

Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan Amendment

Fort Ridgely Golf Course Repurposing: Resource Management, Interpretive Services and Recreation

June 2017



The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Parks and Trails would like to thank all who participated in the planning process. Many DNR staff, citizen advisory committee members, local officials, stakeholder groups, park users, and citizens contributed to this process.

Citizen Advisory Committee Members:

Bix Baker
Bruce Beatty, Nicollet County Commissioner
Ron Bolduan
Marie Dranttel, Nicollet County Commissioner
Naomi Evenson
Lisa Filter
Rhonda Fjeldberg
Dennis Hoffbeck
Loran Kaardal
Ben Leonard
Sarah Maass
David Runck
Jeff Sieve
Cheyanne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community)
Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

DNR Staff:

Kathy Dummer, regional manager
Rachel Hopper, planning supervisor
Phil Leversedge, deputy director
Darin Newman, planner

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Department of Natural Resources Approval of Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan Amendment

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 1911 established Fort Ridgely State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.012, subd. 17).

This management plan (master plan) amendment received input and comments both within the Department of Natural Resources and from the public.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Erika Rivers'.

6/20/2017

Erika Rivers, Director

Date

Division of Parks and Trails

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

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INTRODUCTION

Fort Ridgely State Park has an important place in Minnesota's state park system and is the fourth oldest state park. Fort Ridgely holds both state and national significance; it was established in 1911, but the beginnings of the park go back fifty years earlier when the fort became the site of two significant battles in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The State of Minnesota initially purchased the five acres of the old fort site in 1896 as a memorial to those killed in the war. The site was then established as a state park in 1911 with the State's purchase of additional land to expand the original memorial site.

In 1937, the Commissary building and other fort building foundations were reconstructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the National Park Service. Over the next several years, the CCC expanded park facilities by constructing picnic shelters, bathrooms, and trails. Fort Ridgely State Park currently encompasses 1,044 acres within the Minnesota River Valley.

The nine-hole golf course at Fort Ridgely State Park opened in 1927 and has been modified and reconfigured multiple times. The course was redesigned with artificial turf greens in 1988. During the 2001-2002 legislative session, \$1.5 million was legislatively appropriated to redesign the course and implement course improvements including installation of natural greens and an irrigation system. Renovation began in 2006 and the course was reopened in July 2008.

In 2016, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) decided to close the golf course located within Fort Ridgely State Park. In addition to being a high-cost, low-use activity for the park, golf has long been viewed as inconsistent with Minnesota's statutory direction and best practices for management of state parks. Resources and investments will be focused on reinvigorating use of the state park while also honoring its history.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to amend the 1983 Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan and rescind the 2000 Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan Amendment on the Fort Ridgely Golf Course.

The DNR is creating this master plan amendment to guide future development, natural and cultural resource management, and interpretation at Fort Ridgely State Park. The amendment will prioritize new investments in the state park after closure of the golf course.

Master plans (also called management plans) are required for some units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, such as state parks, under Minnesota Statutes 86A.09. This amendment will bring the management plan into congruence with the statutory purpose of state parks, the Minnesota State Parks

Department of Natural Resources Mission

Our mission is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.

Division of Parks and Trails Vision

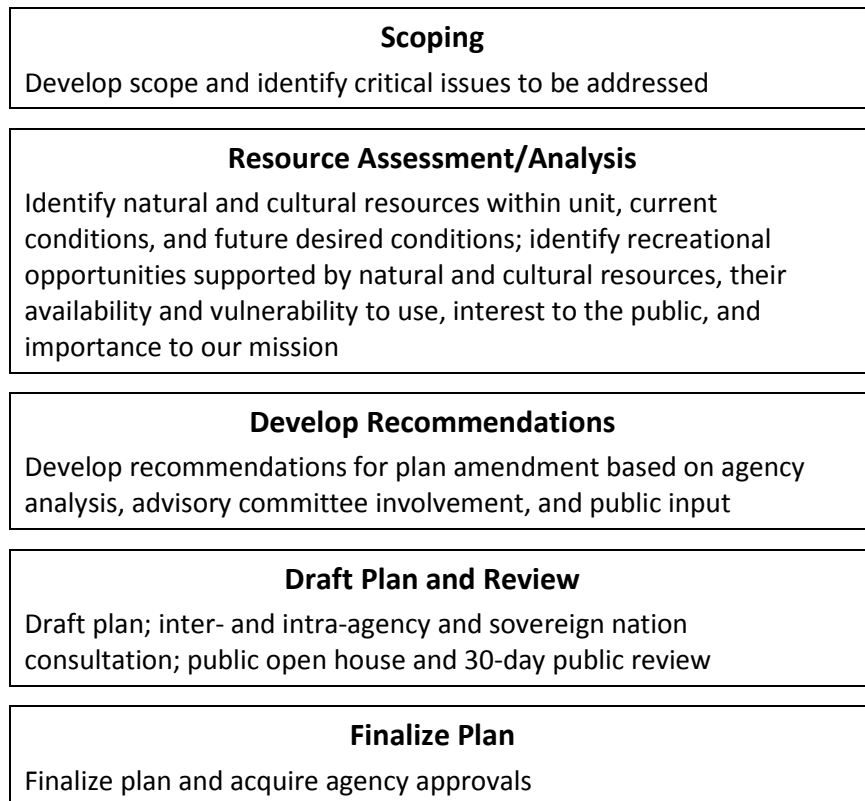
Our vision is to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.

and Trails System Plan, current state park policies, accepted best management practices, and management direction (see [Appendix B](#)).

