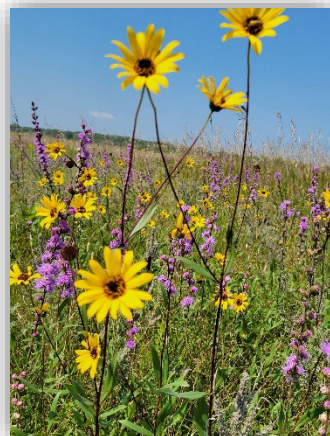
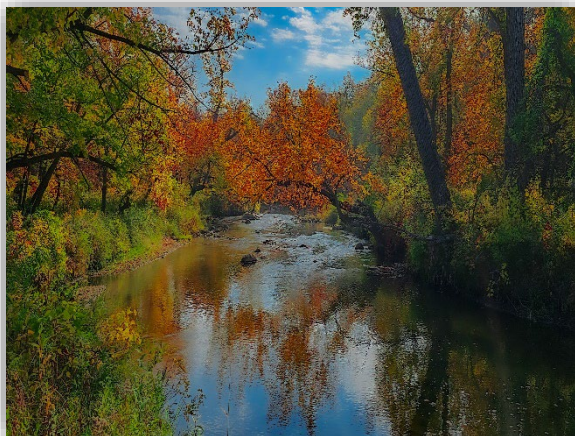


Buffalo River State Park

Management Plan

03/31/2026





For more information on this management plan, please contact the DNR Parks and Trails Division at (651)259-5600.

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**Department of Natural Resources Approval
Of the Management Plan for Buffalo River State Park**

Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.09, subd. 1 requires that a master plan be prepared for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks. The Laws of Minnesota for 1937 established Buffalo River State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.012, subd. 9).

The management plan (master plan) received input and comment both within the Department of Natural Resources and from the public.

/s/ Ann Pierce

Ann Pierce, Director
Parks and Trails Division, Minnesota DNR

03/31/2026

Date

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Parks and Trails Division
500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4039

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Executive Summary

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

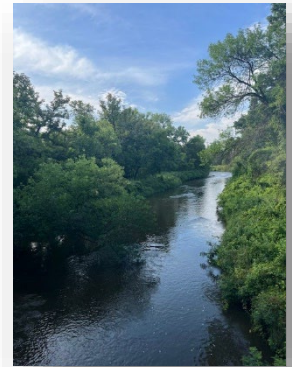
Buffalo River State Park, located in Clay County, Minnesota, 14 miles east of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area, was established in 1937 and was the first state-owned recreational facility in the area. The park encompasses over 1,100 acres of high-quality prairie, river and forest ecosystems. When combined with adjacent lands owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), it creates over 8,000 acres of contiguously managed land, known as the Bluestem Prairie Preserve.

Buffalo River State Park also holds evidence of a long history of people living in and traveling through the park—from early American Indian habitation and historic Ojibwe and Dakota sites to Euro-American settlement. The park contains a rich legacy of historic buildings and structures designed by the National Park Service and built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s.

Today, Buffalo River State Park offers many of the core recreational opportunities visitors expect to find in Minnesota state parks, including camping, hiking, fishing and picnicking. Like many of Minnesota’s state parks, visitation at Buffalo River State Park peaks in the summer. But, in recent years, visitation has been increasing in other parts of the year, with many locals visiting the park to enjoy winter hiking opportunities.

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

Natural and Cultural Resources—continue the management of native plant communities including maintaining and improving critically imperiled, imperiled and vulnerable to extirpation native plant communities and reconstructing native plant communities on undeveloped land; continue to manage invasive species and reduce woody species; and continue to preserve and perpetuate populations of the threatened or special concern species and species of greatest conservation need; and protect and maintain all known cultural



The 88-mile Buffalo River runs through the park for four miles.

resources in the park (see **Natural and Cultural Resources Recommendations** – p. 22).

Interpretive Services—update the park’s unit interpretive plan; create new self-guided interpretive trails and experiences within the park; add an outdoor amphitheater to the picnic area; and continue to work collaboratively with partners (see **Interpretive Services Recommendations** – p. 34).

Recreational Use and Visitor Services—add additional campsites to the campground; consider new camping opportunities like camper cabins; convert the former swimming pond to a nature play area; improve water access for fishing and paddling; and explore a connection of the Heartland State Trail extension to the park (see **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations** – p. 37).

Park Boundary—continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the statutory boundary; and propose a modification to the statutory boundary to include MSUM Regional Science Center land (see **Park Boundary Recommendations** – p. 43).

Operations—continue to maintain the partnership between the park, TNC and MSUM through the existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) (See **Operations Recommendations** – p. 45).

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

Recommendations in the management plan will be implemented over time and are subject to the availability of adequate capital development and operational funding.

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

Introduction

State Park Overview

Buffalo River State Park was established as a state park in 1937. The park is located 14 miles east of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area in Clay County. At the time it was established, Buffalo River State Park was the first state-owned recreational facility in the region. Taking advantage of federal job creation programs during the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established a camp and began developing the park's original 122 acres. The park was originally focused on providing outdoor recreation amenities like a human-made swimming pond since there were few other opportunities in the area. It was expanded beginning in the 1960s as the quality and rarity of the surrounding prairie were recognized.

Today the park has 1,355 acres within its statutory boundary and currently owns 1,131 of these acres. The park shares its southern border with the Bluestem Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), which is owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and co-managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The park also shares a boundary with the Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) Regional Science Center to the east. Together, these three areas make up over 8,000 acres of some of the finest and largest remnant tallgrass prairie preserves in the state. The landscape contains more than 250 species of wildflowers and grasses, including some plants now rare in Minnesota. The Buffalo River that runs through the park is bordered by a river bottom forest of ash, cottonwood, oak, and basswood.

Buffalo River State Park benefits from a long-standing partnership with TNC and MSUM that supports the shared stewardship of the park and surrounding natural areas. This collaboration is formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines cooperative management of resources, joint research efforts, and shared use of facilities, including the Regional Science Center. Together, these partners work to protect and interpret the region's unique prairie and riparian ecosystems, provide educational programming, and support scientific study that informs ongoing conservation and management efforts.

Cultural resources at the park document the long history of peoples in the area—from early American Indian habitation and historic Ojibwe and Dakota sites to Euro-American settlement. Many of the state park's facilities were developed by the WPA in the 1930s—several of these structures are part of a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Parks and Trails Division manages state parks, recreation areas, state waysides, forest recreation areas, state trails, water trails and other water recreation programs across the state.

The state park offers naturalist-led and self-guided interpretive opportunities for park visitors. Seasonal staff-led programs, signs and other materials provide park visitors with opportunities to learn about the park’s natural resources and history of the area, as well as outdoor skill-building activities.

Buffalo River State Park supports many of the core recreational opportunities visitors expect to find in Minnesota state parks. The park’s overnight facilities include a seasonal campground and group camp. An extensive trail network of prairie and riverine trails supports over 12 miles of hiking. Like many of Minnesota’s state parks, visitation at Buffalo River State Park peaks in the summer. But, in recent years, visitation has been increasing in other parts of the year, with many locals visiting the park to enjoy winter hiking opportunities.

Statutory Direction

Minnesota state statute provides direction for the purpose of state parks and how they should be developed and managed. As described in *Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.05:

Subd. 2. State park; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration. (a) A state park shall be established to protect and perpetuate extensive areas of the state possessing those resources which illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's natural phenomena and to provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations.

DNR utilized this framework as it developed resource management goals and considered interpretive and recreational opportunities for the property.

Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan and Buffalo River State Park

The DNR adopted the *Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan* in 2015. The system plan advances new approaches for managing state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, forest recreation areas and water recreation. The plan recommended a differentiated approach to managing these recreation systems – to focus on providing different types of recreational experiences and a range of facilities and levels of services at units across the system. The intended outcome is that visitors will have a wider range of high-quality opportunities from which to choose those that best match their interests and expectations.

Buffalo River State Park is designated a “Core/Gateway State Park” in the [Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan](#).

For more information about the system plan, see the DNR website.

The system plan created three investment groups—Rustic, Core, and Destination—to differentiate the types of experiences state parks and state recreation areas offer and to prioritize the kinds of investments to make across the system in the future. Under the investment group framework, Buffalo River State Park is one of 12 state parks designated as a Core/Gateway State Park. As described by the system plan:

Core State Parks and Recreation Areas offer a diversity of quality outdoor recreation experiences, often in close proximity to population centers, with an emphasis on providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails with basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage. In many ways, the Core group represents the typical visitor experience provided across much of the system to date: close-to-home, basic, high-quality facilities that visitors have come to know and expect. Gateway Parks and Recreation Areas – located within 30 miles of select metropolitan areas – will, over time, have the kind of facilities and programming that attracts and serves new outdoor recreation participants. The purpose of the additional differentiation is to target efforts to connect people to the outdoors by developing and promoting outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all backgrounds, especially families with children, ethnically diverse cultures, women, youth and young adults.

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation at Buffalo River State Park

Climate change alters the character of the state’s lands, waters, plants, fish and wildlife. It affects the DNR’s ability to manage these resources for the long-term benefit of the public. The DNR’s responsibility is to use the best available science to implement adaptation strategies that will minimize the negative impacts of climate change on the state’s natural resources, outdoor recreation opportunities, and commercial uses of natural resources.

The DNR will develop and implement land management practices that sustain Minnesota’s natural resources while helping to reduce future climate change by mitigating the environmental impacts of increased carbon emissions. These efforts will be guided by Operational Order 131 Climate Adaptation and Mitigation in Natural Resource Management. The DNR is committed to enhancing ecosystem resilience and reducing the negative impacts of climate change on the state’s resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.

For more information about climate change impacts and the DNR’s response, see the DNR website.

Climate change is impacting resource management and recreation in state parks. Several potential impacts and associated actions were identified during the planning process and are reflected in the texts and recommendations of the management plan. As part of assessing restoration efforts and plant community resilience, the division will monitor the health of native plant communities with an eye toward effects of climate change-related warming temperatures and varying precipitation. Natural and cultural resource management actions may need to adjust to changing conditions over time – timing and frequency for use of prescribed fire, invasive species management techniques, etc.

Communicating these impacts and responses to the public will be increasingly important at Buffalo River State Park and across the state park system. Longer shoulder seasons and less reliable winter snows will cause changes in visitor patterns and recreational opportunities, such as more winter hiking and less snow-shoeing or cross-country skiing opportunities.

Statutory Authority

Including the creation of Buffalo River State Park in 1937, the Minnesota State Legislature has passed eight acts related to Buffalo River State Park.

- *Laws of Minnesota 1937, chapter 474, section 1b*
 - Buffalo River State Park was established in 1937 by the Minnesota State Legislature. The land was purchased by the state's Executive Council to provide work for unemployment relief during the Great Depression and developed primarily for recreational purposes.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1961, chapter 60, section 4*
 - Lands were added to Buffalo River State Park's statutory boundary.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1967, chapter 787, section 3, subdivision 4*
 - Lands were added to Buffalo River State Park's statutory boundary.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1969, chapter 524, section 2*
 - The Minnesota State Legislature passed the Outdoor Recreation Act, which includes confirmation of which units that are to be considered state parks – including Buffalo River State Park.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1969, chapter 879, section 1, subdivision 5*
 - Lands were deleted from Buffalo River State Park's statutory boundary.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1989, chapter 259, section 1, subdivision 1*

- Lands were added to Buffalo River State Park’s statutory boundary.
- *Laws of Minnesota 1989, chapter 259, section 2*
 - Ten acres of land within the park were conveyed to Minnesota State University Moorhead via a transfer of custodial control to operate and maintain a science center.
- *Laws of Minnesota 2008, chapter 368, article 1, section 20, subdivision 1*
 - Lands were added to Buffalo River State Park’s statutory boundary.
- *Laws of Minnesota 2008, chapter 368, article 1, section 20, subdivision 1*
 - Lands were added to Buffalo River State Park’s statutory boundary.

Planning Process

The Buffalo River State Park Management Plan is a 20-year strategic vision for the state park. It guides the development of facilities and management of unit resources. Minnesota Statutes, Section 86A.09 requires a management plan be developed for certain units of the outdoor recreation system—including state parks. The DNR is to prepare and approve a management plan prior to requesting funding from the Minnesota State Legislature for the construction of new facilities or other development.

Management plans are developed through an open public process. DNR Parks and Trails Division staff and planners work with other DNR staff, other state agencies, local government officials, local legislators and citizens during the planning process.

The management plan process for Buffalo River State Park included several public engagement opportunities. The process began with an open house, held at the MSUM Regional Science Center on December 9, 2024. In addition to the open house, the division used an online survey of park visitors to gather input about the future development and management of the state park.

