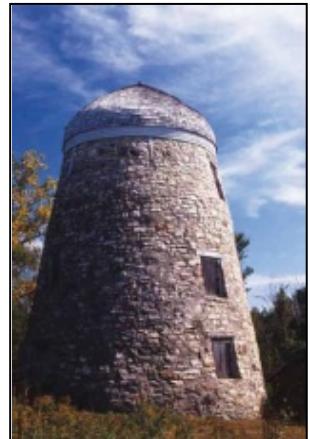


When considering where to provide new activities, experiences, and/or facilities, the Division of Parks and Trails should complete system-wide assessments to determine where which units are best suited for them. The Division should carefully assess the number of locations, geographic distribution, and compatibility with existing master plans.

**Recommendation: Preserve physical assets that fit the role of the park or trail.**

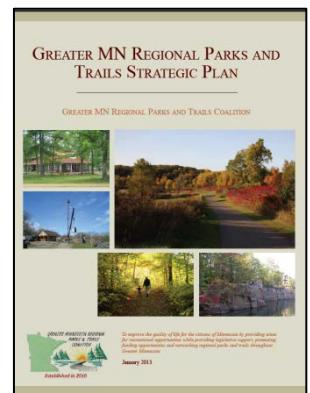
Since 1895, the state has been investing in state parks and trails. Examples include historic buildings, sanitation buildings, and paved trails. There is an obligation to protect this public investment, and it is critical to maintaining a system of parks and trails of statewide significance.

Providing experiences of statewide significance and/or experiences that draw tourists is the appropriate role of the Division of Parks and Trails. Investing resources toward this end will result in increased visits and increased revenue. It also will achieve the goal of connecting people to the outdoors and creating the next generation of park and trail users.



**Recommendation: Closer coordination with regional providers to develop complementary facilities that meet recreation needs within a region.**

The Division of Parks and Trails should continue to work with the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coalition so that recreation needs can be met on a state and regional level. Coordinating planning, funding, and development strategies is recommended in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and the *Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2013). Roles and responsibilities can be clarified so that duplication can be avoided, opportunities created in a timely manner by the most appropriate agency, and efficiencies gained. Opportunities for joint planning and evaluation efforts will help achieve this goal.



Stakeholders and park and trail providers should continue to be involved. Progress toward achievement of these recommendations should continue to be monitored and evaluated, so that adjustments can be made if needed.

**Recommendation: Continue to manage the natural and cultural resources in all units of the system.**

Natural and cultural resource preservation and management is a legislative mandate for the Division of Parks and Trails, specifically as it relates to state parks (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd.2c). High-quality natural and cultural resources are the foundation of the outdoor experience provided to state park, state recreation area, state trail, and state forest recreation area visitors and must be protected and managed on a system-wide basis. Resource management efforts will be prioritized to have the greatest positive impact for the long-term preservation and enhancement of the resource base, unrelated to how the Division, in the short term, differentiates its recreational use and visitor services efforts.



## State Trail-Specific Recommendations

**Recommendation:** *Work more cooperatively with local and regional units of government, in consultation with trail groups and partners, to acquire, develop, and maintain state trails.*

The Division of Parks and Trails should focus on trails of statewide significance and, wherever possible, allow local or regional units of government to develop trails that are low on the Division's priority list. The Division will consult with trail groups and partners about levels of maintenance and alternatives for accomplishing maintenance activities. The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and the *Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2013) emphasize the importance of such coordination.

**Recommendation:** *More narrowly define the criteria for state trail designation, and develop a priority list for DNR development and maintenance efforts.*

The definition of both a regional trail and a state trail need to be further refined so that appropriate funding sources can be identified and providers understand who should develop what and where.

In developing priorities:

- Engage trail groups, tourism officials and other stakeholders.
- Develop clear public criteria utilizing other plans, such as the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and stakeholder input.

**Recommendation:** *Coordinate with state and local road authorities to connect state trails to local and regional trail systems, and fill gaps in the state trail system.*

Where land may not be available to make trail connections for many years or where it may not be feasible to develop an off-road trail on the site due to physical limitations, upgrading roadways to include bikeways that can serve as connectors may be a useful temporary or permanent solution.

**Recommendation:** *Make trail connections based on criteria.*

The following criteria should be considered:

- Trail use.
- Whether the trail does or could connect to high-quality natural resources or recreation areas.
- Whether the trail does or could connect with local businesses (i.e., food, retail).
- Proximity to population centers and/or tourism destinations.
- Natural resource significance.
- Cultural resource significance.
- Whether the trail provides a unique or high-quality opportunity or experience.
- Whether the trail does or could fill a critical gap in an area with recreation opportunity shortages.
- Whether the trail does or could play a role in providing commuter opportunities.

### Did you know?

Minnesota has a reputation as a national leader in providing top-quality outdoor recreation experiences. The extensive network of multi-use trails earned Minnesota the honor of Best Trails State in 2010.