Fort Ridgely State Park is a Core Park in Minnesota's state park system. Investments in Core Parks emphasize providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails with basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage. Core Parks represent the typical state park experience that visitors have come to know and expect.

Process

The master planning process generally involves the following steps:



The DNR worked with citizens, stakeholders, tribal communities, and government representatives throughout the Fort Ridgely State Park planning process. The process included public input from a public input questionnaire, stakeholder meetings, and a citizen advisory committee.

The DNR considered public input and proposals received during the planning process and developed a draft management plan amendment to guide repurposing the golf course and other future developments within the state park. Focus areas for the plan amendment, as directed by statute, included alternative recreation, interpretive, and resource



Members of the citizen advisory committee complete a small group activity.

management opportunities. While golfing will no longer be available at Fort Ridgely State Park, DNR is committed to managing and investing in this beautiful and historically significant state resource into the future.

The DNR asked park users and the public to submit comments and ideas about the future of Fort Ridgely State Park through a questionnaire. There were more than 500 responses to the questionnaire between August 24 and October 31, 2016. The questionnaire was promoted on the Fort Ridgely State Park Web page, the DNR planning Web page, through the CAC and on the Minnesota State Parks and Trails Facebook page.

The DNR consulted with various stakeholder groups during the planning process. The DNR met with the Friends of Fort Ridgely, tribal representatives, the Minnesota Historical Society and Nicollet County Historical Society, and park staff.

The Fort Ridgely Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) consisted of 15 citizen, tribal, and government participants and met five times from August through October 2016. The CAC helped identify issues and provided recommendations to DNR in development of the plan amendment. Committee members represented a diversity of local and statewide interests in Fort Ridgely State Park. The meetings were open to the public and each meeting provided opportunity for public comment.

The DNR and the CAC reviewed input from stakeholder meetings and the public input questionnaire while developing preliminary recommendations. Committee members completed an exercise to help the DNR prioritize recommendations. The DNR incorporated all of the CAC's priority recommendations in this plan.

The draft management plan amendment was available for public review from December 1, 2016 to January 6, 2017. The DNR received about 650 comments during this period. The DNR considered these comments and made some changes to the plan based on public feedback.

See [Appendix A](#) for more information about public input opportunities and how public input influenced the final plan.

DESCRIPTION

Closure of the golf course presents an opportunity to re-envision the future of Fort Ridgely State Park. The golf course closure represents a change in services or activity as identified in the park management plan, statutorily requiring a management plan amendment. As required by M.S. 86A.09, subd.6, the master plan amendment must address impacts of the proposed change to:

- 1) Natural and cultural resources;
- 2) Interpretive services;
- 3) Recreational opportunities; and
- 4) Administrative activities.

These topic areas provided the framework for the CAC's work, stakeholder discussions, and public feedback, which are reflected in this plan amendment as recommendations for post golf course management.

Plan amendment format

The plan is structured to recognize overarching goals and direction, and provide recommendations for the following topic areas: natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, and recreation. Due to the extensive and significant breadth of cultural resources at Fort Ridgely State Park, cultural resource management has been addressed as a separate topic area.

Each section begins with overarching goals for Fort Ridgely State Park. A direction statement embodies what is new or different about the future of the park. Each section includes several recommendations to fulfill the direction and goals. Recommendations balance the needs and desires of park users with the statutory requirement to protect key natural and cultural resources within the state park and interpret those resources.

It is important to note that while each topic area is addressed individually, management of these activities are interrelated and contingent upon one another. Implementation of recommendations in this plan amendment will depend on funding, operational support, and implementation of the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan.

Natural Resources

Background

The Division of Parks and Trails' natural resource management program has identified the following goals for Fort Ridgely State Park:

- Consistent with the statutory direction provided for Minnesota State Parks, reconstruct native communities to resemble their appearance around the mid-1800s.
- Through landscape restoration, provide an opportunity for reflection and interpretation of the site's natural and human history.

- Create healthy native communities that provide ecosystem functions and habitat for local plants and animals.
- Contribute to state and regional natural resource plans such as Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare.

Direction: Restore and protect original plant communities.

Recommendations

- 1) Restore original plant communities on the golf course while integrating appropriate recreational opportunities.

The division will restore original plant communities throughout the golf course site. Restoration priorities include increasing prairie and oak savanna plant communities, restoring cultural viewsheds, expanding existing remnant and restored native plant communities, and increasing habitat connectivity. Landscape restoration will balance preserving cultural landscapes, protecting and restoring original plant communities, and accommodating new recreational uses.



A crew uses prescribed fire during prairie restoration.

- 2) Maintain overlook vistas through natural resource management.

Resource management near overlooks will focus on maintaining viewsheds while protecting or restoring original plant communities.

Golf course restoration will advance the division's natural resource management goals by realigning Fort Ridgely State Park to be consistent with statutory direction for state parks. Restoration also supports the goals and direction in the 2010 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Prairie systems in the park support several rare and endangered species. Grasshopper sparrow, bobolink, dickcissel, and meadowlark have all been found utilizing prairie habitat at Fort Ridgely State Park. Prairie restoration will expand the habitat for these species at the park. The division will be able to manage prairie communities more effectively with larger, more contiguous prairie management areas.

