

# **Buffalo River State Park Citizen Advisory Committee**

## **Meeting #1 Handout**

### **Planning process overview & timeline**

The management plan is a 20-year strategic vision for the state park - it guides the development of facilities and management of state park resources. For example, a management plan will point out what activities will be offered, where new facilities may be built and what areas should be restored as prairie or forest, or what the focus for the state park's interpretive programs will be.

New management plans typically take a year to develop – from the initial information gathering, division and department coordination, through the public involvement and the development of the final plan.

The citizen advisory committee's work will likely be completed in June, with a draft plan ready for public review by the end of July. After the public review period, final edits to the plan will be made, anticipating it will be approved in fall 2025.

### **Citizens Advisory Committee roles and responsibilities**

A Citizen Advisory Committee will assist DNR as part of the management plan process. The committee will meet several times in the next couple months to provide input, help evaluate alternative courses of action, and review the draft management plan once it is written.

The CAC's role is advisory. The DNR is charged with making decisions that will guide the future course of the state park. This process must balance the needs and desires of park users with the need to protect key natural and cultural resources. There may be some areas of disagreement among various partners, users, and management, but we will strive to reach consensus or, at a minimum, informed consent.

The CAC members are asked to:

- Attend and participate in meetings
- Review draft materials; provide feedback
- Identify and share information that the planning team should be aware of
- Engage your constituencies, neighbors and stakeholders
- Respect others' viewpoints and the DNR's decision-making process

The CAC will typically not "vote," although there may be informal polling of members. DNR staff will summarize meeting discussions but will not prepare official minutes.

CAC members are also welcome to comment as individuals or as representatives of groups on any aspect of the management plan, and all comments will be considered as part of the plan review process.

## CAC Meeting Plan

- Meeting #1 (March 26): Overview of planning process, guiding legislation, natural and cultural resources, and outdoor recreation
- Meeting #2 (April 16): Outdoor recreation opportunities and recommendations
- Meeting #3 (May 7): Wrap up outdoor recreation discussion, overview and discussion of interpretive program
- Meeting #4 (date TBD): Present draft plan and wrap up any lingering discussions

## State park overview

### What is a state park?

From Minnesota Statutes, chapter 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.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state park unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

(1) exemplifies the natural characteristics of the major landscape regions of the state, as shown by accepted classifications, in an essentially unspoiled or restored condition or in a condition that will permit restoration in the foreseeable future; or contains essentially unspoiled natural resources of sufficient extent and importance to meaningfully contribute to the broad illustration of the state's natural phenomena; and

(2) contains natural resources, sufficiently diverse and interesting to attract people from throughout the state; and

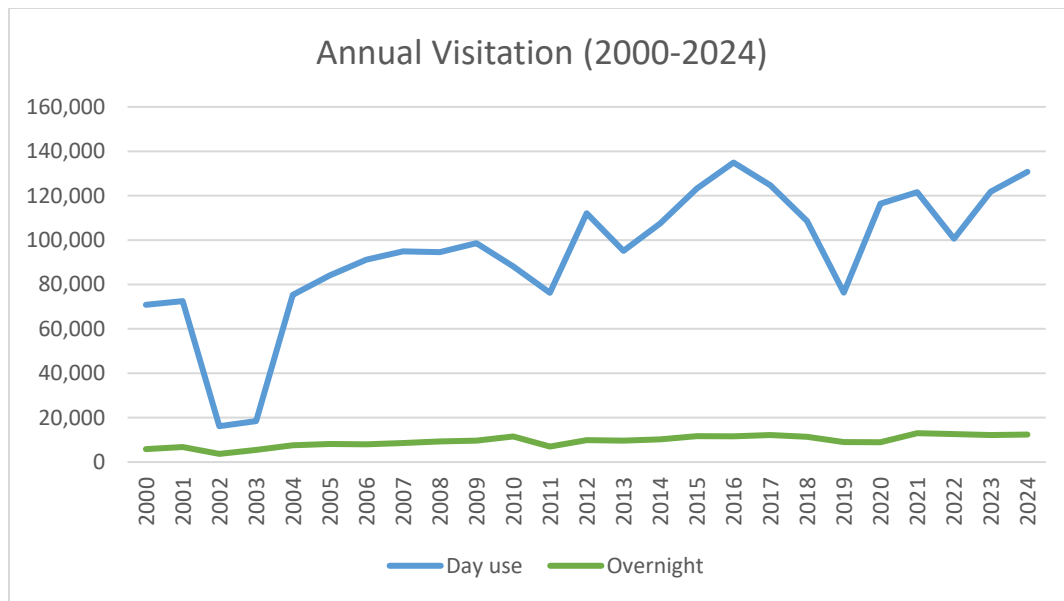
(3) is sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources which give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for human enjoyment of these qualities.