## Committee Recommendations

### Recommendations for Innovative Programs and Initiatives to Increase Outdoor Recreation Participation

*Committee Vision: The challenges of today's fiscal climate provide an opportunity to re-evaluate, redefine and create an accessible state park and trail system to connect people to the outdoors, create a new generation of park and trail users, provide high-quality recreational opportunities, protect our natural and cultural resources, and support local tourism and jobs.*

#### Understanding State Park and Trail Visitors

The committee recognized the need to understand people's motivations for recreating outdoors and develop strategies to help them overcome barriers. Connecting people and the outdoors is a key strategy in both the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and the *Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (2012).

The Division of Parks and Trails conducted significant research in 2007 on the barriers to outdoor recreation participation and strategies for overcoming those barriers. Additional research on barriers was conducted during the summer of 2012. The results of this research, anticipated early in 2013, should help to determine which of the following recommendations – and the additional ideas in Appendix B – would be most likely to increase outdoor recreation participation and which recommendations the Division of Parks and Trails has capacity to implement.

***Recommendation: Expand partnerships to increase capacity to deliver services and programs, develop recreation facilities, and provide outreach.***

The Division of Parks and Trails should build on its successes in this area and focus on overcoming the barriers to working with partners. Specific ideas to consider include:

- Developing formal and informal relationships with schools, the State High School League, and local park districts.
- Expanding equipment rental and other services through concessionaires (e.g., tents and other camping equipment, fish-cleaning services, etc.).
- Offering lodging at select destination parks and trails via public or private partnerships.
- Working with local/regional tourism organizations to provide visitors with reasons to stay in the area longer when visiting a state park or a state trail.
- Collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to make signage more affordable.
- Establishing partnerships with youth groups and youth centers to get more youth to parks and trails.
- Expanding Early Childhood Family Education to parks.
- Soliciting local food vendors/trucks for key locations and dates.
- Expanding partnerships with health care programs and professionals.



I can  
**CAMP!**

I can  
**FISH!**

I can  
**CLIMB!**

I can  
**PADDLE!**

**ARCHERY**  
in the parks

**Recommendation: Package programs and opportunities to help people plan their experiences.**

- Provide equipment, staff support, and trip-planning tools such as itineraries.

**Recommendation: Connect to local and regional tourism organizations, businesses and chambers of commerce to provide information on attractions available in the area.**

- Additional information about the variety of opportunities will augment the area as a tourist draw and promote longer stays by visitors.

**Recommendation: Develop and maintain a comprehensive and integrated information source on parks and trails in collaboration with other providers (public, private, non-profit).**

- Maintain multiple sources of information, including digital and paper maps.



**Minnesota State Parks and Trails add vitality to local businesses and communities.**

*"I was anticipating having to close my doors in 2009, but I knew that the mountain bike trails were going to open at Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area in 2010, so I hung in there for one more year, and what's happened since that has been unbelievable. My business has more than doubled."*

- Jenny Smith, owner since 2005, Cycle Path & Paddle, Crosby



## Appendix A: Minnesota State Park and Trail System Background

The Division of Parks and Trails manages a variety of units, as defined by the Outdoor Recreation Act and *Minnesota Statutes*. This report addresses state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest recreation areas (see also the map in Appendix F).

The Division of Parks and Trails manages 67 state parks and nine state recreation areas. Overall, these units encompass 274,136 acres and represent less than one half of one percent of all the land in Minnesota.

### **State Parks**

According to *Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05, the purpose of state parks is to protect and perpetuate areas of the state that illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's unique natural resources, and to provide for the use, enjoyment and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations. "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" (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd. 2c).



### **State Recreation Areas**

To be authorized as a state recreation area, a unit's resources must be able to sustain intensive recreational use by large numbers of people. "Physical development shall enhance and promote the use and enjoyment of the natural recreational resources of the area" (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd. 3c).



### **State Trails**

Minnesota's state trail system includes more than 25 legislatively authorized trails (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.105). There are more than 1,400 miles of developed multiple-use trails, of which 619 miles have a hard or paved surface. Most of the state trails are on abandoned railroad grades, and accommodate both non-motorized and motorized uses, particularly snowmobiling.



### **State Forest Recreation Areas**

Originally developed and managed by the DNR Division of Forestry, state forest campgrounds, trails (motorized and non-motorized), and day-use areas provide recreation opportunities within state forests (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05 subd. 7). Of the 58 state forests in Minnesota, 22 offer designated campsites, but state forests do not have on-site managers, organized interpretive programs, or modern facilities such as showers and flush toilets.



## **Division of Parks and Trails Budget Overview**

Even as the overall budget has diversified with the addition of Legacy funds and has increased overall, the Division of Parks and Trails has been facing ongoing budget shortfalls for operating and maintaining the many units it oversees. General Fund allocations provide a significant portion of the funds that pay for basic operations and maintenance activities, such as visitor assistance, mowing, cleaning restrooms, providing night security in campgrounds, and sweeping and crack-sealing trails. Over the last three bienniums, General Funds allocated to the division have been reduced by 25 percent.