A citizen advisory committee (CAC) also provided input during the planning process. The CAC included members of local communities, state park visitors, and interested citizens. The committee met five times during the planning process:

- March 26, 2025
- April 16, 2025
- May 7, 2025

*For more information about public involvement in the planning process, see **Appendix B – Public Input and Review Summary.***

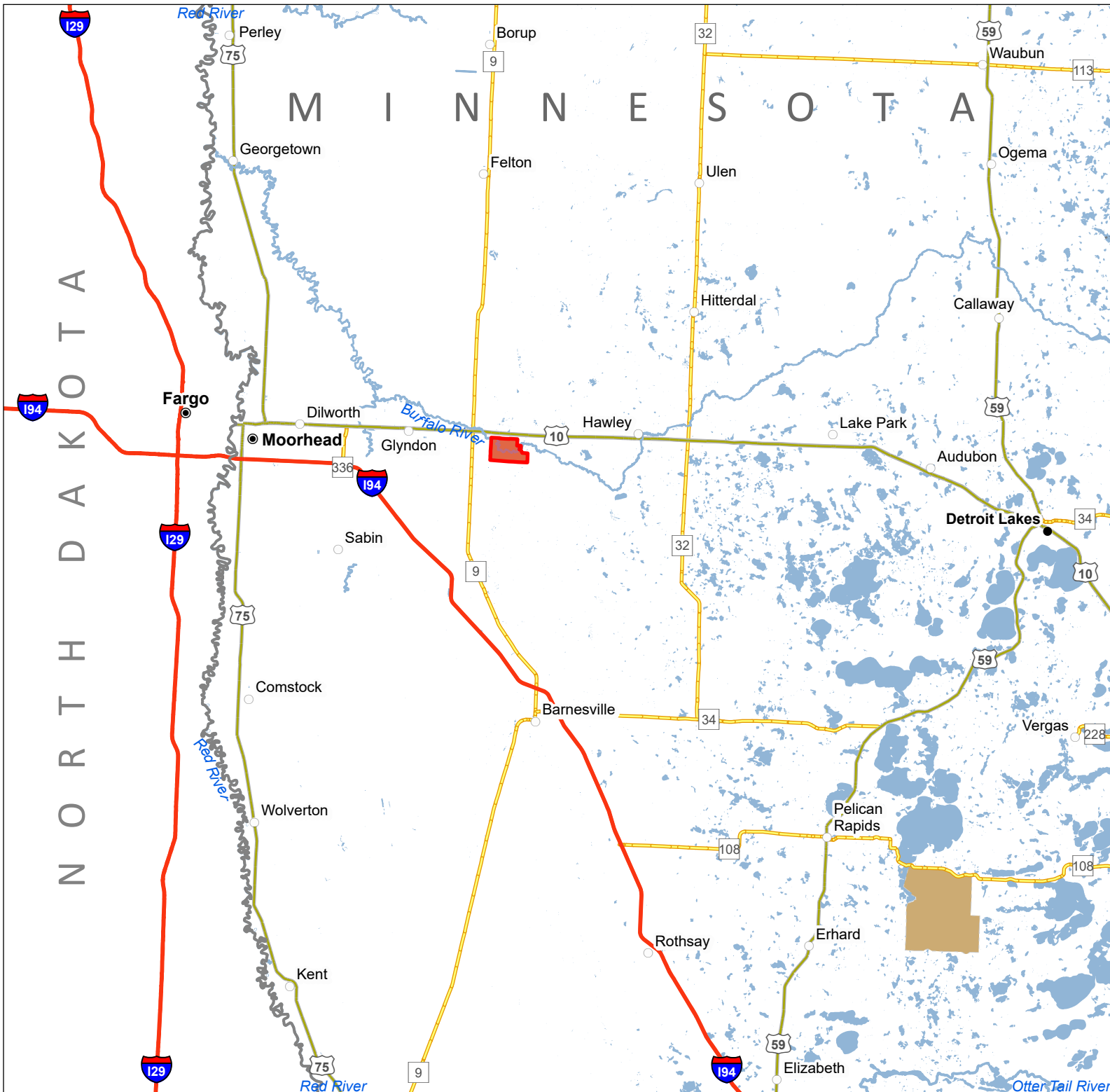
Buffalo River State Park Management Plan

- June 4, 2025
- August 19, 2025

The committee reviewed information collected during the planning process, provided input on the natural and cultural resource management issues, interpretive services programs, recreational use and visitor services proposals, and brainstormed and reviewed draft recommendations for the plan.

A draft of the Buffalo River State Park management plan was released for public review in November 2025, with an open house held on December 2, 2025 at the MSUM Regional Science Center.

For a more detailed summary of the public involvement efforts for the planning process, see Appendix B – Public Input and Review Summary.

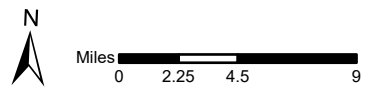


Buffalo River State Park

Figure 1: State Park Location

Legend

- Buffalo River State Park
- Major Rivers
- Interstate Trunk Highway
- U.S. Trunk Highway
- MN Trunk Highway
- Maplewood State Park



mn DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Regional Setting

Political and Demographic Setting

Buffalo River State Park is in Clay County in west central Minnesota, approximately 16 miles from the North Dakota border. In 2020, Clay County had a population of 65,318, a nearly ten percent increase from 2010. The county seat for Clay County is Moorhead, approximately 14 miles east of the park. Fargo, which is just east of Moorhead and about 15 miles from the park, is North Dakota's largest city. The Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area, which is made up of Clay County in Minnesota and Cass County in North Dakota, had a population of nearly 263,000 people in 2023, an increase of over seven percent since 2018. The population of the metropolitan area is expected to grow another 6.5% by 2028.

Buffalo River State Park shares a boundary with TNC's Bluestem Prairie SNA to the south and the MSUM Regional Science Center to the east. Together, these three areas create more than 8,000 acres of contiguously managed land.

Land surrounding the park, the SNA and the university's land is primarily agricultural land, with other publicly owned lands nearby, including state wildlife management areas and United States Fish and Wildlife Service waterfowl production areas.

Recreational Opportunities Setting

There are a range of recreational opportunities within a 30-mile radius of Buffalo River State Park (see Figure 2: Regional Recreation Opportunities). These opportunities include state and federal-managed facilities, as well as numerous local and privately-run facilities. This section lists several major categories of outdoor recreation facilities located within a 30-mile radius of the state park that offer similar nature-based opportunities.

State Parks, State Recreation Areas and State Waysides

Maplewood State Park is the only other state park or recreation area within 30 miles of Buffalo River State Park, measured as the crow flies. It contains a wide variety of recreational opportunities including 25 miles of hiking trails, multiple boat access points, a swimming beach and 20 miles of horseback riding trails. In the winter the park offers five miles of groomed classic ski trails and five miles of ungroomed backcountry ski trails, as well as 21 miles of groomed snowmobile

trails and an additional half-mile groomed snowshoe trail. The park has a part-time naturalist on staff year-round to provide interpretive programming.

Wildlife Management Areas

There are 47 state-managed wildlife management areas located within 30 miles of the state park. These areas primarily offer hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Scientific and Natural Areas

There are four SNAs within 30 miles of the state park: Richard M. and Mathilde Rice Elliot SNA, Blanket Flower Prairie SNA, Felton Prairie SNA, and Bluestem Prairie SNA. Bluestem Prairie SNA shares a border with Buffalo River State Park and lies within the Bluestem Preserve which is owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy. Bluestem Prairie SNA does not have any trails besides those which originate from Buffalo River State Park and run through the northern portion of the SNA.

Blanket Flower Prairie, Felton Prairie and Richard M. and Mathilde Rice Elliot SNAs do not offer any maintained trails or recreational facilities. All these SNAs are remnants of important prairie habitats. Felton Prairie SNA is an important gravel prairie complex; Blanket Prairie SNA straddles the edge of the prairie and deciduous forest; and Richard M. and Mathilde Rice Elliot SNA contains a high-quality remnant of native mesic prairie.

State Trails

A portion of the Heartland State Trail extension comes just within 30 miles of the state park. In 2006, the Minnesota Legislature authorized an extension of the Heartland State Trail from Park Rapids to Moorhead. Since the authorization, five miles of trail has been developed from Detroit Lakes to Frazee. The rest of the extension has yet to be developed.

State Water Trails

A large segment of the Red River of the North State Water Trail comes within 30 miles of the state park. There are ten water access sites on this segment as it runs through the middle of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area.

For more detailed descriptions of these state-managed recreation facilities and protected areas, see the DNR's website.

Waterfowl Production Areas

There are 138 federal waterfowl production areas within 30 miles of the park. These are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are generally open to recreation. Most of these sites are to the east of the park in the area surrounding Detroit Lakes.

Water Access Sites

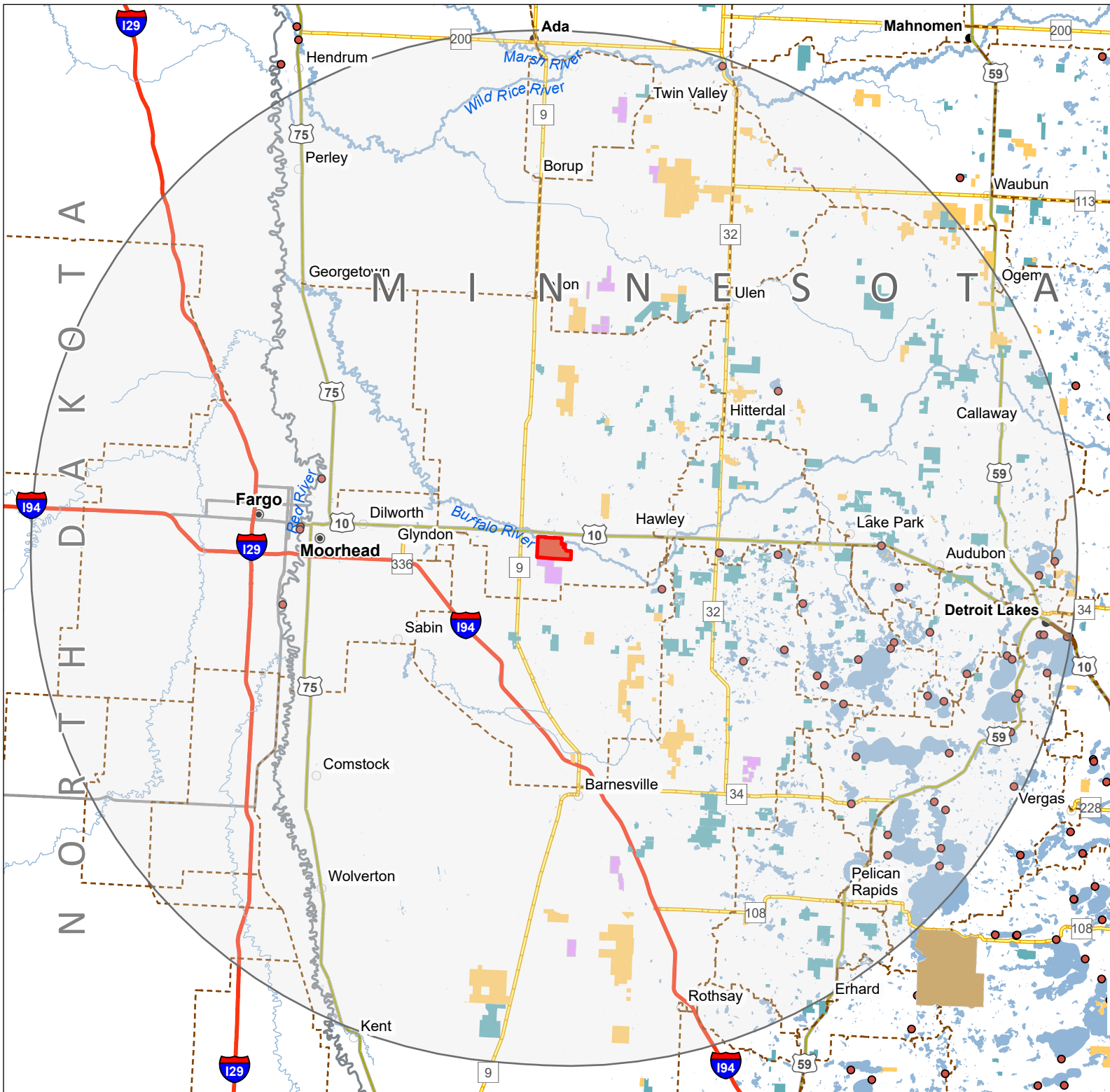
There are 47 public water access sites within 30 miles of the park, two of which are carry-in sites. Most of these sites are to the east of the park in the area surrounding Detroit Lakes.

Snowmobile Trails

While there are no snowmobile trails within the state park, there are over 596 miles of trail within 30 miles of the park. Of those miles, 473 are in Minnesota and 123 are in North Dakota.

Local Recreation Opportunities

There are numerous local parks and recreation sites within a 30-mile radius of Buffalo River State Park, including facilities in Glyndon, Hawley, Moorhead and Fargo. These municipal parks and recreation sites are usually smaller than state parks and are more typically focused on active recreation (playgrounds, pools, disc golf courses, ballfields, etc.) instead of the nature-based recreation typically found in a state park. The area is also home to privately-run recreational sites including swimming pools, campgrounds and other amenities. These sites may offer complementary opportunities to the type of experiences offered at Buffalo River State Park and have the potential to cross-promote and share visitors with the park, enhancing the recreation offering and tourism attraction of the area.

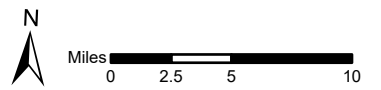


Buffalo River State Park

Figure 2: Regional Recreational Opportunities

Legend

-  30 Mile Radius
-  Maplewood State Park
-  Scientific and Natural Areas
-  Wildlife Management Areas
-  Waterfowl Production Areas
-  State Trails
-  Snowmobile Trails
-  Public Water Access Sites
-  Buffalo River State Park



Natural and Cultural Resources

The Parks and Trails Division uses a unit resource management plan to help guide natural and cultural resource management efforts at Buffalo River State Park. The division prepared the most recent version of this plan for the state park in 2025. The *Buffalo River State Park Unit Resource Management Plan* inventoried natural and cultural resources and set goals, objectives, and strategies for the division’s future efforts.

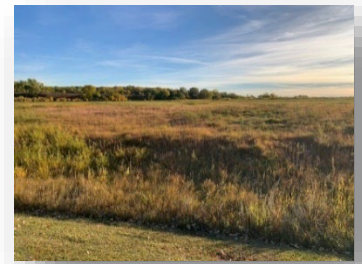
The information and recommendations below supplement the goals and directions set in the *Buffalo River State Park Unit Resource Management Plan*.

Natural Resources

Buffalo River State Park is an important resource area. The state park land, when combined with adjacent TNC and MSUM Regional Science Center lands, comprises the 8,093-acre Bluestem Prairie, a large, high-quality tallgrass prairie. The park, along with the rest of the Bluestem Prairie, was identified as a “core” prairie area in the 2011 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. This designation, reserved for important remnant prairies, spotlights the critical ecological role the state park and adjacent Nature Conservancy land holds. Some plants, animals and plant assemblages are so rare as to carry federal protections under the Endangered Species Act.

Climate

Buffalo River State Park has a typical continental climate characterized by harsh winters and warm summers. Temperature and precipitation rates for Moorhead, the nearest city with a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) observation station, are outlined in the table below.



The park contains some of the finest and largest remnant tallgrass prairieland in Minnesota.

Table 1: Historical Climate Data for City of Moorhead, MN

Month	Average Maximum Temperature (F)	Average Minimum Temperature (F)	Average Total Precipitation (inches)	Average Total Snowfall (inches)
January	17.2	-0.3	0.73	12.2
February	22.6	3.9	0.72	7.7
March	36.6	17.7	1.33	9.3
April	54.1	31.8	1.72	4
May	68.5	45.2	3.4	0
June	77.8	56.4	4.66	0
July	81.8	60.7	3.37	0
August	80.5	58.5	2.74	0
September	71.5	48.5	2.94	0
October	55.2	35.5	2.51	0.7
November	37.8	21.1	1.05	8
December	23.2	7.6	0.92	10.8

Buffalo River State Park is experiencing a changing climate as evidenced by increasing temperature and decreasing precipitation. Temperature has increased at a rate of 0.44 degrees per decade for the past 30 years while the 125-year increase was 0.23 degrees per decade. Precipitation measured over 125 years was increasing by 0.22” per decade but is now declining by 0.91” per decade over the past 30 years. In Minnesota, temperatures are expected to continue increasing into the foreseeable future, especially in the winter, and more frequent extreme precipitation events paired with longer dry spells are likely to occur.

