

Draft Natural and Cultural Resource Recommendations for Buffalo River State Park

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" 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 guidance on managing old growth forest stands within the state park. The department old growth forest guidelines and subsequent amendments provide direction for management activities in old growth forest stands. The focus of the department's guidance 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.

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 tail 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.
- Acknowledge that 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.

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 cultural resource. 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 maintain the compliance of the historic district within the park.

Draft Interpretive Services Recommendations for Buffalo River State Park

General

- Update the Buffalo River State Park Interpretive Plan. Unit interpretive plans describe expectations for personal and nonpersonal 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 and needs to be updated. The update should integrate 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.

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.
- Add a small outdoor amphitheater to the picnic area. A small amphitheater would provide an additional space for interpretive programming.
- Add interpretive program storage. Future buildings should allow space for clean, dry storage of interpretative supplies and equipment.
- Add an indoor presentation space, including audio-visual equipment, for interpretive programming. An indoor presentation space allows for additional programming opportunities within the park.

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 key venue for indoor interpretive programming, workshops, and special events that engage diverse audiences.
- 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.

Draft Outdoor Recreation Recommendations for Buffalo River State Park

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 like camper cabins 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. Implementation should be pursued in a manner that aligns with the park's operational capacity and business needs.
- Make improvements to the group camp to enhance accessibility, functionality, and 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.
- Improve water access for fishing and boating along the Buffalo River. The Buffalo River provides ample opportunity for water recreation. Improving paths and signage leading to the river, as well as clearing the river of snags and other obstructions would provide greater access and enjoyment of the river for park visitors.
- Partner with MSUM Regional Science Center to provide access to restroom facilities at the Regional Science Center. Currently, bathroom facilities are only available to park visitors near the main entrance

to the park. Providing access to the bathrooms at the Regional Science Center would enhance visitor comfort, hygiene and the overall trail experience, making the trails more user-friendly to a wider variety of visitors.

Trails & 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. Since the authorization, five miles of trail has been developed from Detroit Lakes to Frazee. As the trail continues to be developed, a route into the park should be explored to connect trail visitors to park facilities.
- Accommodate winter recreational uses on trails throughout the park. The changing climate and windy conditions at Buffalo River State Park make winter trail grooming difficult. In winters with adequate conditions, allow park visitors to hike, snowshoe, dog walk (on leash), and cross-country ski on the park's trails, though the division does not currently groom trails for these uses.