Revenues collected by the Division of Parks and Trails have increased, but not enough to offset the General Fund reductions. In addition, those revenues are allocated to Division activities other than operations and maintenance, and the transfer of those revenues to help offset the General Fund reductions would create shortfalls elsewhere.

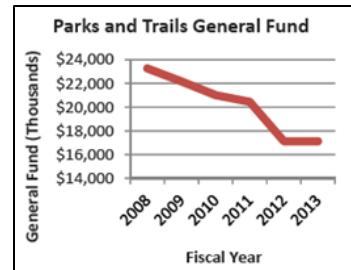
*General Fund allocation declines are resulting in reductions in operations and maintenance, even as the division has received Legacy Funds to supplement and enhance other division activities.*

## **Funding the Division's Work**

The Division of Parks and Trails' budget has several broad categories which fund the Division's work. The Division has limited ability to reallocate other funding within its budget to offset the operations and maintenance shortfall. Much of the remaining funding within the Division's budget are constitutionally or otherwise legally dedicated to specific activities and programs, or to fund grants.

### ***General Fund***

The source of this funding is the general tax revenue collected by the state. The Division has the greatest flexibility in how to use funding from this source. Nearly all funding from this source is used for operations and maintenance activities on state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and state forest recreation areas. This source provides more than half of the operations and maintenance money for state parks, state trails, state recreation areas, and state forest recreation areas (see chart on p. 21). In the FY 2012-13 biennium, the division's General Fund allocation was reduced \$7 million (17 percent) from the previous biennium.



### ***Natural Resources Fund***

Funding in this source comes from a wide variety of dedicated funds, including snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle, off-highway vehicle, off-highway motorcycle, and other gas-tax-derived revenue. This fund also includes lottery-in-lieu funds (from sales tax on lottery games) and the State Park Revenue Account (from permit sales and camping fees) which the Division of Parks and Trails uses to fund operations and maintenance activities. Other than lottery-in-lieu funds and the State Park Revenue Account, the Division has little to no flexibility to reallocate these dedicated funds.

### ***Game and Fish Fund***

Funding from this source comes from hunting and fishing license sales. These funds are used to cover staff and program expenses for the Public Water Access Program and Fishing Piers Program. These are dedicated funds and cannot be transferred for other uses.

### **Parks and Trails Fund**

This source, referred to as Legacy Funds, comes from the constitutional amendment sales tax increase – the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The Parks and Trails Fund receives 14.25 percent of the sales tax revenues resulting from the increase, of which a percentage goes to the Division of Parks and Trails. These funds are intended to “supplement, not supplant” existing funding sources. The Division has used these funds to enhance interpretive programming, accelerate resource management activities, rehabilitate park and trail facilities, and make strategic acquisitions.

### **Special Revenue Funds**

The special revenue funds come from a collection of small sources including revenue from cooperative agreements, merchandise sales in state parks, operations at Itasca State Park (including the Douglas Lodge), and revenue from timber sales. These funds are used to accomplish resource management and interpretive services projects across the system.

### **Federal Funds**

Federal funds are allocated to the DNR through several programs, including the Lake Superior Coastal Zone Management Program, the Clean Vessels Act, and the Federal Recreational Trail Program. Much of this funding is used to support water recreation, such as the Public Water Access Program. These are dedicated funds and cannot be transferred for other uses.

### **Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund**

These funds come from state lottery proceeds and are allocated by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. Typically these funds are for one-time expenses and projects such as new facilities or facility rehabilitation. However, in the FY 2012-13 biennium the Division of Parks and Trails was given a larger allocation and an exemption to use this money to fund ongoing expenses and staffing to help compensate for the loss of General Fund money cited above. It is not anticipated that this larger allocation or exemption will be extended beyond this biennium (see chart on p. 21)

### **Revenues and Economic Impacts**

The Division of Parks and Trails’ activities produce revenue that helps support the Division’s operations and creates significant economic benefits to local economies across Minnesota. In 2010, state park and state recreation area revenues totaled \$17.9 million, the majority from vehicle permits and camping and lodging fees, merchandise sales and sales of consumables (pop, firewood, and ice). More than \$1.2 million was returned to the General Fund from the collection of state and local sales taxes on purchases made by park visitors. An additional \$152,000 was deposited in the School Trust Fund for the revenue collected at state forest recreation area sites located on school trust lands.