Topography and Geology

The landscape of Buffalo River State Park and Bluestem Prairie was shaped by multiple waves of glaciation. The last glacier to cover the area—the Grantsburg-

Des Moines lobe of the Wisconsin glacial stage—melted around 10,000 years ago, forming the massive Glacial Lake Agassiz. At its largest, the lake spanned roughly 110,000 square miles across what is now northwestern Minnesota and parts of Canada.

As Lake Agassiz drained south through the Glacial River Warren (now the Minnesota River Valley), it left behind the flat lakebed that defines today's Red River Valley. Later drainage into Hudson Bay shifted the landscape further. The resulting topography is relatively flat, with subtle relief created by wave-cut escarpments and sandy beach ridges formed along ancient shorelines.

Several of these ancient shorelines—also known as strandlines—are still visible:

- The Campbell Beach Ridge, which crosses the west side of the park, is marked by scattered boulders (glacial erratics), including one near the park entrance with an interpretive plaque.
- The Norcross Beach Ridge lies southeast of the park, within Bluestem Prairie.
- A third, the Herman Beach Ridge, is located between the park and the town of Hawley.

Because of thick glacial and lakebed deposits, there are no exposed rock outcrops in the area. Beneath 250–500 feet of sediment lie layers of shale, granite, slate, and schist.

Soils

Soils in Buffalo River State Park were formed primarily from the sediments left behind by Glacial Lake Agassiz and glacial meltwaters. These soils support the park's diverse prairie and riverine ecosystems and are part of what makes the Red River Valley so agriculturally productive.

The park contains two main soil associations:

- Ulen-Arveson-Flaming soils are flat to gently sloping and range from poorly to moderately well-drained. They formed from sandy to clay-rich materials deposited by ancient lakes and glacial activity.
- Lohnes-Sioux soils vary from flat to steep, are generally better drained, and were formed by river and lake wave action from loamy and sandy outwash materials.

Notable features in the park's soil landscape include wave-cut escarpments and ancient beach ridges shaped by Glacial Lake Agassiz. The terrain between the



The Campbell Beach Ridge was left behind when Lake Agassiz drained.

Norcross and Campbell strandlines is especially flat, likely formed by a combination of delta deposits and beach over-wash processes. Some of the most distinct beach ridges can be observed in the northeast part of the park (Section 15) and on the eastern side of the MSUM Regional Science Center.

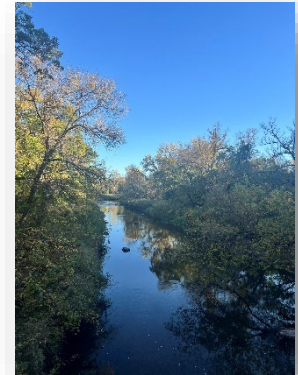
Water Resources

The 88-mile-long Buffalo River flows from Tamarac Lake in Becker County through the park and empties into the Red River near Georgetown, Minnesota. It drops 635 feet at a gradient of seven feet per mile. The river runs through the park for four miles and covers 20 acres. In 1938, a concrete low-head dam was constructed along the river in the park by the WPA. In 2002, the dam was removed, and three rock vanes were installed in the riverbed to return the river to a free-flowing condition. County Ditch #57, which runs along the west side of the park, was dug in 1957 to channel water into the Buffalo River from the adjacent prairies. The park also contains 122 acres of high-quality wet prairie.

Vegetation

Buffalo River State Park's vegetation has gone through major changes over the years. Prior to European settlement, the area was a host to pristine tallgrass prairie containing a vast array of forbs, grasses and sparse woody vegetation. Large trees were mostly restricted to the river terrace system and pockets of brush were scattered and mostly confined to the wet prairie and wetland transition zones. As settler-colonists arrived, they often brought with them vegetation from their homeland to use for gardening, landscaping, wind breaks, livestock food and more. This helped introduce non-native vegetation to the area (also incidentally through trade), which has degraded the quality of the landscape over time. The suppression of fire until the 1990s has also played a role in the increased woody vegetation cover. Other factors that have negatively influenced the landscape at Buffalo River State Park include agriculture, gravel mining and the construction of facilities on-site.

While the park was initially developed by the WPA in the 1930s to provide outdoor recreation amenities, Buffalo River State Park was expanded beginning in the 1960s as the quality and rarity of the surrounding prairie were recognized. Since then, the lands in the state park have been managed to sustain and restore native plant communities. Today, three ecological systems and five native plant communities are represented in the park (see Figure 5: Land Cover – System Level Classifications). Descriptions of the ecological systems and native plant community classes and types found in the park are



The Buffalo River winds through the park for 4 miles on its way to the Red River.

included in Appendix C – Ecological Systems and Native Plant Community Type Descriptions.

Table 2 – Landcover Types at Buffalo River State Park

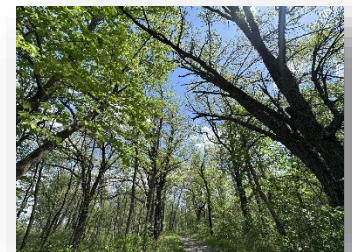
Landcover Description	Acres	% Cover
Developed and Use Areas	41	3.7
Reconstructed Prairie	170	15.6
Water Bodies	20	1.8
Old Fields	6	0.5
Black Ash-Silver Maple Terrace Forest	168	15.3
Dry Sand-Gravel Prairie (Northern)	11	1.0
Mesic Prairie (Northern)	538	49.2
Wet Prairie (Northern)	122	11.2
Dry Hill Prairie (Northern)	17	1.6

Old Growth Forests – The state park encompasses 149 acres of Black Ash-Silver Maple Terrace Forest designated old-growth along the river corridor. The division follows the DNR Old Growth Forests Guidelines for management of old growth stands in the state park.

Minnesota’s old growth forests are managed to ensure their quality is maintained. The following activities are not allowed: timber harvest (including salvage and timber improvements); wildlife opening and browse regeneration development; pesticide use except to protect against serious exotic threats; and new road or trail development.

Rare Plant Species – The park contains 12 rare plant species. One species is listed as federally threatened; two are state-listed threatened species; nine are state-listed species of special concern. All have a strong affinity for prairie or wet prairie settings.

Invasive Plant Species – There are numerous noxious invasive plant species present in the state park that are actively managed. Management strategies vary depending on the species. Control methods typically involve a combination of mechanical methods (mowing/prescribe fire), chemical methods (foliage spraying or spot application of herbicide) and biological controls. The division



Old growth forest along the river corridor in the park.

utilizes the department *Operational Order 113 Invasive Species* and division guidelines to identify appropriate control methods.

Invasive plant species of most concern at Buffalo River State Park are: leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, buckthorn, reed canary grass, Canada and other invasive non-native thistles, and Crown Vetch. In addition to these noxious non-native invasive plants, willows, boxelder, green ash and other woody species threaten the open prairies. Some species of terrestrial invasives such as Yellow Star Thistle and saltcedar do not occur in the park now but occur in states to the west and should be anticipated.

Desired Future Conditions

The long-term goals for Buffalo River State Park focus on maintaining and enhancing the quality of native plant communities. Restoration areas will be improved to at least a “moderate” quality ranking and sustained at that level or higher. Efforts will continue to reconstruct native vegetation on six acres of undeveloped land, supporting the natural seed bank and ongoing management. The park will also prioritize preserving populations of threatened and special concern plant species, as well as any rare plants discovered in the future. Management will target the most sensitive native communities to ensure they remain intact and representative of Minnesota’s pre-settlement ecosystems.

Wildlife

Remnant prairie landscapes can hold fauna lost in much of Minnesota. Prairies are amongst the most altered habitats in Minnesota and contain more species of greatest conservation need than any other habitat identified in *Minnesota’s State Wildlife Action Plan, Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare*.

Mammals

The park supports a variety of common prairie and woodland mammals. White-tailed deer, raccoons, red foxes, and eastern cottontail rabbits are regularly observed. Smaller mammals such as thirteen-lined ground squirrels, meadow voles, and northern short-tailed shrews are abundant in prairie areas. The park also provides habitat for less commonly seen species like mink, long-tailed weasels, and occasionally coyotes. Bats—including the little brown bat—are found foraging along the river and near wooded edges and are of growing interest due to regional population declines.



Little brown bats were once common and widespread in Minnesota but have suffered serious population declines due to White-nose Syndrome.

Moose and black bear are historically native in this landscape and occasionally continue to use resources in the park. These species also travel in the corridors prioritized for conservation in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Birds

Buffalo River State Park and the adjacent Bluestem Prairie SNA are recognized as important birding areas due to their high avian diversity. Grassland-dependent species such as western meadowlark, bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, and upland sandpiper nest in the prairie habitat. Riparian and wooded areas support a variety of forest birds, including great horned owls, woodpeckers, warblers, and American redstarts. Raptors such as northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, and bald eagles are also commonly seen flying above open areas and the river corridor.

Reptiles and Amphibian

The park's mix of moist lowlands, wetlands, and dry prairie ridges creates ideal habitat for several herpetofauna. Common species include American toads, Canadian toads, chorus frogs, leopard frogs, and tiger salamanders. Garter snakes and plains hog-nosed snakes are regularly observed in upland and edge habitats. Though less common, smooth green snakes and snapping turtles may also be present, particularly near wetlands or along the riverbanks.

Invertebrates

Buffalo River State Park supports a rich community of invertebrates, many of which are essential pollinators and indicators of ecological health. Native bee species, butterflies, and moths are particularly abundant in prairie habitats during the summer months. The park is home to several noteworthy pollinators, including monarch butterflies and regal fritillaries, both of which rely on native prairie plants. Aquatic invertebrates such as dragonflies, damselflies, and various aquatic insects are found near wetlands and the river, contributing to a healthy trophic web. The Buffalo River also supports populations of freshwater mussels, which play a critical role in maintaining water quality and serve as important indicators of stream health.

Fisheries

Based on fish surveys conducted by the DNR in the past 25 years, there are approximately 35 species of fish found throughout the 139 miles of the Buffalo River. Of the 35 species of fish found throughout the river, 13 were categorized as sensitive to environmental disturbances, although none were listed as



A female Oriole feeds her nestling.

species of special concern. The most common fish species sampled in Buffalo River State Park were common carp in 2001 and channel catfish in a 2016 survey of game fish. The removal of the dam in Buffalo River State Park in 2002 was a critical piece in restoring the connectivity of the river and of the spawning fish species that inhabit it.

The Buffalo River is also an important location in the effort to restore Lake Sturgeon to the Red River of the North watershed. Lake Sturgeon were historically abundant in the Red River basin but overfishing, declines in water quality and construction of dams led to Lake Sturgeon being extirpated from the Red River basin by the mid-1900s. Work to restore the Lake Sturgeon population has been in progress since the 1980s, an important part of which was the removal of the dam in the park. There has also been subsequent stocking of over 28,000 Lake Sturgeon in the Buffalo River since 2002.

Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species

There are 12 plant and 34 animal (including birds, butterflies and moths, a gastropod, mammals, reptiles and amphibians) federal- or state-listed species documented within the state park. The division monitors the known locations of these species and uses its resource assessment process to avoid or mitigate impacts to listed species by development projects, recreational activities or other management actions.

Cultural Resources

Buffalo River State Park sits on historic homelands of the Ojibwe and Dakota people. The 1825 Treaty of Prairie du Chien was a significant agreement between the United States government and multiple Indigenous nations, including the Dakota and Ojibwe. The U.S government stated the treaty aimed to reduce intertribal conflict by establishing formal boundaries between the traditional territories of these nations. One of the key boundary lines created by the treaty followed the course of the Buffalo River in present-day Minnesota, which served as a dividing line between Dakota lands to the south and Ojibwe lands to the north. This boundary did little to ease longstanding tensions between the two nations as resources such as game could not be confined to the same boundary limits. While the treaty sought to promote peace, it also paved the way for increased U.S. intervention and eventual displacement of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.

The park, along with the adjacent SNA and MSUM lands, contains significant cultural resources reflecting both ancient and more recent human habitation.

The area includes several known buffalo processing sites and other archaeological features that provide insight into the region’s rich cultural history. Evidence indicates that this landscape has served as a travel corridor and seasonal camping area for thousands of years.

The Red River Oxcart Trails once stretched a distance of over 900 miles between Saint Paul, Minnesota, and Manitoba, Canada. with a portion of the trails running parallel to the Buffalo River in the vicinity of the state park. These trails were used by Métis groups/individuals and fur traders beginning in the 1820s and prior to the introduction of the railroad in the area, the carts carried goods such as furs, hides and tallows from the Red River region to Saint Paul. The carts were constructed entirely of wood and leather and were noted for their creaks and groans which could be heard from miles away.

Buffalo River State Park also contains numerous cultural resources related to its development as a state park. Several of the state park’s original facilities were constructed by the WPA in the National Park Service Rustic style. Together, these facilities are designated as a historic district and have been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989. The historic district includes three buildings—the bath house (commonly referred to as the picnic area bathrooms), the garage and residence (nature center), and the latrine (sanitation building in campground)—and three structures—the stone curb, diversion dam, and the swimming beach (commonly referred to as the swimming pond)—that contribute to the historic designation as well as one non-contributing building—a small well house.

In 2002, a portion of the WPA diversion dam was removed due to public safety issues caused by water pollutants in river water entering the swimming pond. The dam abutments were retained, and rock vanes replaced the spillways. The pond was reconstructed using filtered water and depth was reduced to promote swimmer safety. In 2019, the swimming pond was closed due to operational challenges.

Natural and Cultural Resource Recommendations

General

- Utilize the Unit Resource Management Plan to guide resource management efforts. The division will continue to follow the directions for natural and cultural resource management set out in the park’s unit resource management document, as supplemented with the recommendations in this management plan.



The WPA bath house, commonly referred to as the picnic area bathrooms



The WPA garage and residence, commonly referred to as the nature center.



The WPA latrine is located in the campground.

- Conduct resource assessments to avoid or mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources. The division will utilize its resource assessment process to identify natural and cultural resources impacts and devise avoidance and mitigation strategies.
- Follow the directions established in the Department of Natural Resources' Operational Order 131 Climate Adaptation and Mitigation in Natural Resource Management. The division will utilize the department's operational order and its own division guidelines to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on its natural resources.
- Ensure resource management efforts and other park activities protect rare plants and animals. The division will utilize information about the presence of rare plants and animals within the state park to evaluate division management and park visitor activities impacts, and devise actions to protect these species and critical habitat.