The division will use its resource assessment process to identify potential impacts to natural resources when considering a proposed project, operational action, or special event. The goal of resource assessments is to evaluate a specific situation and to make recommendations that will result in the prevention, minimization, or mitigation of undesirable effects on natural or cultural resources.

Cultural Resources

Background

The division's cultural resource management program has identified the following goals for Fort Ridgely State Park:

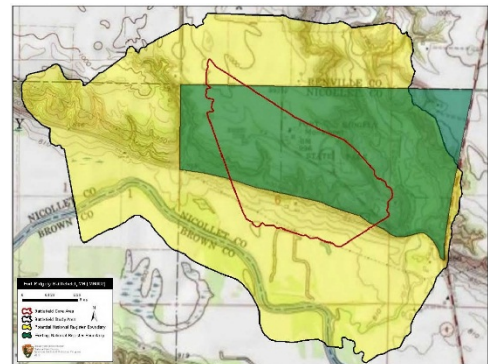
- Identify and study archaeological resources.
- Identify significant historic viewsheds.
- Avoid site impacts where possible.
- Avoid cultural landscape impacts where possible.
- Minimize adverse effects of park operations on cultural resources.
- Promote historical interpretation at the park.

Direction: Enhance protection and awareness of cultural resources.

Recommendations

1) Nominate Fort Ridgely as a National Civil War Battlefield.

The Fort Ridgely Historic District, one of two historic districts in the park, was nominated to recognize the fort site. The surrounding battlefield is not included in the existing historic district, and the battlefield merits recognition on the National Register of Historic Places. The division will work with Nicollet County Historical Society, Minnesota Historical Society and tribal partners to prepare a nomination to list the Fort Ridgely battlefield on the National Register of Historic Places. The DNR, and partners, may apply for a grant through the American Battlefield Protection Program to fund additional planning and research.



The yellow area depicts the national battlefield study area and potential national register boundary. The existing Fort Ridgely Historic District is shown in green. Figure from page 20 of National Park Service report (2010).

2) Evaluate potential renovation and reuse of historic structures.

The park contains historic structures from several eras, including fort structures from the 1850s and 1860s, structures from the 1920s, and structures constructed in the 1930s by the CCC. The division will assess these resources to determine their structural integrity and potential for renovation or reuse. Facilities may have potential to serve as a sanitation facility, overnight lodging, or gathering areas for groups and events.



Archaeological work at Fort Ridgely.

Recognizing Fort Ridgely State Park as a battlefield listed on the National Register of Historic Places can enhance public understanding and appreciation for the fort and surrounding battlefield. Designation could allow for additional funding opportunities and increase the exposure of Fort Ridgely State Park.

These actions could lead to increased visitation, demand on park operations and facilities, and introduce new impacts to park resources.

The division will use its resource assessment process to identify potential impacts to cultural resources when considering a proposed project, operational action, or special event. The goal of resource assessments is to evaluate a specific situation and to make recommendations that will result in the prevention, minimization, or mitigation of undesirable effects on natural or cultural resources.

Interpretive Services

Background

Interpretive services provide opportunities to connect to Minnesota's natural, cultural and recreational heritage by provoking curiosity, encouraging discovery, and inspiring stewardship across generations.

The division's interpretive services program focuses its efforts on providing resource-based accessible programs and activities that create a sense of connection with and stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage. Telling the park's unique stories and illuminating the changing relationship between people and landscapes over time may accomplish this.

The division's interpretive staff work in collaboration with other DNR divisions, government agencies, educational institutions, local communities and citizens to develop programs and activities that enhance the visitor's experience by increasing their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources. Interpretive opportunities are presented in a variety of ways: guided experiences such as naturalist-led talks, special events and outdoor skills building programs; and self-guided experiences such as interpretive trail kiosks, exhibits, brochures and electronic media.

The division's interpretive services program has identified the following statewide goals:

- Identify and focus on primary themes related to the park.
- Offer a range of recreational programs to connect people to the outdoors.
- Develop and provide inclusive interpretive opportunities to engage diverse audiences.
- Collaborate with others to enhance and expand interpretive opportunities.

Direction: Diversify interpretation and enhance self-guided orientation.

Recommendations

- 1) Partner with the Dakota Community and other partners to increase and diversify interpretation.

Existing interpretive opportunities focus on the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 from the perspective of European settlers. Closure of the golf course and recognition as a national battlefield will provide an opportunity to interpret new battlefield sites and stories from the perspective of the Dakota community. The division will also pursue opportunities to interpret other stories about Native American history and culture.

- 2) Improve orientation and wayfinding to help visitors access recreational, natural and cultural resources.

Improvements will focus on utilizing technology and innovation to enhance access to self-guided information. Information could be provided on an entrance kiosk, through cell phone tours, directional signage, or other new technologies. The division will consider providing new self-registration options for park visitors.

- 3) Provide accessible interpretive trails.

The division will strive to improve accessibility of interpretive trails near the fort, day-use area, and to natural and cultural resource features such as significant sites associated with the battlefield.

- 4) Work with partners to provide special events and activities.

Fort Ridgely State Park has a long history of hosting community and special events. The DNR will continue to work with area communities and organizations to hold events at the park; events could include reenactments, outdoor skills workshops, holiday events, and pow-wows.