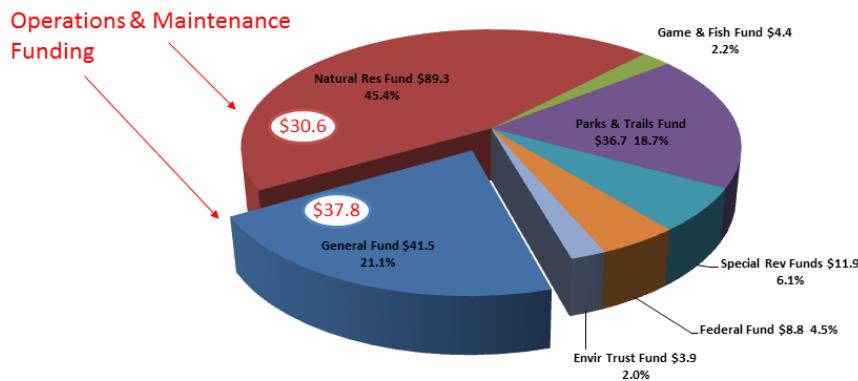
*In 2010, state park and state recreation area revenues totaled \$17.9 million.*

Visitors to state parks and state trails provide significant economic benefits to communities across the state. In 2011, visitors spent \$280 million in the local economy during their trips to Minnesota state parks and state recreation areas, on expenses such as gasoline, groceries, hotels, and restaurants. This total does not

include the money visitors paid for camping fees, permits, or other payments to the state. State trail visitors contributed approximately \$26 million. The economic impacts of all trail use, including grant-in-aid snowmobiling and other state-supported trail uses, would be significantly higher.

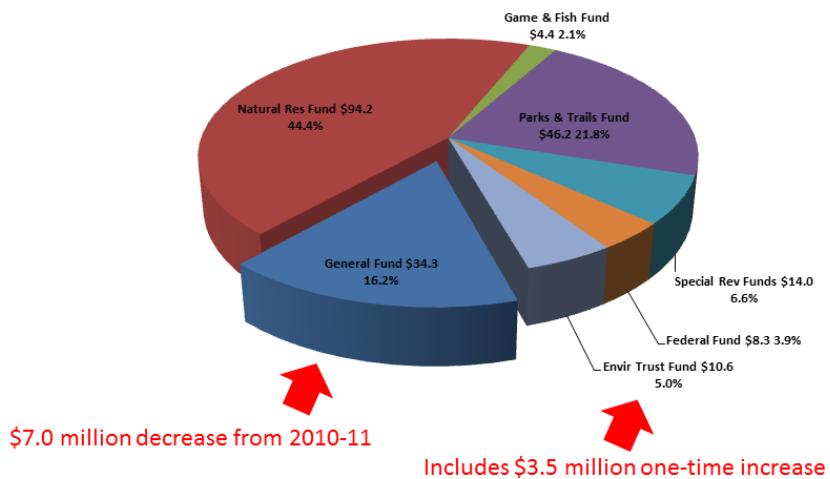
## Division of Parks and Trails FY2010-11 Budget

FY2010-11 Budgeted Expenditures by Fund  
Parks and Trails \$196.5 Million



## Division of Parks and Trails FY2012-13 Budget

FY2012-13 Budgeted Expenditures by Fund  
Parks and Trails \$212.1 Million



## **Appendix B: Additional Suggestions for Innovative Programs and Initiatives**

The committee identified a wide range of ideas for programs and initiatives for getting more people involved in outdoor recreation at state parks and trails. The results of 2007 and 2013 research efforts on the barriers to outdoor recreation participation and strategies for overcoming barriers will guide the implementation of recommendations for innovative programs and initiatives.

Additional ideas identified by the Future Strategies Committee, grouped by general category headings but not in any priority order, include:

### ***Recreation opportunities***

- Nature play areas and playgrounds.
- Pre-school adventure areas.
- Quick-visit amenities (short trail loops, easily accessible picnic areas).
- Ziplines, rope courses and tree houses.
- Extreme hiking and geocaching.
- Outdoor education and skill building center.
- Single-track mountain bike trails.
- “Fishermen campgrounds” in state forest recreation areas.
- Pond fishing – stocked for easy catch-and-release.
- Fitness zone – outdoor adult fitness equipment.
- Create the best possible views and photo opportunities (e.g., by removing dead or view-obstructing branches) and increase awareness about where and when to see these sights).

### ***Marketing***

- More information kiosks to provide information about park and trail opportunities in family-oriented locations (such as malls, museums and community centers).
- Promotion through public forums.
- Advertising about the benefits of parks and trails across the state – regional to local.
- Advice regarding health benefits of parks and trails – “mental health day.”
- Product placement – within existing video gaming and websites, kids programs.

### ***Technology***

- Better GIS orientation.
- More Wi-Fi (currently available only at Itasca, Lake Bemidji, Lake Bronson, and William O’Brien state parks).
- YELP app and QR codes (providing easy access to information about nearby restaurants, hotels, and other businesses).
- More online 360-degree virtual tours showcasing what there is to see and do at Minnesota state parks and trails.
- Links to GPS mapping systems – pop-up as you drive along.

- User-generated content.
- Apps to make it easier to find information about upcoming programs at Minnesota state parks and trails.

### ***Volunteers***

- Identify projects suitable for volunteers.
- Hire a volunteer coordinator.
- Expand use of volunteers.