Vegetation Management

- Continue native plant community management in the state park. The division will continue managing native plant communities throughout the park by maintaining or improving quality ranks to "high" and transitioning restorations in the park to native plant communities of "moderate" quality. Remnant prairies are uncommon in Minnesota and the genetics of Buffalo River's plants is protected. Restorations within the park will use seed harvested from within the Bluestem Prairie Complex whenever possible. Supplemental seed is obtained from the nearest possible source. Operational Order 124 Plant Materials Standards for Native Plant Community Restorations may provide some additional guidance, but the remnant quality of the Bluestem Prairie complex requires exceeding the minimum requirements found within the operational order.
- Maintain and improve critically imperiled (S1), imperiled (S2) and vulnerable to extirpation (S3) native plant communities. The division will direct management activities to maintain these communities as intact assemblages representative of Minnesota's pre-European settlement history.
- Reconstruct native plant communities on undeveloped land. Maintain current management and monitoring practices to restore native plant communities in undeveloped areas in the park to at least a "moderate" ranking.
- Follow department policy on managing old growth forest stands within the state park. The department old growth forest policy provides

direction for management activities in old growth forest stands. The focus of the department's policy is to promote regeneration and maintain or restore the integrity of the old growth communities.

- Continue to manage invasive plant species within the state park. The division will utilize the directions in the department Operational Order 113 Invasive Species and its own division-level guideline to continue invasive plant species management and monitoring efforts.
- Continue to reduce woody species throughout the open acres of the park. Climate change is increasing hydrologic pressure that favors growth of woody stems which threaten the integrity of open grassland. The division will continue efforts to control and reduce the detrimental impacts caused by pioneer woody plants in the prairie.
- Continue to preserve and perpetuate populations of the threatened or special concern plant species documented in the park and any other rare plant species that are discovered in the future. The park contains 12 rare plant species, and more species will likely be added as future inventories are completed.
- Support a functional floodplain to reduce downstream flooding. Areas adjacent to the Buffalo River serve as an important floodplain that mitigate downstream flooding and impacts to resources. Management actions of this floodplain include preserving undeveloped floodplain areas and removing or modifying barriers that restrict natural floodplain function.
- Utilize timber harvest as a tool for vegetation management and native plant community restoration efforts, including contracting with commercial operators when appropriate. Timber harvest may be implemented to restore and maintain native plant communities, improve forest health, and support other resource management practices such as prescribed fire. Harvest activities may also be used to address storm damage, insect or disease concerns, fuel load reduction, and visitor safety or access needs.

Wildlife Management

- Preserve and perpetuate populations of species of greatest conservation need. The park contains 34 species of greatest conservation need and more species will likely be added as further inventories are completed and as the state wildlife action plan is updated.
- Manage the park to maintain viable nesting areas for grassland birds. Manage the plant communities of the park to maintain a sustainable

population of Prairie Chickens and other grassland birds including species showing world-wide declines.

- Manage white-tailed deer to reduce impacts on native plant communities. The division will manage the population of white-tailed deer such that native vegetation is not overly impacted.
- Continue to investigate re-introduction of prairie obligate butterflies into the park. The division will continue its cooperative work with the Minnesota Zoo to investigate the possibility of the reintroduction of extirpated prairie butterflies and begin such reintroduction activities where success is likely.



Cultural Resources Management

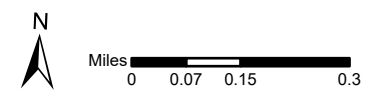
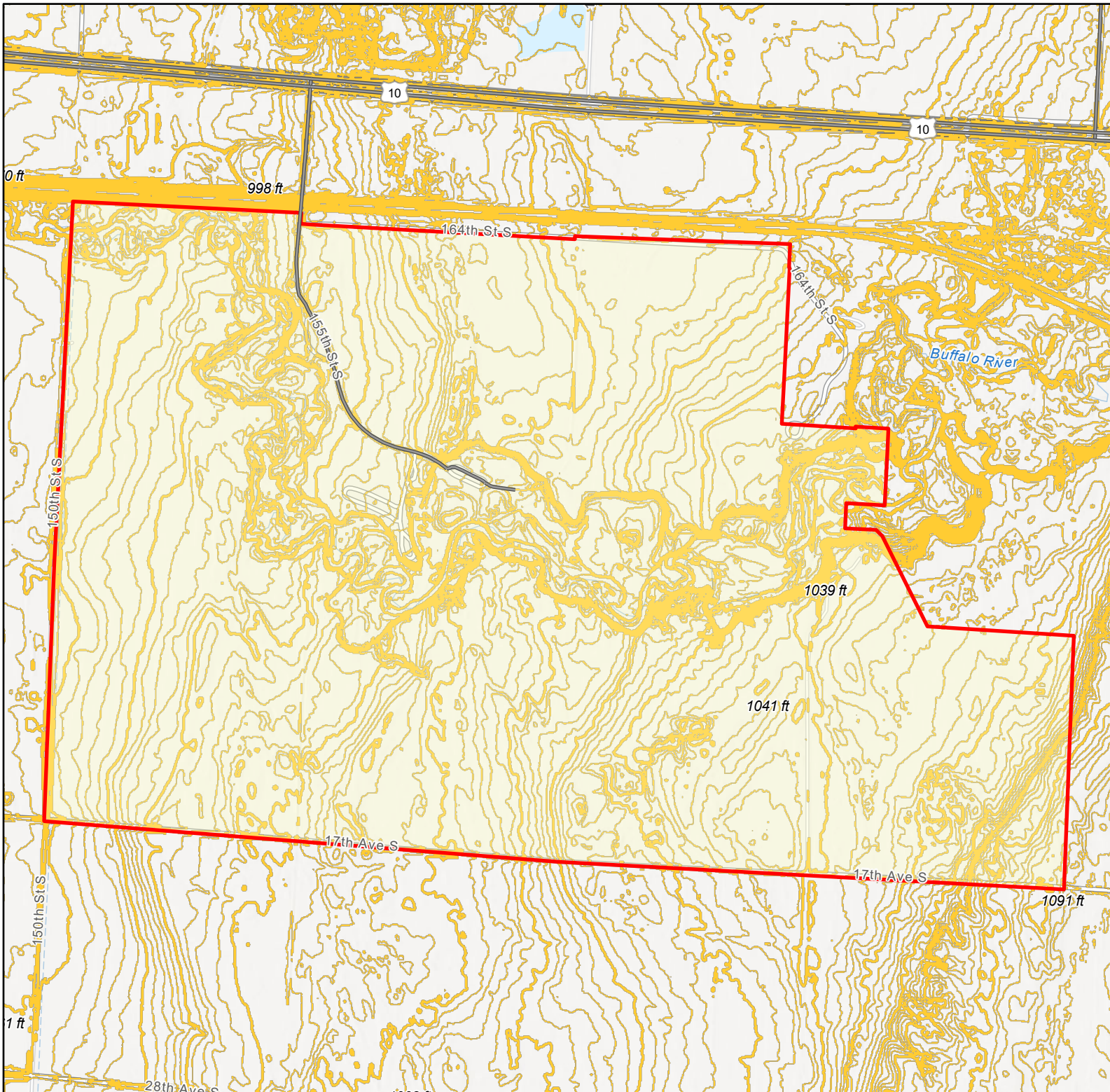
- Protect and maintain all known cultural resources in the park. The division will continue to protect all known cultural resources by preventing vandalism and locating trails and other development so as not to impact known or suspected cultural resources. In cases where impacts cannot be avoided, mitigation will be conducted to preserve the artifacts and information.
- Work with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Minnesota Historical Society to maintain the park's historic district. All repairs and improvements to historic structures will be done in consultation with the Historical Society. Additionally, the closure of the swimming pond by the division will require its removal as a contributing element to the historic district which will be done in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office to ensure compliance with relevant state and/or federal historic preservation laws related to the historic district within the park.

Buffalo River State Park

Figure 3: Topography

Legend

-  2ft Contours
-  Buffalo River State Park Statutory Boundary



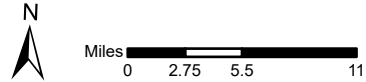
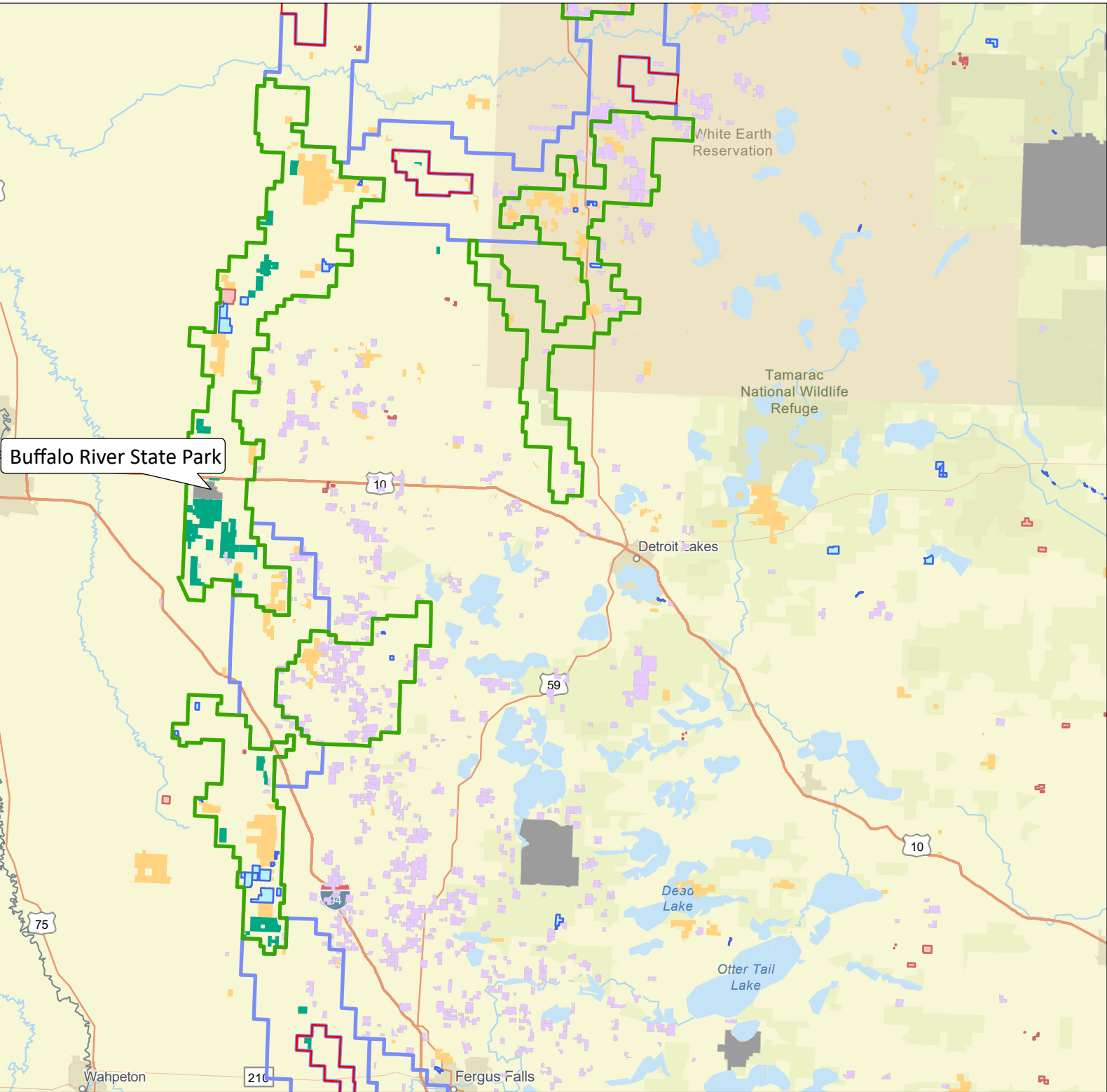
 DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Buffalo River State Park

Figure 4: Position in the Landscape

Legend

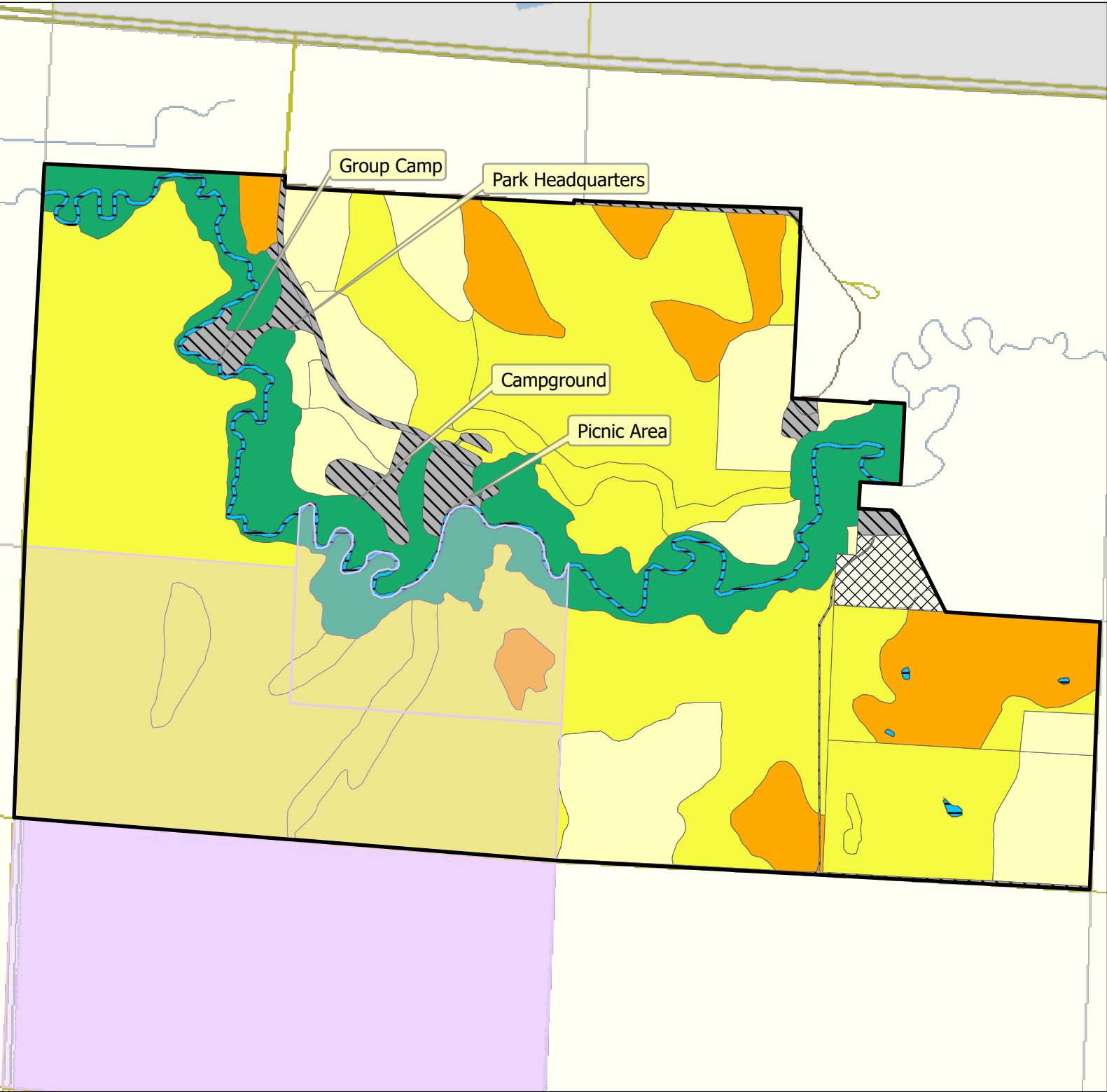
- MN Prairie
 Conservation Plan - Corridor Complex
- MN Prairie
 Conservation Plan - Core Area
- MN Prairie
 Conservation Plan - Corridor
- USFWS Conservation Easements - FSA
- USFWS Conservation Easements - USFWS
- State Conservation Easements - MS Chapter 84C
- The Nature Conservancy Preserves
- State Wildlife Management Area Boundaries
- Minnesota State Park