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

or unlimited volumes of recreational use. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved.

## State park facts and figures

- Buffalo River State Park was established in 1937 and opened in 1939.
- Originally developed by the Works Progress Administration to provide outdoor recreation opportunities not readily found in the area.
- Today, some of the original facilities form a historic district on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places.
- The park is 1081 acres with 1,336 being in the Statutory Boundary.
- The park is bordered to the east by Minnesota State University Moorhead Regional Science Center.
- To the south we have the Bluestem Prairie Scientific and Natural Area which is judged to be one of the largest and best of the state's prairie preserves. The Nature Conservancy manages a majority of this area which is 6,078 acres in size.
- There currently is a Memorandum of Understanding agreement between the park, MSUM and The Nature Conservancy. This agreement allows us to work together to manage the resources that we co/manage.
- Buffalo River State Park also has a shared interpretive position with the Ecological and Water Resources Division - Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas program. This position provides interpretation for surrounding SNA areas as well as the park.
- Park Staff:
  - Manager and Assistant Manager
  - 1 Naturalist that is shared with the SNA program which is part of the division of ecological and water resources; the position provides interpretation for the surrounding SNA areas as well as the park.
  - 2 Parks and Trails Associates
  - 3 Buildings and Grounds/Night Security Workers
  - 2 Operations Interns
- Facilities:
  - Park Office/Nature Store
  - 1 Nature Center
  - 1 Enclosed Picnic Shelter
  - Newly constructed shower building in campground
  - 35 electric sites and 9 non-electric sites
  - WPA stone building across from shower building that we have been looking at repurposing into a camper cabin
  - Rustic group camp that holds ~60 people
  - 12 miles of hiking trails



## Recreation opportunities

### Parks and Trails System Plan

The purpose of this plan is to administer and manage a system of state parks and recreation areas with a wide range of visitor experiences. Not every unit can provide all opportunities - each will fill a niche within a system of diverse recreation opportunities across the state

Buffalo River is designated as a Core/Gateway Park:

- Core: emphasis on providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails with basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage.
- Gateway: located within 30 miles of select metropolitan areas; over time will have the kind of facilities and programming that attracts and serves new outdoor recreation participants

### Regional Recreation Opportunities

- 22 Public Water Access Sites
- 16 Swimming Areas
- 15 Cross Country Ski Areas
- 8 Parks with Hiking Trails
- 6 Disc Golf Courses
- 5 Scientific and Natural Areas
- 4 Campgrounds
- 3 Mountain Biking Trail Networks
- Hundreds of Miles of Snowmobile Trails
- Municipal Bike Trails
- Horseback Riding at Maplewood State Park

## Future opportunities—what we have heard so far

From the online survey we conducted this fall in addition to what we heard at the open house, these are the recreation opportunities people said they want to see [more of] at Buffalo River:

- Biking
- Camping
- Cross country skiing
- Hiking
- Playground
- Programming (events, interpretation, utilization of the Regional Science Center)
- Water recreation (boating, fishing, swimming (many comments for reopening the pond but also many comments about swimming opportunities in a broader sense), river access)
- Other (horseback riding, mountain biking, birding, infrastructure ideas, volleyball/pickleball/other recreation, outreach, signage, winter recreation like snowshoeing, saunas, etc.)

## What does this mean for Buffalo River?

Given what we know about the statutory definition of state parks, the natural and cultural resource base, what we have heard so far about recreation desires, as well as what you personally know/appreciate about the park, consider these questions:

- Is there anything “missing” at Buffalo River State Park – experiences for visitors, types of facilities, amenities, etc.?
- What can we enhance or improve – facilities and/or visitor experiences?
- How can we make better use of what we already have?
- If we do not plan to reopen the pond, how can we use this space?