Increasing interpretive opportunities at the park has potential to attract new visitors and additional visitors. This could introduce potential impacts to natural and cultural resources, recreational uses, and park operations. The division will balance interpretive services goals with resource impacts and operational constraints.

The division will use its resource assessment process to identify potential impacts to natural and cultural resources when considering a proposed project, operational action, or special event. The goal of resource assessments is to evaluate a specific situation and to make recommendations that will result in the prevention, minimization, or mitigation of undesirable effects on natural or cultural resources.

Recreation

Background

As a Core-Classic state park in the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan, Fort Ridgely should offer a diversity of quality outdoor recreation experiences, including classic camping and hiking opportunities, in relative proximity to population centers. Emphasis should be on:



Self-orientation sign panel for Fort Ridgely State Park.



Naturalist program with a school group.

- Providing well-maintained campgrounds, day-use areas and trails.
- Providing basic services and amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings and orientation signage.

Direction: Provide year-round recreational opportunities.

Recommendations

1) Provide new recreational opportunities on the restored golf course.

The division will enhance the park's core recreational uses and consider adding new uses during golf course restoration. New trails may be constructed to increase trail opportunities, improve trail connectivity between park amenities, and accommodate new interpretive messages. The division will also consider adding new recreational uses, like disc golf, to attract new users to the park.

2) Provide shower and restroom facilities to meet the needs of overnight visitors and day users.

The facility will be located and designed to minimize resource impacts while maximizing convenience for park users. The division will consider alternative practices, such as greywater or drip septic systems, when developing the sanitation facility. The facility could be designed to incorporate shared office space and public contact areas for the state park and historic site.

3) Consider adding overnight opportunities.

Fort Ridgely State Park currently offers electric and non-electric drive-in campsites, a rustic group camp, a horse campground, three walk-in campsites, and lodging in the farmhouse. The DNR will monitor usage of these facilities and consider adding or enhancing camping and lodging opportunities in the future.

4) Study potential shared office space and orientation facility for state park and historical site operations.

There are currently separate information sites for state park and historic site visitors, the park office and the commissary. These facilities have separate staff with redundant office hours. A shared facility may facilitate more efficient operations and could maximize the number of public contact hours for state park and historic site visitors. There may be potential to co-locate state park and historic site offices into an existing facility, or develop a new facility, to create a single point of entry for visitors. Design of the facility could provide enhanced self-registration options and incorporate development of a sanitation facility.

5) Improve trail conditions and connections for existing trail uses.

The park's trails are used for hiking, biking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling. Some trails are in need of repair or relocation due to flooding events and cumulative erosion. The division will evaluate and improve sustainability of existing trails. Expansion of existing trails or addition of trail connections will be considered to improve overall connectivity within the park.

6) Enhance access to overlooks.

The division will seek ways to ensure multiple user groups have access to scenic overlooks. Several overlook spur trails could be rehabilitated or designated to accommodate additional user groups, such as equestrians. Viewing platforms and decks may be constructed to improve views and protect resources.



7) Provide a quality equestrian experience.

In addition to guidance about equestrian use in the 2006 plan amendment, the division will add equestrian access to day-use amenities in the southern unit of the park. This will ensure that horseback riders have access to a hitching area and restrooms near the day use area. The division will work with partners to evaluate the feasibility of connecting the north and south park units with an off-road trail through an easement or another method.



Horseback riders at Fort Ridgely State Park.

8) Accommodate additional winter recreational use.

The division will provide winter users with access to the chalet, or another facility in the future, for warming. The park will continue to provide locations for snowmobiling, winter hiking, snowshoeing, and sledding. Some of these uses could be expanded onto portions of the existing golf course. People can cross-country ski in the park, though the DNR does not currently groom trails for this use.

The division will consider adding winter biking to some of the park's trails as a seasonal use. The park could accommodate winter biking on a designated trail system or on a special event basis. Limiting bicycling to the winter season would prevent conflicts with horseback riders that use the park's trail system in the warm seasons.

Resources and investments will be focused on enhancing year-round recreational opportunities. New uses may have the potential to increase visitation, but also introduce new impacts to resources and existing user groups. The division will use best practices to provide year-round recreational opportunities while minimizing conflicts between multiple user groups.

The division will use its resource assessment process to identify potential impacts to cultural resources when considering a proposed project, facility development, operational action, or special event. The goal of resource assessments is to evaluate a specific situation and to make recommendations that will result in the prevention, minimization, or mitigation of undesirable effects on natural or cultural resources.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