Buffalo River State Park

Figure 5: Land Cover-System Level Classification

- Legend**
- Bluestem Prairie SNA
 - System Level Classification**
 - Floodplain Forest System
 - Upland Prairie System
 - Wetland Prairie System
 - Other Natural System
 - Non-Natural System
 - Facilities System
 - Private land within park

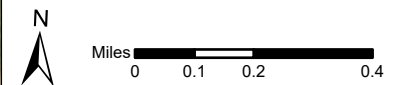
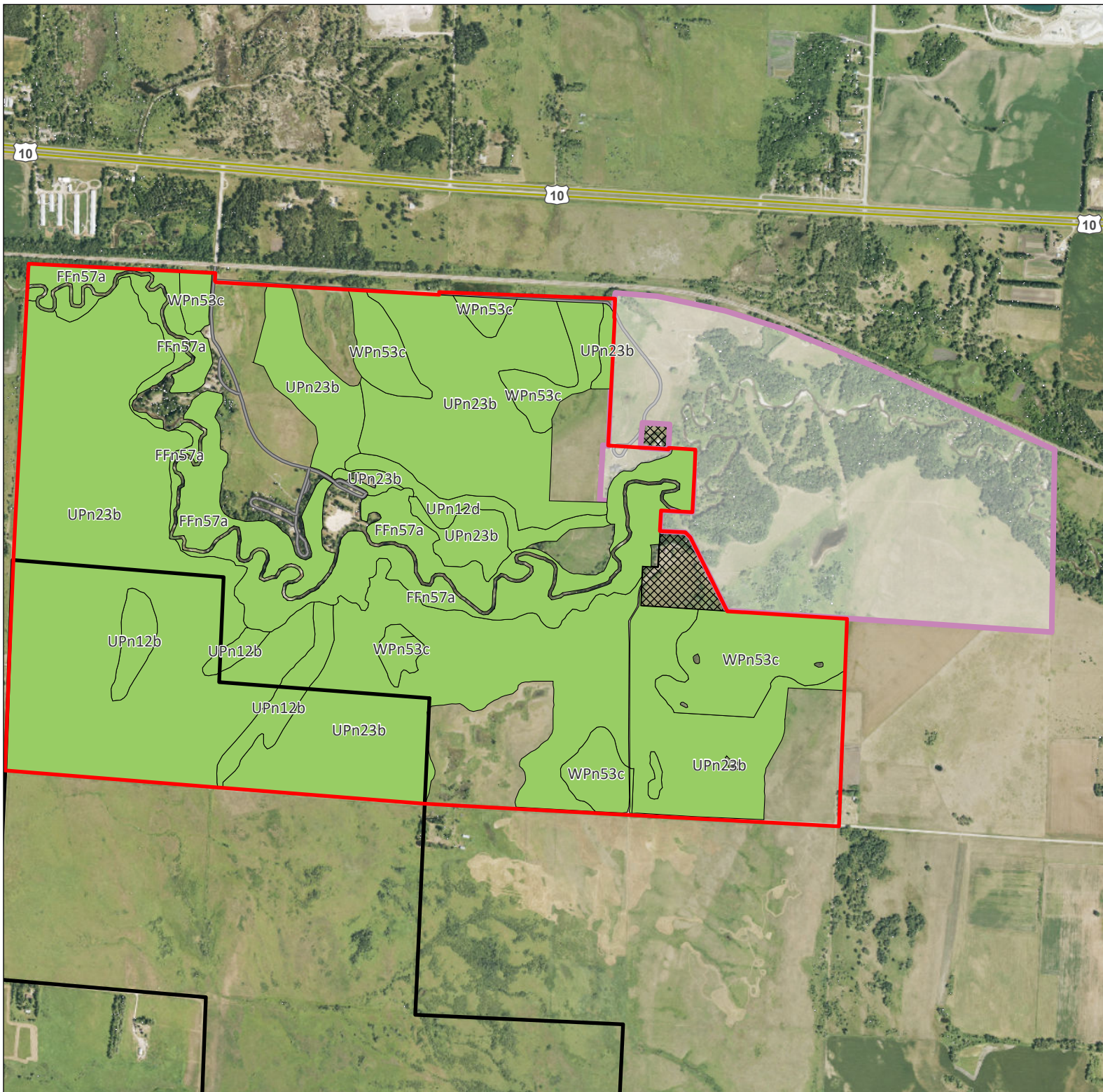


Buffalo River State Park

Figure 6: NPC Quality Rank

Legend

- High Quality NPC
- MSUM Regional Science Center Boundary
- Buffalo River State Park Boundary
- The Nature Conservancy Land
- Private Inholdings

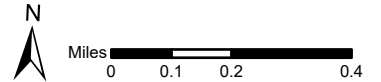
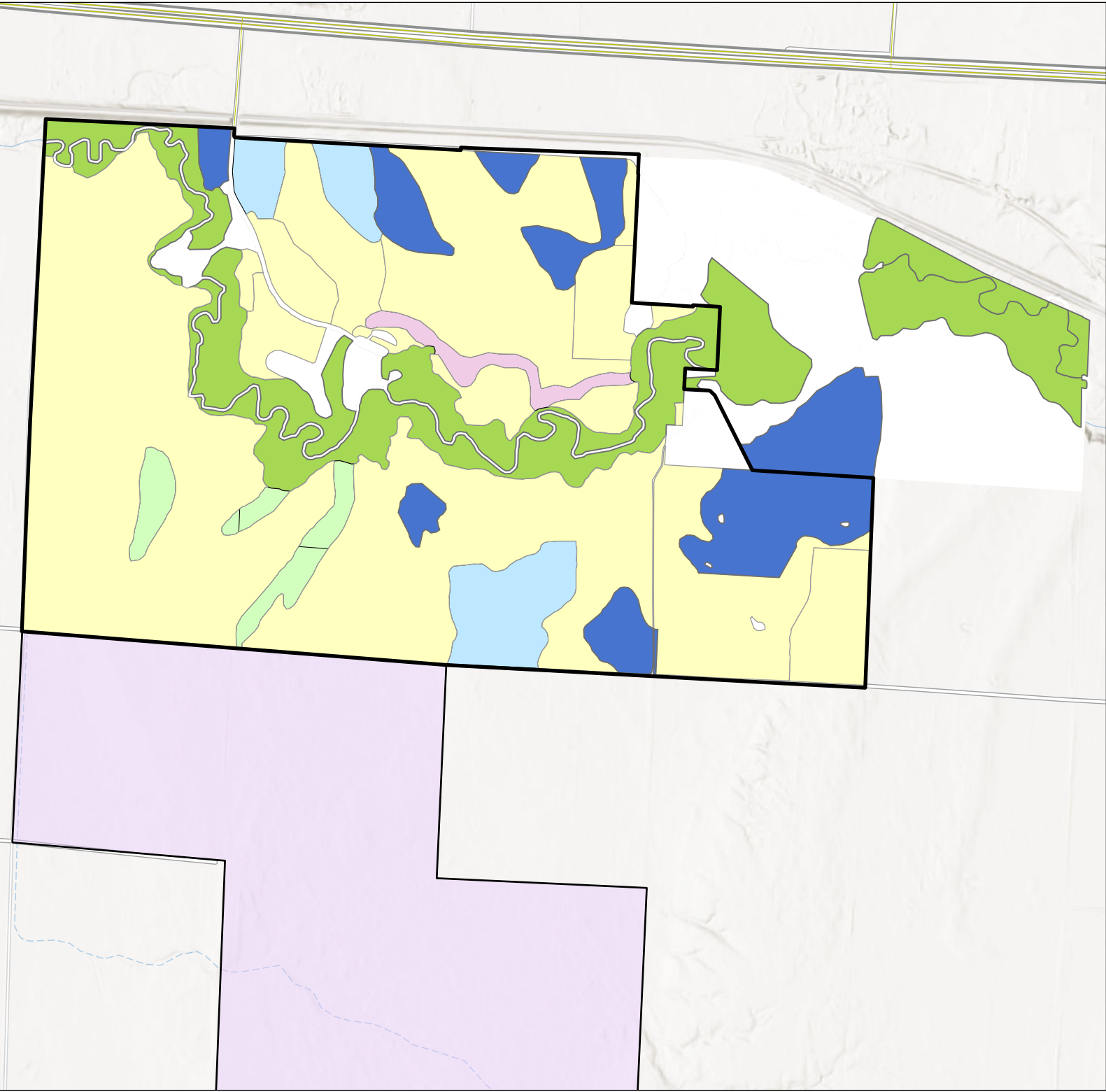


Buffalo River State Park

Figure 7: Desired Future Conditions

Legend

- Not Applicable/ No data
- Black Ash - Silver Maple Terrace Forest
- Dry Sand - Gravel Prairie (Northern)
- Dry Hill Prairie (Northern)
- Mesic Brush-Prairie (Northern)
- Mesic Prairie (Northern)
- Wet Prairie (Northern)
- Bluestem Prairie SNA
- Buffalo River State Park





Buffalo River State Park


Figure 8: National Historic District

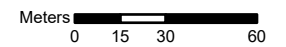
Legend

Contributing Buildings

 Building

 Structure

 Historic District



Interpretive Services

The Parks and Trails Division’s interpretive services program forges emotional and intellectual connections to Minnesota’s natural, cultural and recreational heritage by provoking curiosity, encouraging discovery, and inspiring stewardship across generations.

The division’s interpretive services program connects people with the outdoors with staff-led and self-guided experiences. Professional interpreters lead a variety of programs such as talks, special events and outdoor skills-building programs. Self-guided experiences include interpretive trails, exhibits, brochures and electronic media.

The *Minnesota State Parks and Trails Statewide Plan for Interpretive Services* (2018) communicates the vision and goals for interpretive services system-wide.

Existing Interpretive Programs and Services

Programs and Special Events

In partnership with the SNA program, the park offers interpretive programs during the summer months. Programs typically include guided hikes, nature talks, outdoor skill-building activities and occasional special events that focus on topics like prairie ecology, wildlife observation, and the cultural history of the region. These programs are designed to engage a wide range of audiences, including families, young children and general visitors.

Programs and events are promoted through the DNR online events calendar, the park’s weekly program flyers and occasional news releases.

Self-Guided Interpretive Opportunities

Buffalo River State Park offers self-guided interpretive opportunities that enhance the visitor experience. The park recently completed an inventory of its exhibits, determining that most had reached the end of their lifespan and needed to be removed. A small number of new exhibits were installed in 2019 and 2020, including the pollinator plot which sits along the Muskoda Trail in the campground. This wayside exhibit explains the importance of pollinators to prairie ecosystems and all along the trail, visitors will find native wildflowers planted to support pollinators like monarch butterflies and native bees.



The pollinator plot features an interactive wayside exhibit.

In addition to signage, the park provides interpretive resources for checkout at the contact station, including discovery kits, birding kits, fishing poles, and Junior Ranger booklets for children.

Interpretive Facilities

Currently, Buffalo River State Park does not have any dedicated interpretive facilities such as a visitor center, interpretive building, or amphitheater. The park occasionally uses MSUM's Regional Science Center for select programs.

Interpretive Staffing

Since 2012, the park has shared a summer seasonal naturalist position in partnership with the SNA program. The position is based out of the park, but the naturalist spends most of their time on SNA-related programming and the remainder on interpretive programming at the park. The SNA program covers the position's salary in exchange for supervision from the park manager, guidance from the Parks and Trails Division regional naturalist, and delivery of a few programs each week at the park. Prior to 2012, the park contracted with MSUM to provide summer interpretive programming at the park.

Outreach

Outreach efforts at Buffalo River State Park have been limited due to the seasonal and shared nature of the interpretive position. With no full-time interpretive staff based at the park and no dedicated interpretive facilities, it has been challenging to maintain a consistent presence in the surrounding community or to develop sustained partnerships with local organizations. These limitations have made it difficult to fully engage diverse audiences or expand awareness of the park's unique natural and cultural resources.

Partnerships

Partnerships are an integral part of interpretive services at Buffalo River State Park. A key collaboration between the state park and the SNA program enables the presence of a seasonal naturalist who provides valuable educational programming during the peak visitor season. Additionally, the park occasionally partners with MSUM to host events at the Regional Science Center. These partnerships enhance the park's capacity to offer interpretive experiences that connect visitors with the unique natural and cultural resources of the region.



While the park does not have its own interpretive center, it often is able to use the MSUM Regional Science Center for programming.

Interpretive Services Recommendations

General

- Update the Buffalo River State Park Interpretive Plan. Unit interpretive plans describe expectations for staff-led and self-guided interpretation at this unit. Unit interpretive plans identify audiences, resource stories (or themes), and their methods of interpretation. Unit-level interpretive plans are intended to supplement the statewide interpretive plan. Buffalo River State Park's current interpretive plan was written in 2008. The update should integrate the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan (2019) and the Minnesota State Parks and Trails Statewide Plan for Interpretive Services (2018) guidance, along with any recent natural and cultural resource research findings. It is important that interpretive services planned at Buffalo River State Park are welcoming, inclusive and relevant for diverse audiences.
- Create new, self-guided interpretive trails and experiences within the park. These experiences should highlight the park's unique natural and cultural features, encouraging deeper visitor engagement and independent exploration.