### ***Miscellaneous***

- Gas fireplaces.
- Bus service to state parks to overcome transportation barriers.
- Better signage.
- Access to restrooms during the winter and shoulder seasons.
- Culture change to unleash innovation.
- Examine restrictions and limitation to programs – charging a yoga instructor to offer a session.
- Yoga in the parks.
- Warrior races.
- State park amazing race.
- Forage-and-feed class.
- Senior connections and activities.
- Programs for singles groups (wine and cheese, hike, music).
- Programs for faith-based groups to connect with nature.
- Community gardens.
- Film-making.
- Addition of I Can Hike; I Can Geocache; I Can Explore; I Can Birdwatch; I Can Do Outdoor Photography programs.
- Business meeting/retreat program (catering access, Wi-Fi).
- Event-planning assistance (wedding, family reunion, funeral).
- Senior opportunities (picnic in the park program, golf carts).
- Music in the parks - local music, dance, cultural groups, school bands – include local and ethnic foods.
- Recorded messages sent to target audiences in native languages.
- More opportunities for school activities.

## Appendix C: Future Strategies Committee Members

### Becky Lourey, Co-chair

Becky served in the Minnesota Senate representing District 8 in east-central Minnesota from 1996 to 2006, following three terms in the House of Representatives. Family is central to Becky's life, and her experiences raising 12 adopted and birth children greatly influenced the public policies she pursued at the Legislature. A graduate of Little Falls High School, Becky attended Asbury College in Kentucky and the University of Minnesota. A former farmer, she lives in Kerrick and owns a small business, Nemadji Research Corporation, which she co-founded with her late husband Gene.



### Dennis Ozment, Co-chair

Dennis is a retired Minnesota Legislator and Minneapolis Fire Captain. He served for 24 years in the Minnesota House of Representatives, where he chaired the Environment Policy and Finance Committees, the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) and both the Republican and Democrat Claims Committees. Dennis also served on many other committees, commissions and task forces. He recently spent five years serving as Great Lakes Project Coordinator with the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, a nonprofit, non-partisan, networking group of legislators, for legislators, working on environment and energy issues.



### Denise Anderson

Denise has been the Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Natural Resources since 2006. Previously, she served as Financial Director for the State's Office of Enterprise Technology. Since 2010, she has been a Governor-appointed State Employee Representative on the Investment Advisory Council, which advises the State Board of Investment on the investment of state funds. A recent graduate of the Humphrey Institute – State of Minnesota Senior Leadership Institute, Denise has an MBA in Finance from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting, also from the U of M.



### Jenna Fletcher

Jenna is a Program Director for the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Jenna also has worked for the State of Minnesota as a policy analyst on forestry issues, and researched urban smart growth practices for ICF Consulting, a national environmental public policy consulting firm. A graduate of Carleton College, Jenna has a master's degree in Conservation Biology and an MBA, both from the University of Minnesota.



### Cris Gears

Cris has been Superintendent of Three Rivers Park District since 2007. Before that, he was Director of Parks and Recreation for Kitsap County and the City of Bremerton (both in Washington) and for the City of St. Louis Park. His experience also includes working as City Manager in Excelsior and Assistant to the City Manager in St. Louis Park. Cris also served on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Foundation, the Twin Cities Regional Parks Foundation and the Steering Committee for the Minnesota Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. Cris and his wife, Donna, live in Minnetonka.



## **Dorian Grilley**

Dorian is Executive Director of the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota, a four-year-old bicycle education, promotion and advocacy nonprofit. He was Executive Director of the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota from 1996 to 2008. Before that, he spent 17 years working for the Minnesota DNR in the divisions of Forestry and Parks and Trails. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Biking and Walking, based in Washington, D.C. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Minnesota and attended graduate school at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. He and his family live in Mahtomedi.



## **Dawn Hegland**

Dawn has been with the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission since 1994 and has worked with many program areas, including community development, economic development, natural resources, transportation and tourism development. She has been Executive Director since 2008. Dawn also serves on the University of Minnesota's West Central Clean Energy Resource Team, Center for Small Towns, and the Tourism Center Advisory Committee. She has a BA degree in Biology, Environmental Science, and Secondary Education from Concordia College in Moorhead. She lives with her husband, Ed, and their three children on a farm in rural Lac qui Parle County.



## **Michael Huber**

Michael is Senior Community Consultant in the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. He serves on the Executive Committee for the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies, and on various committees of the Urban Land Institute's Minnesota District Council, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Department of Health. He has an M.H.S.A. degree in hospital administration from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a B.A. degree in Biology from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana.



## **Mark Larson**

Mark is a board member of the 3,400-member Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, which advocates for the state's parks and trails and works with public agencies to acquire land. Before retiring in 2011, Mark worked on policy and performance management with Minnesota's State Planning Agency and Department of Transportation. A fourth-generation Minnesotan, his passion for the outdoors began with trips to state parks, the BWCA and the Rockies. Mark hikes, bikes, kayaks, camps, fishes, snowshoes and cross-country skis. He and his wife, Mary Kennedy, live in St. Paul.