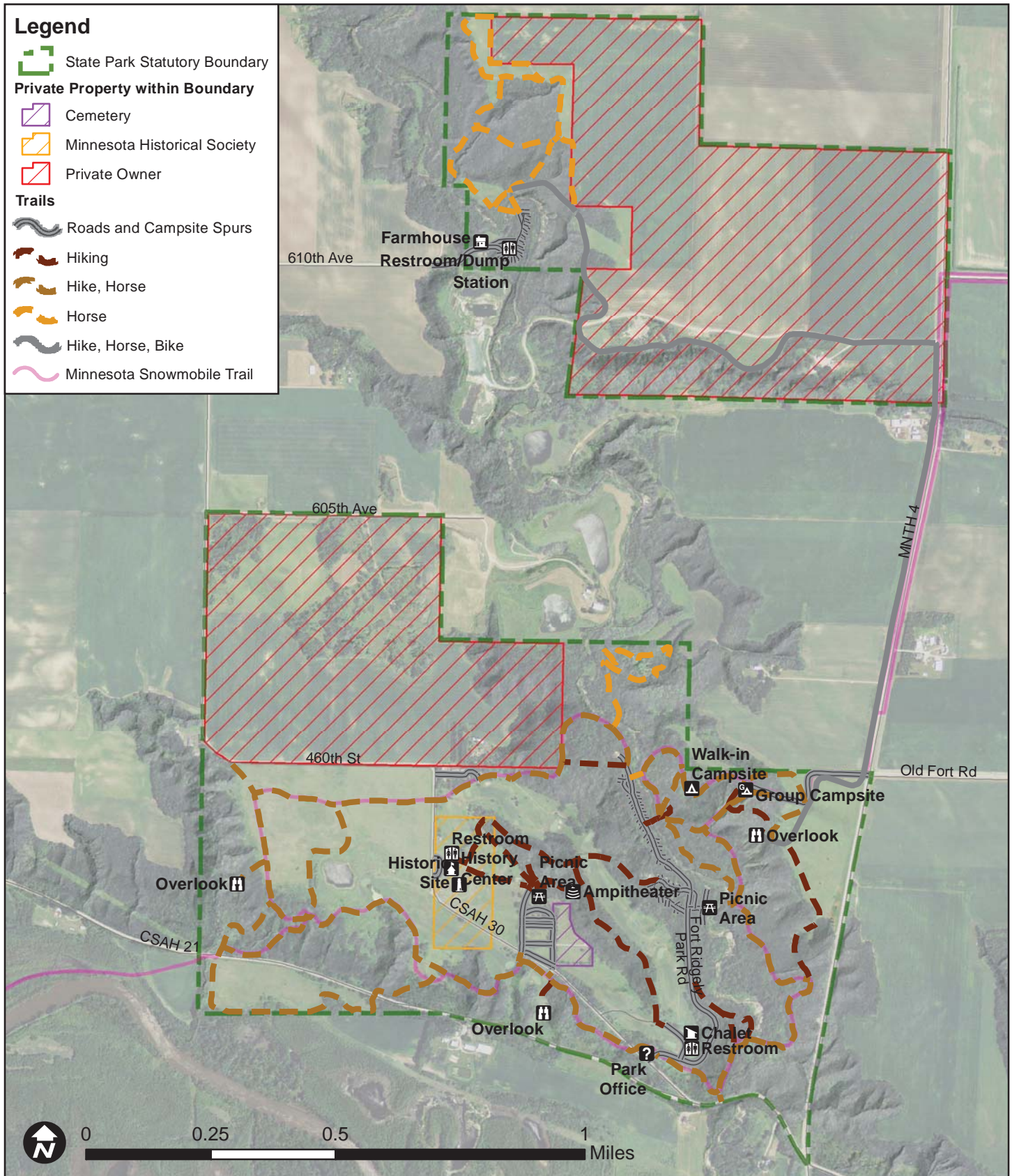
Table 1: Fort Ridgely State Park Visitation: 2011-2016

Year	Overnight Visitors	Total Visitors (vehicle count)	Golf Rounds Played	Golf as Percent of Total Visits
2011	6,331	58,193	2,750	4.7%
2012	7,105	65,459	2,635	4.0%
2013	7,002	69,862	2,246	3.2%
2014 ¹	3,450	66,722	2,635	3.9%
2015	6,735	75,309	2,786	3.7%
2016	6,096	70,193	2,636	3.8%

1: A flood event in 2014 interrupted park operations and resulted in temporary closures.