Interpretive Services Facility Developments

- Consider interpretive opportunities when updating or constructing new recreational facilities in the park. During the early planning stages, identify opportunities for new exhibits or other creative elements to interpret important park themes, and consider adding an indoor presentation and storage space if appropriate.
- Add a small outdoor amphitheater to the picnic area. A small amphitheater would provide an additional space for interpretive programming.

Partnerships and Outreach

- Continue to work collaboratively with the MSUM Regional Science Center, TNC and the SNA program. This includes the development of joint educational programming, citizen science initiatives and public outreach events. Continue to utilize the Regional Science Center as a venue for indoor interpretive programming, workshops and special events.

- Increase promotion of the park and interpretive programs by utilizing partner resources. Collaborate with local organizations, tourism bureaus, schools and media outlets to expand the reach of marketing efforts. Leverage the communication platforms of key partners — including the MSUM Regional Science Center, TNC and the SNA program — to share program schedules, special events, and volunteer opportunities.

Recreational Use and Visitor Services

Buffalo River State Park offers an array of recreational opportunities for visitors. This includes over 12 miles of hiking trails that meander through both the river bottom forest and prairie landscapes, a large picnic area that includes a screened-in picnic shelter, access to the river for fishing and wading, and a seasonal campground and group camp. The adjacent Bluestem Prairie SNA and MSUM Regional Science Center land also provide additional opportunity for prairie exploration.

Up until 2019, Buffalo River State Park featured a human-made swimming pond that was fed with extensively treated water from the Buffalo River. This amenity has remained closed due to a variety of ongoing operational challenges, including the high costs associated with water treatment and physical plant maintenance, as well as persistent local workforce challenges. The pond was originally constructed to provide a swimming option in an area where few such opportunities existed; however, over time, additional public and private swimming facilities have become available in the region, reducing the need for the park to offer this amenity. Additionally, this type of amenity is not typical of the recreation opportunities offered within the Minnesota State Park system. The swimming pond, being a highly modified and artificial feature, does not align with state parks' statutory purpose. Therefore, the DNR does not intend to reopen the pond and instead focus on recreational opportunities that better fit within the state park system and the park's landscape.

Overnight Use Facilities – Camping and Lodging

Buffalo River State Park has a variety of camping facilities that support overnight use for park visitors, including a seasonal drive-in campground with 35 electric campsites and nine non-electric campsites. The campground also features an RV dump station and a modern accessible shower building that was constructed in 2019. The park also has the Coneflower Group Camp, a seasonal group camp along the river that can accommodate up to 50 people.



The picnic shelter is enclosed and has electricity. It may be reserved in advanced for events and is open to the public when not in use.

Day-Use Facilities and Areas

For day-use visitors, the park features a spacious picnic area, including a screened-in picnic shelter that offers a comfortable, shaded setting for group gatherings and protection from insects and weather. Seasonal flush toilets are available in the picnic area and there are vault toilets available for year-round use. During the winter months, the nearby hill provides a spot for sledding, making the picnic area a hub of activity in all seasons.

Trails and Trail Uses

Buffalo River State Park offers approximately 12 miles of hiking trails that traverse a diverse landscape of northern tallgrass prairie, riverine forests, and floodplain ecosystems. These trails provide visitors with opportunities to observe over 250 species of native wildflowers and grasses, as well as a variety of wildlife. Notable trails include the 2.5-mile Hiking Club Trail, which loops through wooded areas along the Buffalo River and open prairie habitats, and the Bluestem Trail, a two-mile loop leading to the Bluestem Prairie SNA. The Muskoda Trail offers a half-mile loop near the campground and features the pollinator plot, where visitors can enjoy a seasonal display of native wildflowers that support bees, butterflies and other essential pollinators. Trails in the park are generally flat and composed of mowed grass, making them accessible to hikers of most abilities.

Due to limited funding and variable winter weather, the park does not groom trails for winter use. Visitors may still access the trails in the winter and are welcome to hike, snowshoe, or cross-country ski on ungroomed paths.

Accessibility

The DNR is committed to serving all Minnesotans, and one way to enhance that service is by improving accessibility at state parks so every visitor can enjoy their natural beauty and recreational opportunities. This commitment aligns with federal law: under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (28 CFR Part 36), state and local governments may not discriminate on the basis of disability. Access must be provided to services, programs and activities, and 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 areas. The ADA also provides guidance for accommodating the variable character of the natural environment when ensuring accessibility, delineating modifications and exceptions that may be applied to preserve the integrity of outdoor recreation settings while addressing



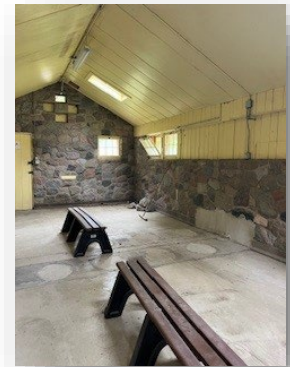
View from the Hiking Club Trail at Buffalo River State Park.

elements such as hydrology, terrain, surface characteristics and vegetation. Information regarding accessibility will be available in both print and digital formats to help guide visitor expectations.

Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations

Overnight Facilities

- Add additional campsites to the campground where feasible. The existing campground is at capacity on most weekends during the summer and could benefit from additional campsites to increase capacity.
- Consider adding new camping opportunities to the park. Camper cabins offer a lower barrier to entry for visitors who are new to camping. Given that Buffalo River’s campground is at capacity on most summer weekends and the demand for camper cabins is high across the state park system, the addition of this type of opportunity would likely attract new visitors and see strong use throughout the camping season. One potential option would be to convert the former WPA latrine/sanitation building into a two-unit camper cabin, as it is already situated within the campground. Additionally, there may be an opportunity to add remote camping opportunities to the park. Implementation of both camper cabins and remote campsites should be pursued in a manner that aligns with the park’s operational capacity, resource considerations and business needs.
- Make improvements to the group camp to enhance accessibility, functionality, and the visitor experience. This could include upgrades to pathways, restrooms, and overall layout to better accommodate visitor needs and improve the function of the site.



Converting the former WPA latrine/sanitation building into two camper cabins may be a good reuse of the building.

Day-Use Facilities and Areas

- Convert the swimming pond into a nature play area that appeals to a variety of visitors and acts as a gateway to the broader park experience. Consider the following elements in its design:
 - Ecologically-inspired art and design that incorporate interpretive themes and messages. Design elements should incorporate artistic features that reflect the ecology and identity of the park.



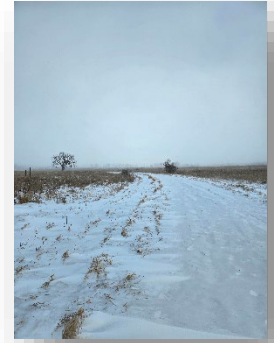
- A water feature that serves both as a safe recreational play area for children and an interactive educational tool highlighting the ecological, hydrological, and cultural significance of the local river landscape.
 - Maintain some undeveloped space for free play.
 - Restore part of the site back to a native habitat.
- Add a small, year-round trail center near the picnic area. A trail center can both serve as a place to learn about interpretive themes of the park as well as a comfortable, indoor space for park visitors to use year-round. Currently, there is not a winterized indoor space for visitors to use.
- Improve water access for fishing and paddling along the Buffalo River. The Buffalo River provides ample opportunity for water recreation. Improving paths and signage leading to the river, maintaining a recreational paddling route for canoes and kayaks, as well as adding a fish cleaning station near the river would provide greater access and enjoyment of the river for park visitors.
- Improve restroom access in more remote parts of the park. With facilities currently limited to the main area of the park, trail users are left without access to restroom facilities. Options to consider include partnering with MSUM to provide access to restrooms at the Regional Science Center and installing vault toilets along popular hiking routes.

Convert the swimming pond into a nature play area.

Trails and Trail Uses

- Promote and make enhancements to hiking opportunities near the river. The trails along the river near the picnic area and campground provide shorter hiking opportunities than those found in the rest of the park. Better promotion of and enhancements these trails, such as improvements to accessibility and connectivity between trails, would allow visitors of all abilities to know about and access these opportunities.

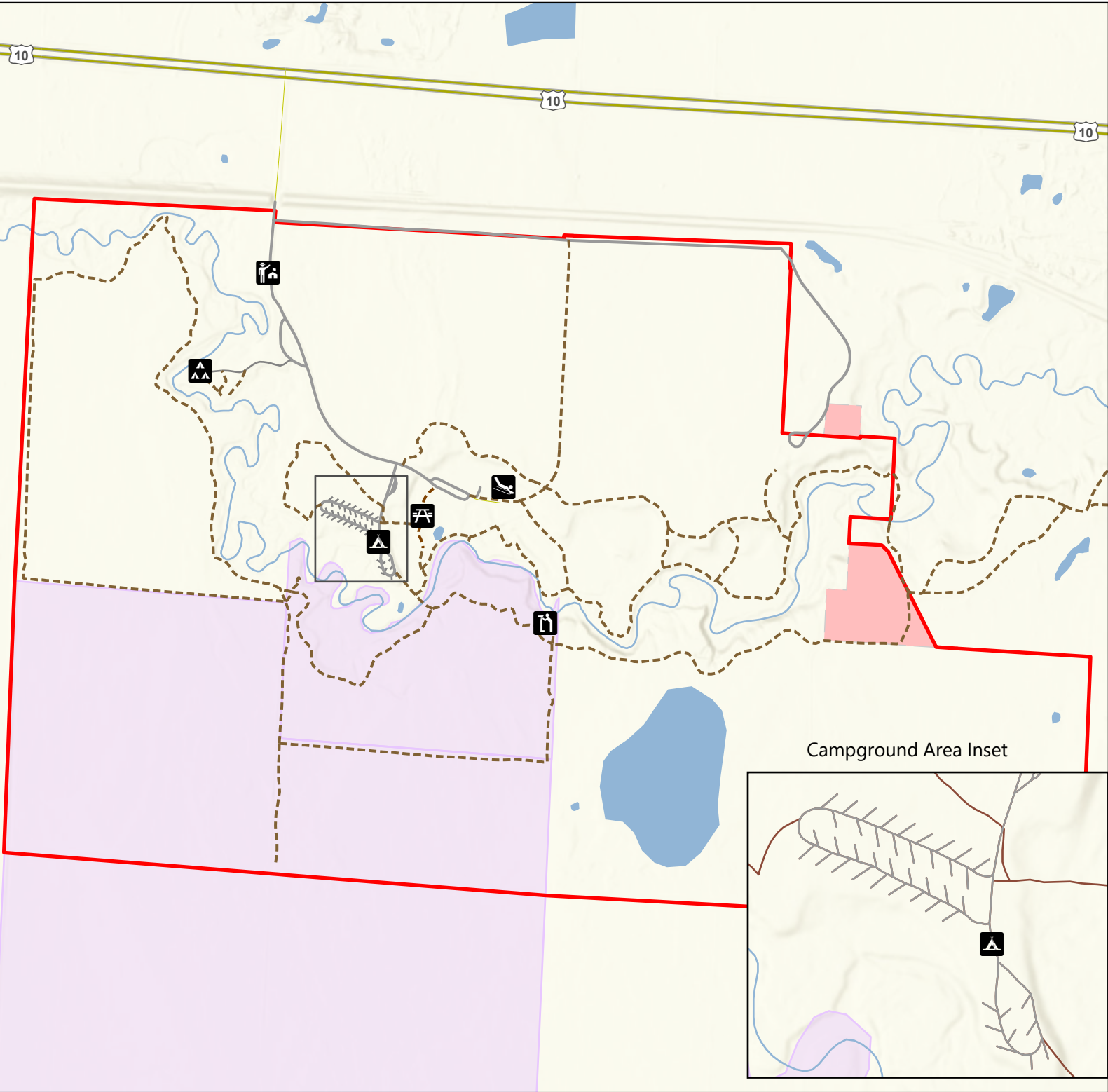
- Explore a connection of the Heartland State Trail extension to the state park. In 2006, the Minnesota Legislature authorized an extension of the Heartland State Trail from Park Rapids to Moorhead. To date, five miles have been developed between Detroit Lakes and Frazee. As future segments are constructed, a connection to Buffalo River State Park should be considered to link trail users with park facilities. While the exact alignment has not been determined, the park road is the most likely route, minimizing disturbance to sensitive prairie resources.
- Accommodate winter recreational uses on trails throughout the park. Given the park's variable winter weather and windy prairie conditions, grooming trails is not currently feasible. However, in winters with adequate snow cover, the park should continue to welcome visitors to hike, snowshoe, walk leashed dogs, and cross-country ski on ungroomed trails. To enhance the visitor experience and encourage exploration, a clearly marked snowshoe route should be identified, with seasonal signage to help users navigate and understand where to begin their visit.



Wintertime at Buffalo River State Park.