## **Steve Nagle**

Steve lives in rural Otter Tail County, where he serves as Executive Director of West Central Minnesota Communities Action in Elbow Lake. WCMCA serves more than 5,000 families a year with the mission of helping people escape poverty. Steve is the Chair of the Friends of Maplewood State Park and a member of Minnesota Parks and Trails. He frequents Minnesota state parks and enjoys bicycling and cross-country skiing. Steve is a graduate of Mankato State University and Moorhead State University with a master's degree in Public and Human Service Administration.



## Courtland Nelson

Courtland joined the Department of Natural Resources as Director of the Division of Parks and Recreation (now the Division of Parks and Trails) in 2004. Previously, he was Director of Utah State Parks (1993-2004) and Deputy Director of Arizona State Parks (1987-1993). Courtland is active in state tourism activities and research dealing with barriers to participation in outdoor recreation. He holds a master's degree in Outdoor Recreation Education from Utah State University and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology/History from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He and his wife, Mitzi, live in Forest Lake and have a daughter.



## Les Ollila

Les began spent most of his 36-year career with the DNR as Regional Trails and Waterways Manager in Grand Rapids, where he helped develop the Taconite, North Shore and Arrowhead state trails. Over time, his job expanded to include canoe routes, public water accesses, Lake Superior harbors, OHV trails and more. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation Resource Management. Les and his wife, Ilene, live in Grand Rapids and have two grown children. Now retired from the DNR, Les is involved with several trail and recreation groups and stays connected to the international snowmobile community. He is very proud of his work connecting northeastern Minnesota communities with trails and the legacy of providing public water accesses to the public.



## Molly Pederson

Molly is Public Affairs Director for Conservation Minnesota, a nonprofit organization that has helped Minnesotans shape job-producing clean energy policies, water cleanup, habitat protection and the 2008 Legacy Amendment. She is a veteran of local and state campaigns, where she has created and implemented grassroots field plans and directed outreach to varied constituency groups. Molly also spent two years as a membership and public affairs director for a regional chamber of commerce. Her private sector experience includes a stint as a publications editor for a medical group and a variety of sales and marketing positions.



## Erika Rivers

Erika Rivers was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Natural Resources in February 2011 by Commissioner Tom Landwehr. She is responsible for overseeing the divisions of Fish and Wildlife, Parks and Trails, and Enforcement. Erika began her career with the DNR in 2004, and has lived and worked in Greater Minnesota in various planning, information and outdoor recreation positions. Most recently, she was the project manager on the Lake Vermilion State Park development project. Erika has a B.A. in Journalism and a Ph.D. in Conservation Biology, both from the University of Minnesota. She and her husband, Patrick, have two children.



## John Schaubach

John Schaubach recently retired after more than 30 years in the field of health care in the Cuyuna Range community. John has served as a board member of the Cuyuna Lakes Trails Association since 1998. This organization was created out of a Blandin Community Leadership project to establish this state trail. John also serves on the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission as the citizen commissioner for the river from Grand Rapids to Brainerd and on the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area Advisory Board.



## **Jeff Schoenbauer**

After decades as a senior principal with Brauer & Associates, Ltd, Jeff cofounded Schoenbauer Consulting, LLC in 2008 to focus on specific types of public projects related to parks, trails, outdoor recreation and community planning. His experience managing complex and often controversial public projects has included serving as principal consultant on the *Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan*, authoring publications on park and trail planning, and overseeing the design and construction of numerous park and trail projects, including the Cuyuna Country SRA mountain-bike trails and the Lake Vermilion State Park campground.



## **Kathy Schoenbauer**

Kathy has 30-plus years as a researcher, facilitator, project manager, trainer and curriculum designer. A key contributor to the *Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan*, she also served as project manager for the LCMR-funded Best Practices for Parks and Outdoor Recreation project (2005 – 2007). Prior to her public sector work, she was a senior consultant and director of operations for Personnel Decisions International and QI International. She has an MBA degree from the University of St. Thomas and a BS degree in Recreation Administration from the University of Minnesota.



## **Colleen Tollefson**

Colleen is Assistant Director of Explore Minnesota Tourism, where she has worked for nearly 30 years. Her current responsibilities include industry communications, organizational partnerships, tourism education, development of tourism public policy and oversight of the Travel Information Centers. Prior to joining EMT, Colleen was the director of special projects for the Minnesota Restaurant, Hotel and Resort Associations. She also has worked in Minnesota State Parks and at Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head Island and was instrumental in establishing the End-O-Line Railroad Park in southwest Minnesota. She has a B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration from the University of Minnesota.