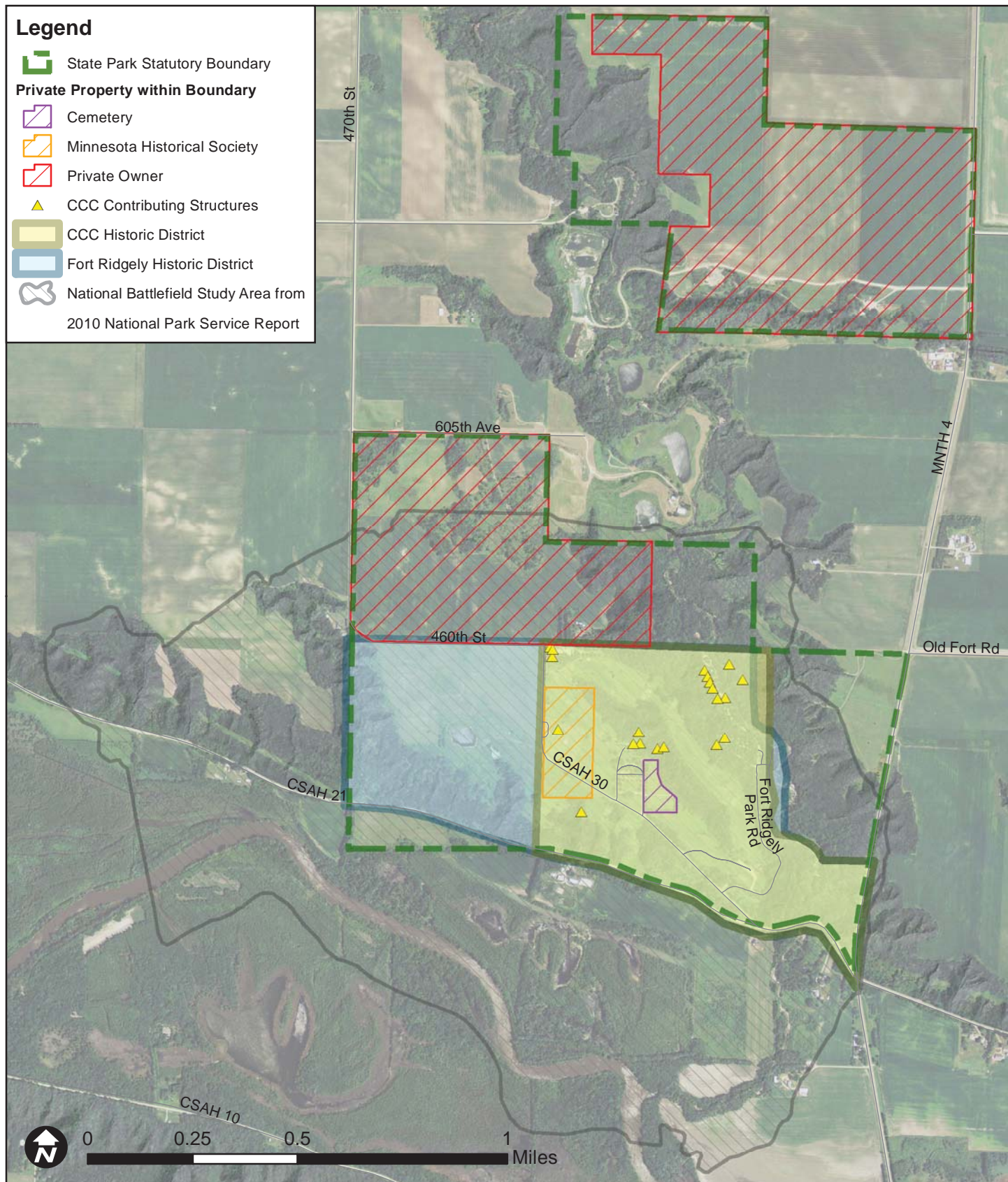
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Figure 1: Current Park Facilities



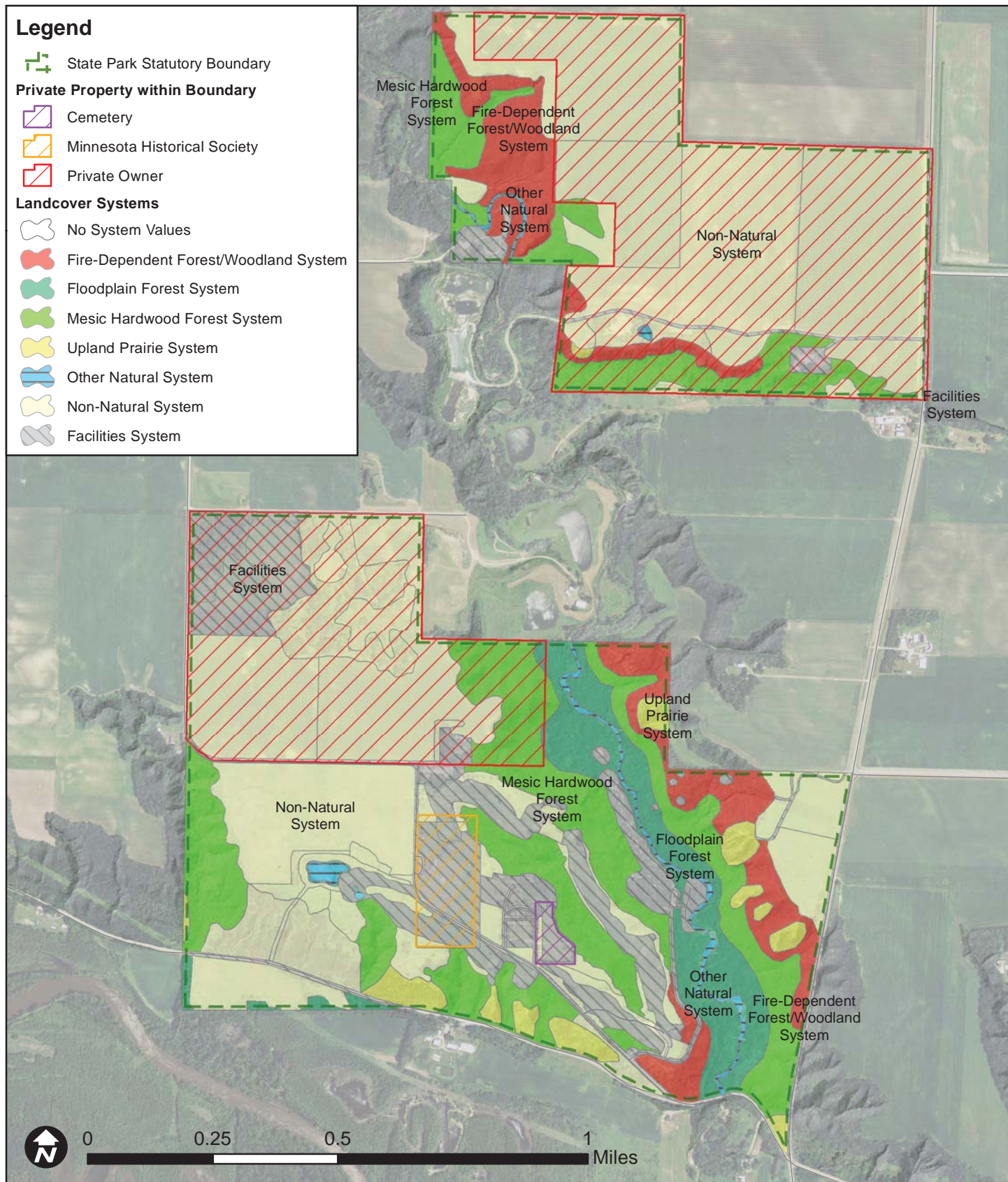
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Figure 2: Historic Resources



FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

Figure 3: Landcover Systems



APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT

Public Review Period

The draft management plan amendment was available for public review from December 1, 2016 to January 6, 2017. The DNR announced the public review period through a news release, the CAC, and informal communications with stakeholders.

The DNR held a public open house meeting on December 15, 2016 in New Ulm to share the draft management plan amendment and gather public input. The DNR provided copies of the plan amendment, summaries of public input, and information about Fort Ridgely State Park at the meeting. DNR staff were present to answer questions about the plan and receive public comments.

People were able to comment on the plan at the open house meeting, through an online questionnaire, and via email or mail. About 650 comments were submitted; the vast majority of comments were submitted online.

The public comments covered a wide range of topics and ideas. The themes from the public input are summarized in the following table. The table does not include every comment submitted; instead it organizes into themes all ideas that were received during the public review period. The comments are sorted into broad categories due to the volume of comments submitted. The table includes a DNR response indicating whether or not that theme resulted in a change to the plan and an explanation of the decision.

About 600 of the comments expressed support for continuing operation of the golf course and/or leasing the golf course to the City of Fairfax. However, it appears that about 150 of these comments are multiple responses from a few individuals. This seems likely because similar comments were submitted within a short period of time from the same IP addresses.

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
Golf Course		
<p>Keep the golf course available because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a unique way to enjoy the park's scenery and wildlife. • Tradition and memories of using the course with family and friends. • The Fort Ridgely golf course could be operated like the one at Fort Snelling State Park. • It is an activity that brings people to the park for repeat visits. • Closing the course squanders the investment made to rehabilitate it. • It is a cost-effective recreational opportunity for visitors. • The public supports it. 	No change to the plan.	<p>In 2016, the DNR decided to close the golf course. In addition to being a high-cost, low-use activity for the park, golf has long been viewed as inconsistent with Minnesota's statutory direction and best practices for management of state parks.</p> <p>The DNR met with the Friends group, the City of Fairfax and local legislators to discuss the basic minimum requirements of typical concession agreements, as provided by state law. At that meeting, and in additional communications, DNR stated that a concession agreement would be considered if: a) it were financially viable and not require additional state investments, b) it</p>

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group is willing to take on operations of the course. • The course is part of the park's history. • Closing the course is a point-of-no return; delay closure until all other options are exhausted. • Camping numbers will decrease without the golf course. • The DNR's park use numbers do not accurately reflect usage of the golf course. • Closure could be seen as de-prioritizing needs of Greater MN. • It provides local recreation opportunities. • It attracts a unique type of visitor that otherwise would not go to a state park. • It is an asset to area communities. • Not all state park facilities need to make money. • Golf is a healthy, active outdoor activity. 		adequately met the public outdoor recreation mission for state lands, and c) state fiscal controls and standard contract protocols were observed. The final proposal submitted by the interest group did not meet the basic criteria that were openly shared with them prior to, and during, development of the proposal.
Lease the golf course to the City of Fairfax.	No change to the plan.	See above.
Continue to operate the golf course. Seek efficiencies, like reduced watering, to cut costs.	No change to the plan.	See above.
<p>Close the golf course because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golf courses are a waste of real estate. • The course doesn't fit with the historic nature of the park. • Golf is a declining sport. • There is an overabundance of golf courses. • It is costly to operate and only serves a small percentage of visitors. • It is not a sustainable park use. • Golf is not in the best long-term interest of the park. • Prairie restoration is an ecological and sociological improvement to a golf course. • The park should remain a somber place to honor those that lost their lives at Fort Ridgely. 	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	See above.

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing the course shows respect for the painful history of the Dakota being forced from their traditional lands. 		
Do not lease the golf course to the City of Fairfax.	No change to the plan.	See above.
Restore native prairie on the golf course.	No change – included in draft plan.	Prairie restoration is already included in the plan recommendations.
Convert the golf course to an 18-hole disc golf course.	No change – included in draft plan.	Portions of the golf course near the fort site and within significant viewsheds will be restored to native prairie. Other parts of the course could be used for disc golf, as recommended by the plan.
Convert the golf course to an archery golf course.	No change to the plan.	This suggestion is not compatible with state park rules.
Add teepee sites or camper cabins on the golf course.	Added overnight use recommendation.	The park currently offers overnight lodging in the farmhouse. The DNR will monitor overnight usage of the park and may add more lodging options in the future.
Add backpack campsites on the golf course after restoration.	Added overnight use recommendation.	The park currently offers a range of camping opportunities, including walk-in campsites. The DNR will monitor existing overnight accommodations and may add more sites in the future.
Develop a new trail across the golf course connecting the campground to the historic site.	No change to the plan.	Existing trails make this connection. However, the DNR will continue to evaluate current trails and may add, replace, or improve trail connections within the park as needed. Cultural and resource impacts would need to be mitigated and approved by state and tribal historic preservation officers.
Increase equestrian trail connections, including new loops on the golf course.	No change – included in draft plan.	The 2006 plan amendment and this plan include recommendations to improve equestrian trail connections. Cultural and resource impacts would need to be mitigated and approved by state and tribal historic preservation officers.
Add a winter sliding hill to the golf course.	Winter use recommendation updated.	Parts of holes #1 and #9 are currently used for sledding but there is potential for additional, or improved, sledding opportunities in other locations.