Buffalo River State Park

Figure 9: Existing Recreational Facilities



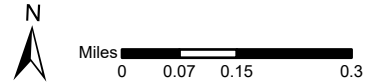
Legend

- Buffalo River Statutory Boundray
- Private Inholdings
- Bluestem Prairie SNA
- Major Rivers
- Hiking Trails
- Parks and Trails Roads (Public)
- Parks and Trails Campsite Spurs and Access Paths
- U.S. Trunk Highway
- Roads

Type of Facility

- ▲ Campground
- ▲▲ Group Camp
- 🏠 Overlook
- 🏠 Ranger Station
- 🍷 Picnic Area
- 🛷 Sledding Hill

Campground Area Inset

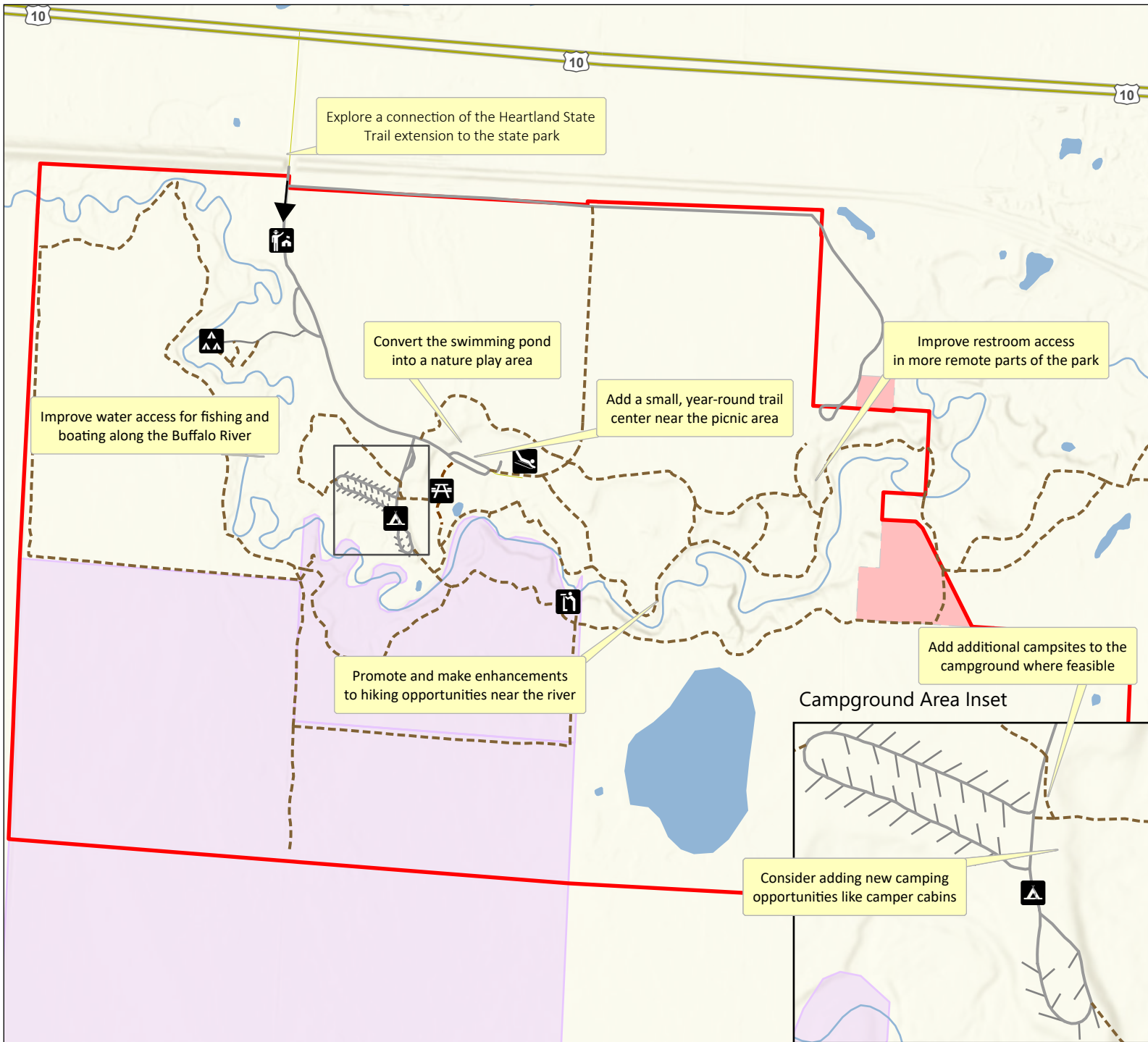


Buffalo River State Park

Figure 10: Proposed Development

Legend

- Buffalo River Statutory Boundray
 - Private Inholdings
 - Bluestem Prairie SNA
 - Hiking Trails
 - Parks and Trails Roads (Public)
 - Roads
- ### Type of Facility
- ▲▲ Campground
 - ▲▲▲ Group Camp
 - 🏠 Overlook
 - 👤 Ranger Station
 - 🍴 Picnic Area
 - 🛷 Sledding Hill
 - Major Rivers



N

Miles

mi DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Park Boundary

The Minnesota State Legislature establishes the boundaries for state parks. A state park statutory boundary defined in Minnesota Statutes provides staff, citizens and policy makers with a common understanding of which lands are appropriate for inclusion in the state park. It is the policy of the DNR to propose for inclusion within a statutory boundary only those lands the landowners have agreed to be included. The DNR is then authorized to negotiate with willing sellers for acquisition of lands contained within that statutory boundary. Being within a statutory 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.

Current State Park Statutory Boundary

The current Buffalo River State Park statutory boundary includes 1,355 acres, of which 1,131 acres are owned and administered by the DNR. An additional 245 acres within the statutory boundary are owned by TNC; MSUM owns 10 acres within the statutory boundary; and the remaining 5.6 acres are in private ownership. The state park is bounded by MSUM land to the east and the Bluestem Prairie SNA to the south. State Highway 10 sits outside the park's northern boundary, with the Northern Pacific Railway running between the park and the highway.

Proposed Boundary Modifications

The DNR will continue to prioritize land acquisitions and boundary modifications at Buffalo River State Park to support long-term resource protection and recreational goals. Acquisition efforts will focus on privately owned lands within the park's existing statutory boundary, working with willing sellers as they express interest in transferring property. In addition, the DNR proposes modifying the park's statutory boundary to include the rest of MSUM's land adjacent to the Regional Science Center. These efforts reflect the DNR's commitment to thoughtful expansion and preservation of park resources in alignment with statutory responsibilities and conservation objectives, and discussions with MSUM have signaled an interest in this proposed approach.

Park Boundary Recommendations






Acquisitions and Boundary Modifications

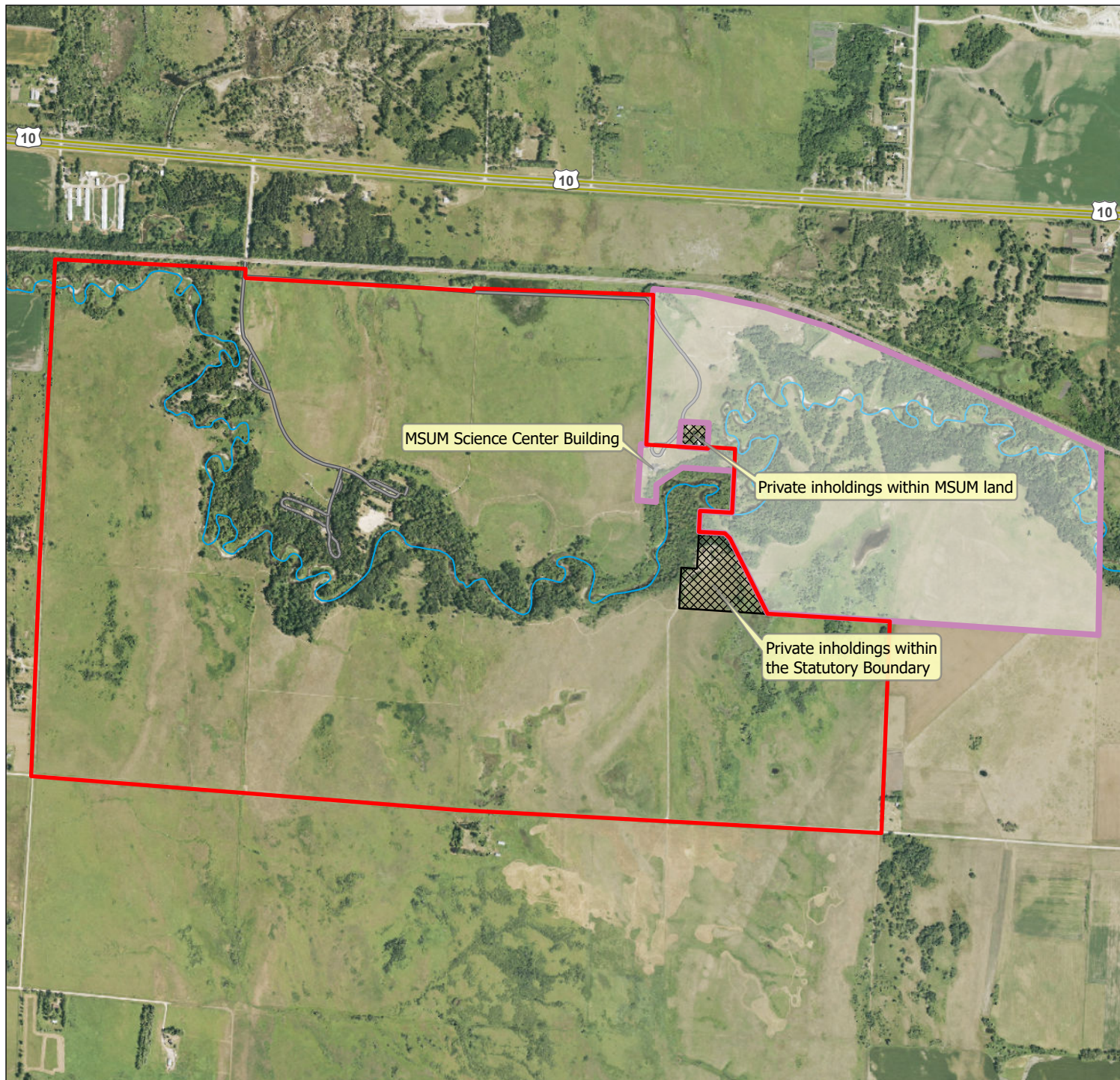
- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the park statutory boundary. DNR purchases land for state parks from willing sellers within established statutory boundaries. The division will work with the owners of the private lands within the park statutory boundary to purchase inholdings as owners are ready to sell their property.
- Propose a modification of the park statutory boundary to include MSUM Regional Science Center land. Should Minnesota State University Moorhead decide they want to sell the Regional Science Center and the adjacent land, the DNR is interested in its acquisition. While the Regional Science Center itself is already within the statutory boundary of the park, the incorporation of the rest of MSUM's land adjacent to the Regional Science Center into the statutory boundary is important to buffer the high-quality protected prairie found within the park.

Buffalo River State Park

Figure 11: Park Boundary

Legend

-  Buffalo River State Park Statutory Boundary
-  MSUM Regional Science Center Property Boundary
-  Private Inholdings
-  Parks and Trails Roads
-  U.S. Trunk Highway



Park Operations

Park staff are responsible for park administration, resource management, recreation management, interpretive services, public safety and general facility and building maintenance. As of 2025, Buffalo River has ten staff positions. These positions are a mix of full time, part time, and seasonal positions:

- 1 park manager (year-round, full-time)
- 1 assistant park manager (year-round, full-time)
- 1 park naturalist (summer seasonal, full-time but shared with SNA program)
- 2 parks and trails associates (seasonal, part-time)
- 3 buildings and grounds/night security workers (seasonal, part-time)
- 2 operations interns (seasonal, full-time)

In addition to its dedicated park staff, Buffalo River State Park relies on key partnerships with TNC and MSUM to support park operations, especially resource management.

Operations and Staffing Needs

Operational costs for managing resources, maintaining facilities and providing programming and other visitor services increase over time with inflation and as new opportunities are created. Building and facility modifications recommended in the plan are also likely to have initial start-up expense and long-term maintenance obligations. The Parks and Trails Division estimates that implementing the recommendations included in the management plan will require additional resources. Resources may be provided by additional staff, partnerships and/or volunteers. The division will need to consider filling existing vacant positions as well as possibly adding new positions to support the facility improvements and program enhancements envisioned in the management plan.

Park Operations Recommendations

- Continue to maintain the partnership between Buffalo River State Park, TNC and MSUM through the existing MOU. This collaboration supports shared management objectives, including the protection and restoration of prairie and riparian ecosystems, the advancement of scientific research, and the delivery of educational and interpretive programming. Ongoing coordination among these partners will ensure consistent stewardship practices, enhance visitor experiences, and

promote long-term conservation goals across the park and adjacent protected lands.

Plan Modification

Management plans document a partnership-based planning process and the recommended actions resulting from that process. While management plans are written to be flexible enough to accommodate changing natural resource conditions, evolving scientific understanding, changing funding considerations and emerging social considerations, periodic adaptations to these plans are necessary. As such, the DNR has adopted processes for plan amendments (major changes) and plan revisions (minor changes), which are coordinated through the Parks and Trails Division's planning section.

Plan Amendment

A change is approved through plan amendment process if it meets any of the following criteria:

1. Alters the park vision, goals or specific management objectives outlined in the plan; or
2. Is controversial among elected officials and boards, park user groups, the public, other DNR divisions or state agencies; or
3. Directly affects other agencies (e.g., Minnesota Historical Society).

Plan Amendment Process

The Plan Amendment Process consists of five steps:

1. The existing plan is reviewed at the park and regional levels to determine which stakeholders are potentially impacted by a resource condition or proposed change.
2. If the proposed change involves other DNR divisions, the issue should be resolved by staff of involved divisions and approved by the division directors.
3. If the proposed change involves other state agencies, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the appropriate division directors from all involved agencies.
4. If the proposed change is potentially controversial among elected boards, user groups or the public, a citizen advisory committee may be established to assist with identifying issues and reviewing the proposed change.

5. Public notice and approval of the plan amendment follows the process for management plans as described in *Minnesota Statutes* Chapter 86A.09.

All plan amendments are coordinated, documented and distributed by the DNR Parks and Trails Division planning section.

Plan Revision

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

Plan Revisions Related to Physical 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 not uncommon. 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/archaeological 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 sections of the plan should be updated periodically as needed. The DNR Parks and Trails Division’s resource management and interpretive staff will determine when an update is needed and coordinate the revision with the division’s planning section.

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Appendices

Appendix A—Management Plan Recommendations

Natural and Cultural Resource Recommendations

General

- Utilize the Unit Resource Management Plan to guide resource management efforts. The division will continue to follow the directions for natural and cultural resource management set out in the park’s unit resource management document, as supplemented with the recommendations in this management plan.
- Conduct resource assessments to avoid or mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources. The division will utilize its resource assessment process to identify natural and cultural resources impacts and devise avoidance and mitigation strategies.
- Follow the directions established in the Department of Natural Resources’ Operational Order 131 Climate Adaptation and Mitigation in Natural Resource Management. The division will utilize the department’s operational order and its own division guidelines to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on its natural resources.
- Ensure resource management efforts and other park activities protect rare plants and animals. The division will utilize information about the presence of rare plants and animals within the state park to evaluate division management and park visitor activities impacts, and devise actions to protect these species and critical habitat.

Vegetation Management

- Continue native plant community management in the state park. The division will continue managing native plant communities throughout the park by maintaining or improving quality ranks to “high” and transitioning restorations in the park to native plant communities of “moderate” quality. Remnant prairies are uncommon in Minnesota and the genetics of Buffalo River’s plants is protected. Restorations within the park will use seed harvested from within the Bluestem Prairie Complex whenever possible. Supplemental seed is obtained from the nearest possible source. Operational Order 124 Plant Materials Standards for Native Plant Community Restorations may provide some additional guidance, but the remnant quality of the Bluestem Prairie

complex requires exceeding the minimum requirements found within the operational order.