## **Barry Wendorf**

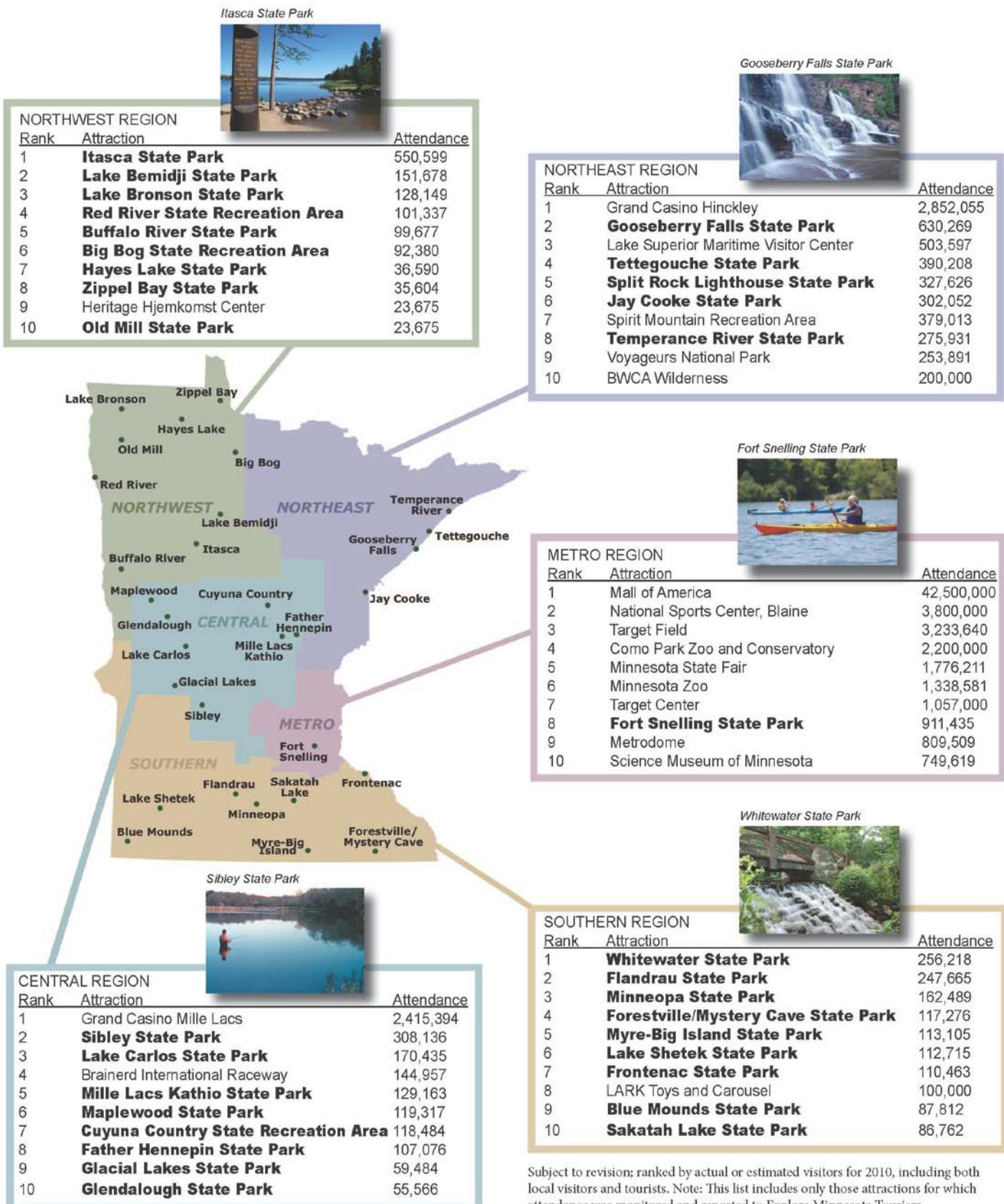
Barry is Parks Director for Isanti County and a member of the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Coalition. Priorities of the Coalition include working with the DNR and Met Council on a strategic plan for a network of high-quality regional parks and trails. Barry previously worked for the City of Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department and was a Park Ranger for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He received an A.A.S. Degree in Natural Resource Management from Central Lakes Community College in Brainerd and a B.S. Degree in Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Services from Minnesota State University - Mankato.



## **Committee Staff**

- Amy Barrett, Communications Project Supervisor, Division of Parks and Trails, Minnesota DNR
- Judy Erickson, Project Consultant, Conservation Strategies
- Colin Kelly, Principal Planner, Division of Parks and Trails, Minnesota DNR
- Jade Templin, AICP, Principal Planner, Division of Parks and Trails, Minnesota DNR
- Laurie Young, Planning Supervisor, Parks and Trails Division, Minnesota DNR

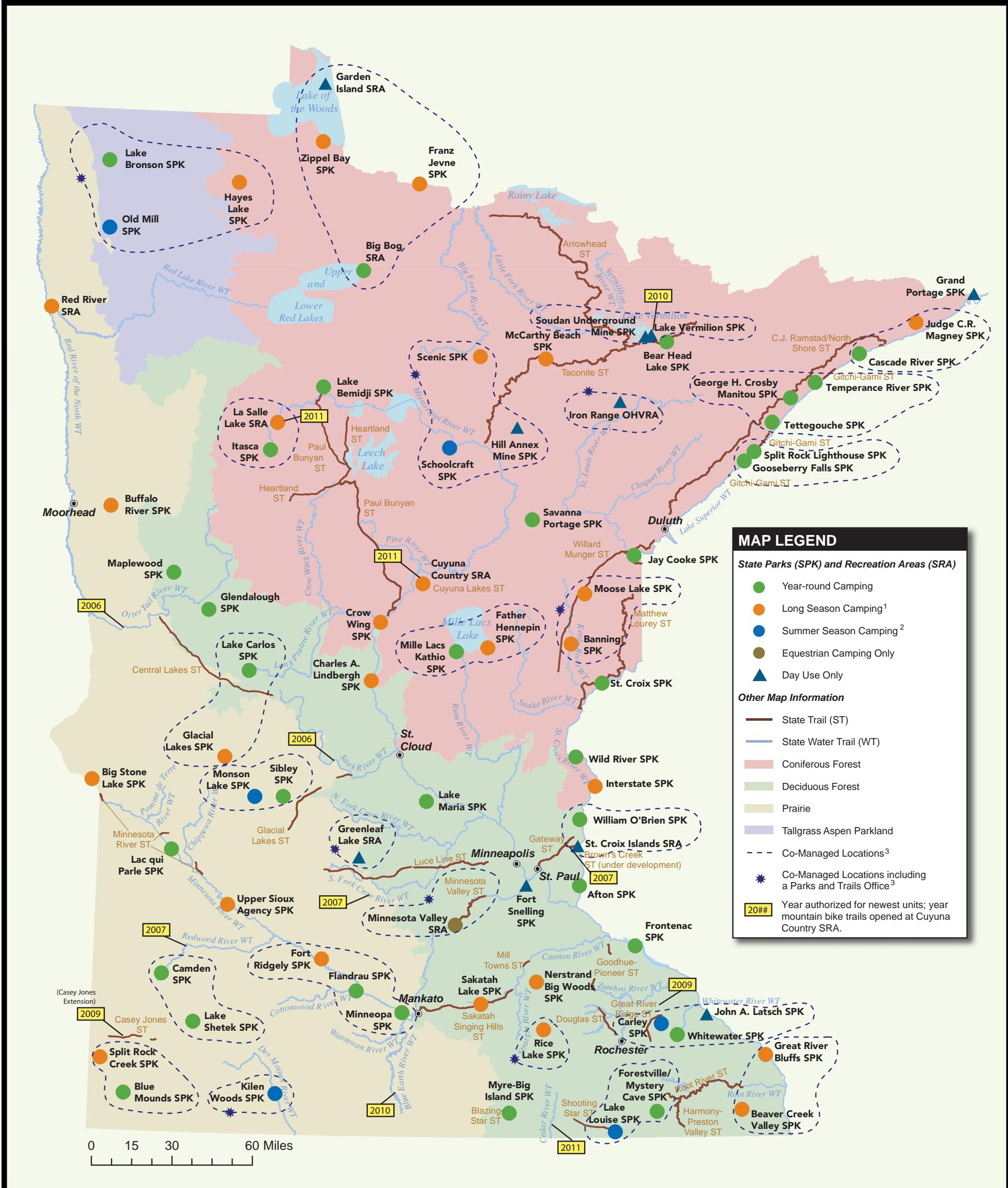
## Appendix D: Top Minnesota Attractions by Tourism Region



Subject to revision; ranked by actual or estimated visitors for 2010, including both local visitors and tourists. Note: This list includes only those attractions for which attendance was monitored and reported to Explore Minnesota Tourism.

Source: Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2010

# Minnesota State Parks and Trails



## State Parks and Trails Facilities

### State park facilities

State parks .....	67
State recreation areas .....	9
State waysides .....	8
Visitor centers .....	32
State park camping and lodging units .....	4,831
Horse camp sites .....	287
Group camp sites .....	112
State park trail miles .....	1,280
Archaeological sites...	700
State forest campgrounds and day-use areas .....	62

### Trail facilities

Ski trails .....	651
Horse trail miles (state park, state forest, state trail) .....	1,017
Snowmobile trail miles .....	946
Off-highway vehicle trail miles.....	1,001

### Trail facilities (continued)

Authorized state trail miles .....	2,695
Developed state trail segments .....	25
Paved and hardened trail miles .....	620
Natural surface trail miles .....	818
Grant-in-Aid (GIA) snowmobile trail miles.....	21,304
GIA cross-country ski trail miles .....	675
GIA off-highway vehicle trail miles .....	1,571

### Water recreation

Public water access locations .....	1,496
Fishing piers .....	355
Wild and scenic river conservation lands (acres) .....	5,778
State water trail miles (33 water trails) .....	4,528
Adopt-a-River shoreline miles cleaned in 2011 .....	735

### Camping seasons

All Minnesota state parks and recreation areas are open year-round, but camping seasons vary. The summer and long seasons on the map are effective starting in Fall 2013.

<sup>1</sup>**Long-season camping** is generally available April through late October or mid-November.

<sup>2</sup>**Summer-season camping** is generally available Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day Weekend.

### <sup>3</sup>Co-managed units

At these units, administrative and management functions have been consolidated and streamlined. Nearby units increasingly share one manager. Additional units are anticipated to be co-managed in 2013-14.