- Maintain and improve critically imperiled (S1), imperiled (S2) and vulnerable to extirpation (S3) native plant communities. The division will direct management activities to maintain these communities as intact assemblages representative of Minnesota’s pre-European settlement history.
- Reconstruct native plant communities on undeveloped land. Maintain current management and monitoring practices to restore native plant communities in undeveloped areas in the park to at least a “moderate” ranking.
- Follow department policy on managing old growth forest stands within the state park. The department old growth forest policy provides direction for management activities in old growth forest stands. The focus of the department’s policy is to promote regeneration and maintain or restore the integrity of the old growth communities.
- Continue to manage invasive plant species within the state park. The division will utilize the directions in the department Operational Order 113 Invasive Species and its own division-level guideline to continue invasive plant species management and monitoring efforts.
- Continue to reduce woody species throughout the open acres of the park. Climate change is increasing hydrologic pressure that favors growth of woody stems which threaten the integrity of open grassland. The division will continue efforts to control and reduce the detrimental impacts caused by pioneer woody plants in the prairie.
- Continue to preserve and perpetuate populations of the threatened or special concern plant species documented in the park and any other rare plant species that are discovered in the future. The park contains 12 rare plant species, and more species will likely be added as future inventories are completed.
- Support a functional floodplain to reduce downstream flooding. Areas adjacent to the Buffalo River serve as an important floodplain that mitigate downstream flooding and impacts to resources. Management actions of this floodplain include preserving undeveloped floodplain areas and removing or modifying barriers that restrict natural floodplain function.
- Utilize timber harvest as a tool for vegetation management and native plant community restoration efforts, including contracting with commercial operators when appropriate. Timber harvest may be implemented to restore and maintain native plant communities, improve forest health, and support other resource management

practices such as prescribed fire. Harvest activities may also be used to address storm damage, insect or disease concerns, fuel load reduction, and visitor safety or access needs.

Wildlife Management

- Preserve and perpetuate populations of species of greatest conservation need. The park contains 34 species of greatest conservation need and more species will likely be added as further inventories are completed and as the state wildlife action plan is updated.
- Manage the park to maintain viable nesting areas for grassland birds. Manage the plant communities of the park to maintain a sustainable population of Prairie Chickens and other grassland birds including species showing world-wide declines.
- Manage white-tailed deer to reduce impacts on native plant communities. The division will manage the population of white-tailed deer such that native vegetation is not overly impacted.
- Continue to investigate re-introduction of prairie obligate butterflies into the park. The division will continue its cooperative work with the Minnesota Zoo to investigate the possibility of the reintroduction of extirpated prairie butterflies and begin such reintroduction activities where success is likely.

Cultural Resources Management

- Protect and maintain all known cultural resources in the park. The division will continue to protect all known cultural resources by preventing vandalism and locating trails and other development so as not to impact known or suspected cultural resources. In cases where impacts cannot be avoided, mitigation will be conducted to preserve the artifacts and information.
- Work with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Minnesota Historical Society to maintain the park's historic district. All repairs and improvements to historic structures will be done in consultation with the Historical Society. Additionally, the closure of the swimming pond by the division will require its removal as a contributing element to the historic district which will be done in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office to ensure compliance with relevant state and/or federal historic preservation laws related to the historic district within the park.

Interpretive Services Recommendations

General

- Update the Buffalo River State Park Interpretive Plan. Unit interpretive plans describe expectations for staff-led and self-guided interpretation at this unit. Unit interpretive plans identify audiences, resource stories (or themes), and their methods of interpretation. Unit-level interpretive plans are intended to supplement the statewide interpretive plan. Buffalo River State Park's current interpretive plan was written in 2008. The update should integrate the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan (2019) and the Minnesota State Parks and Trails Statewide Plan for Interpretive Services (2018) guidance, along with any recent natural and cultural resource research findings. It is important that interpretive services planned at Buffalo River State Park are welcoming, inclusive and relevant for diverse audiences.
- Create new, self-guided interpretive trails and experiences within the park. These experiences should highlight the park's unique natural and cultural features, encouraging deeper visitor engagement and independent exploration.

Interpretive Services Facility Developments

- Consider interpretive opportunities when updating or constructing new recreational facilities in the park. During the early planning stages, identify opportunities for new exhibits or other creative elements to interpret important park themes, and consider adding an indoor presentation and storage space if appropriate.
- Add a small outdoor amphitheater to the picnic area. A small amphitheater would provide an additional space for interpretive programming.

Partnerships and Outreach

- Continue to work collaboratively with the MSUM Regional Science Center, TNC and the SNA program. This includes the development of joint educational programming, citizen science initiatives and public outreach events. Continue to utilize the Regional Science Center as a venue for indoor interpretive programming, workshops and special events.
- Increase promotion of the park and interpretive programs by utilizing partner resources. Collaborate with local organizations, tourism bureaus, schools and media outlets to expand the reach of marketing

efforts. Leverage the communication platforms of key partners — including the MSUM Regional Science Center, TNC and the SNA program — to share program schedules, special events, and volunteer opportunities.

Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations

Overnight Facilities

- Add additional campsites to the campground where feasible. The existing campground is at capacity on most weekends during the summer and could benefit from additional campsites to increase capacity.
- Consider adding new camping opportunities to the park. Camper cabins offer a lower barrier to entry for visitors who are new to camping. Given that Buffalo River’s campground is at capacity on most summer weekends and the demand for camper cabins is high across the state park system, the addition of this type of opportunity would likely attract new visitors and see strong use throughout the camping season. One potential option would be to convert the former WPA latrine/sanitation building into a two-unit camper cabin, as it is already situated within the campground. Additionally, there may be an opportunity to add remote camping opportunities to the park. Implementation of both camper cabins and remote campsites should be pursued in a manner that aligns with the park’s operational capacity, resource considerations and business needs.
- Make improvements to the group camp to enhance accessibility, functionality, and the visitor experience. This could include upgrades to pathways, restrooms, and overall layout to better accommodate visitor needs and improve the function of the site.

Day-Use Facilities and Areas

- Convert the swimming pond into a nature play area that appeals to a variety of visitors and acts as a gateway to the broader park experience. Consider the following elements in its design:
 - Ecologically-inspired art and design that incorporate interpretive themes and messages. Design elements should incorporate artistic features that reflect the ecology and identity of the park.
 - A water feature that serves both as a safe recreational play area for children and an interactive educational tool highlighting the

ecological, hydrological, and cultural significance of the local river landscape.

- Maintain some undeveloped space for free play.
- Restore part of the site back to a native habitat.
- Add a small, year-round trail center near the picnic area. A trail center can both serve as a place to learn about interpretive themes of the park as well as a comfortable, indoor space for park visitors to use year-round. Currently, there is not a winterized indoor space for visitors to use.
- Improve water access for fishing and paddling along the Buffalo River. The Buffalo River provides ample opportunity for water recreation. Improving paths and signage leading to the river, maintaining a recreational paddling route for canoes and kayaks, as well as adding a fish cleaning station near the river would provide greater access and enjoyment of the river for park visitors.
- Improve restroom access in more remote parts of the park. With facilities currently limited to the main area of the park, trail users are left without access to restroom facilities. Options to consider include partnering with MSUM to provide access to restrooms at the Regional Science Center and installing vault toilets along popular hiking routes.

Trails and Trail Uses

- Promote and make enhancements to hiking opportunities near the river. The trails along the river near the picnic area and campground provide shorter hiking opportunities than those found in the rest of the park. Better promotion of and enhancements these trails, such as improvements to accessibility and connectivity between trails, would allow visitors of all abilities to know about and access these opportunities.
- Explore a connection of the Heartland State Trail extension to the state park. In 2006, the Minnesota Legislature authorized an extension of the Heartland State Trail from Park Rapids to Moorhead. To date, five miles have been developed between Detroit Lakes and Frazee. As future segments are constructed, a connection to Buffalo River State Park should be considered to link trail users with park facilities. While the exact alignment has not been determined, the park road is the most likely route, minimizing disturbance to sensitive prairie resources.
- Accommodate winter recreational uses on trails throughout the park. Given the park's variable winter weather and windy prairie conditions, grooming trails is not currently feasible. However, in winters with

adequate snow cover, the park should continue to welcome visitors to hike, snowshoe, walk leashed dogs, and cross-country ski on ungroomed trails. To enhance the visitor experience and encourage exploration, a clearly marked snowshoe route should be identified, with seasonal signage to help users navigate and understand where to begin their visit.

Park Boundary Recommendations

Acquisitions and Boundary Modifications

- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the park statutory boundary. DNR purchases land for state parks from willing sellers within established statutory boundaries. The division will work with the owners of the private lands within the park statutory boundary to purchase inholdings as owners are ready to sell their property.
- Propose a modification of the park statutory boundary to include MSUM Regional Science Center land. Should Minnesota State University Moorhead decide they want to sell the Regional Science Center and the adjacent land, the DNR is interested in its acquisition. While the Regional Science Center itself is already within the statutory boundary of the park, the incorporation of the rest of MSUM's land adjacent to the Regional Science Center into the statutory boundary is important to buffer the high-quality protected prairie found within the park.

Park Operations Recommendations

- Continue to maintain the partnership between Buffalo River State Park, TNC and MSUM through the existing MOU. This collaboration supports shared management objectives, including the protection and restoration of prairie and riparian ecosystems, the advancement of scientific research, and the delivery of educational and interpretive programming. Ongoing coordination among these partners will ensure consistent stewardship practices, enhance visitor experiences, and promote long-term conservation goals across the park and adjacent protected lands.

Appendix B—Public Input and Review Summary

There were multiple opportunities for public input and review during the development of the Buffalo River State Park Management Plan. Comments and input from the public were utilized throughout the planning process to help identify issues and evaluate potential management actions. The division used news releases, the DNR website, and other media coverage to communicate about the planning process and opportunities for the public to participate.

Plan Initiation

Several methods were used to communicate with the public and collect input at the beginning stages of the planning process. An introductory open house was held at the Minnesota State University Moorhead Regional Science Center on December 9, 2025. Information about the park was shared with the public and comments were collected about future resource management activities and recreation opportunities.

An online questionnaire was also established to collect comments about the state park. One hundred twenty-five responses to the questionnaire were received. The questionnaire responses reflected a range of opinions related to future management and recreation opportunities in the park—many responses requested the reopening of the swimming pond while other responses emphasized a desire to keep the pond closed.

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)

A citizen advisory committee provided input during the planning process. The committee was made up of members of local communities, state park visitors and interested citizens. The committee met five times during the planning process:

First CAC meeting – March 26, 2025

Agenda items included an overview of the management plan process, an overview of Buffalo River State Park, a presentation on natural and cultural resource issues and directions, as well as a discussion on recreational opportunities at the park. This included information on the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan and Buffalo River's role as a Gateway State Park, the regional recreation setting, and a summary of the results of the public input questionnaire. Committee members were asked to start identifying recreation opportunities that would be a good fit for Buffalo River State Park.

Second CAC meeting – April 16, 2025

Agenda items included an overview of the 2022 State Park Visitor Study and a recreation opportunities brainstorm activity where committee members worked in small groups to share ideas for recreation opportunities at the park. Conversations focused on recreational opportunities to replace the former swimming pond, as well as other recreational features that would fit well at Buffalo River. At the site of the former swimming pond, members of the committee expressed wanting a family-friendly recreation feature, such as a nature play area, that also incorporated learning opportunities and could act as a gateway to the broader park experience at Buffalo River. They also shared ideas for trail amenities, winter use and increased camping opportunities.

Third CAC meeting – May 7, 2025

Agenda items included a recap and discussion on the recreation opportunities brainstorm activity from the previous meeting as well as a presentation on interpretive services at the park. The group shared ideas for future interpretation opportunities, including how to connect with the greater Fargo-Moorhead community to introduce them to the park.

Fourth CAC meeting – June 4, 2025

The committee reviewed and commented on the draft recommendations of the management plan. Comments emphasized the need to balance development with preserving and protecting natural and cultural resources in the park, a desire to continue to work with TNC and MSUM on resource management, and wanting to connect with the greater Fargo-Moorhead community to attract new park visitors.

Fifth CAC meeting – August 19, 2025

The committee reviewed a draft of the management plan prior to this meeting and were invited to provide comments or ask questions on its content. Among the topics discussed by the committee about the draft plan were cultural resources within and near to the park, riparian and water-related natural resources within the segment of the Buffalo River that runs through the park, the regional recreational offerings located nearby in North Dakota, and the purpose and intent behind wanting to add MSUM lands to the park's statutory boundary.

Public Review

The draft management was released for public review and comment on November 17, 2025. A 30-day public review period, including an open house, is required by state statute before a management plan is adopted. The draft plan was available online at the DNR website, with copies also available for review at Buffalo River State Park and the DNR Regional Headquarters in Bemidji.

An open house was held on December 2, 2025 at the MSUM Regional Science Center, adjacent to Buffalo River State Park. Public comments were accepted via email and mail, as well as in person at the open house.

Commenters generally expressed strong support for the draft plan and emphasized preserving Buffalo River State Park’s quiet, natural character and remnant prairie. Many supported expanding low-impact amenities—such as remote campsites, camper cabins and trail-related improvements—while cautioning against high-density or amplified features that could diminish solitude. Feedback on the swimming pond was mixed, with some urging its retention or further evaluation and others supporting alternative, carefully sited uses that respect the park’s peaceful atmosphere. The comments received were considered during the preparation of the final version of the management plan.

Appendix C—Ecological Systems and Native Plant Communities

Below are the descriptions of the system-level native plant communities that have been identified at Buffalo River State Park and the classes and types within each system.

Floodplain Forest System

Floodplain Forests occur along rivers and streams, where periodic flooding shapes the plant communities. These forests are adapted to saturated soils and dynamic hydrology, including seasonal overbank flooding, sediment deposition, and erosion. Tree species in this system are flood-tolerant and often form a distinct canopy, with sparse undergrowth due to shade and flooding stress.

Native Plant Community Class and Type within the Floodplain Forest System:

- FFn57a – Black Ash-Silver Maple Terrace Forest

Upland Prairie System

The Upland Prairie System includes native grasslands found on well-drained soils, typically on level to rolling terrain. These prairies are dominated by warm-season grasses and a diverse mix of forbs. Fire and drought are key ecological drivers, maintaining open conditions and limiting tree and shrub encroachment.

Native Plant Community Classes and Types within the Upland Prairie System:

- UPn12b – Dry Sand-Gravel Prairie (Norther)
- UPn12d – Dy Hill Prairie (Northern)
- UPn23b – Mesic Prairie (Northern)

Wetland Prairie System

Wetland Prairie systems are found in low-lying areas with seasonally or permanently saturated soils. These areas support water-tolerant grasses, sedges, and forbs. Wetland prairies provide important wildlife habitat and play a role in water filtration and flood mitigation. They are often maintained by seasonal flooding and fire.

Native Plant Community Classes and Types within the Wetland Prairie System:

- WPn53c – Wet Prairie (Northern)