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
Reinvest any funds saved by closing the golf course into other facilities in Fort Ridgely State Park.	No change to the plan.	This planning process was initiated to focus resources on improving core amenities and experiences. The closure of the golf course will allow over 50% of the existing park budget to be redirected to provide these basic services, amenities, and facilities.
The historical and interpretive recommendations have great promise for attracting more visitors than the golf course.	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	N/A
Other Recreational Uses		
Add ADA trails.	No change – included in draft plan.	Development of accessible trails is already included in the plan recommendations.
Do not include multi-use trails with horseback riding and bicycling.	Winter use recommendation updated.	The plan allows opening additional trails for winter bicycling only. While cyclists and equestrians could use the same trails, the plan does not recommend sharing trails in the same season, except for the existing FairRidge Trail that has dual treadways.
Add mountain biking and/or fat tire biking to the park.	Winter use recommendation updated.	See above.
Add cross-country skiing as a winter use (includes backcountry skiing)	Winter use recommendation updated.	Cross-country skiing is currently allowed on non-groomed state park trails.
Add stormwater basins and/or ponds for swimming and fishing.	No change to the plan.	The DNR and CAC considered this during the planning process. The plan does not recommend swimming facilities due to cost, water quality concerns, consistency with the system plan, and potential impacts to resources.
Separate tent campsites from RV and pull-through campsites.	No change to the plan.	The park already has a separate rustic campground loop.
Add a trail connection to the Minnesota River.	No change to the plan.	The CAC and DNR considered connections to trails outside of the park during the planning process. The CAC and DNR prioritized existing trail connections and connections to amenities within the park. This suggested trail would require an easement.

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
Balance the needs of day users and overnight visitors.	No change to the plan.	Day use and overnight opportunities are both important and the DNR will balance the needs of all users through implementation of the plan.
Replace the sanitation building with a new facility for bathrooms and showers.	No change – included in draft plan.	This is already included among the recreational use recommendations.
Operations and Management		
Use volunteers to support natural resource management at the park.	No change to the plan.	Volunteers support state parks through a variety of activities, including resource management. This is an operational issue that does not need to be addressed in a plan.
Have a special bow hunt to manage the deer population.	No change to the plan.	The DNR uses special hunts to manage deer populations in state parks. This is an operational issue that does not need to be addressed in the plan.
Equestrians appreciate the recent trail work; continue to replace bridges and improve trail conditions.	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	The plan recommends continuing to improve trail connections for existing uses, including horseback riders. Recent trail work has been possible by redirecting funds from golf course operation.
Provide better park maintenance (mowing, sports area, trail conditions, etc.) instead of providing new opportunities.	No change to the plan.	This plan is designed to focus resources on improving core amenities and experiences rather than adding new ones. The closure of the golf course will allow over 50% of the existing park budget to be redirected to provide these basic services and amenities.
Purchase land to join the two units of the park.	No change to the plan.	The land between the north and south park units is outside of the current state park statutory boundary. Statutory boundaries are established by the Minnesota Legislature. The plan, and a previous plan, recommend working with property owners to assess connecting the two park units.
Do not invest in office space because the existing office has few staff hours.	Office space recommendation clarified.	Current office spaces result in redundant staffing patterns. A co-located office space for the state park and historic site could allow for more efficient operations and maximize public contact hours while providing better visitor service.

Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
Support centrally located visitor building with exhibits and information, shared with MHS.	Office space recommendation clarified.	See above.
Ensure that prairie restoration doesn't come at the cost of reduced recreational opportunities.	No change – included in draft plan.	This is already included within the natural resource and recreational use recommendations.
Turn park over to MN Historical Society and Nicollet County to manage.	No change to the plan.	Although the fort area was acquired in 1896 as a state historical monument, the Minnesota Legislature subsequently established Fort Ridgely State Park in 1911 to recognize the broader significance of the area as a state natural and recreational resource. Fort Ridgely is a Core Park in the system plan and the DNR is committed to managing and investing in this resource into the future.
Prairie restoration is unnecessary to interpret the fort site and its history.	No change to the plan.	Public input and state park visitor surveys indicate that resource management is important to visitors' experience. Prairie restoration could allow for new and different interpretive opportunities.
Restoring vegetative communities will improve the prominent viewsheds in the park.	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	N/A
Plan Amendment Structure and Planning Process		
The plan appears to focus on making the park rustic and self-guided – this doesn't show commitment to the park.	No change to the plan.	The recommendations in this plan are consistent with the direction for Core Parks in the system plan. The DNR is committed to managing and investing in this significant resource in the future.
Include information about the history of the golf course in the plan amendment.	Added information about the history of the course to the introduction.	N/A
Prioritize the recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the sanitation building as highest priority. List restoration of the amphitheater as highest priority. 	No change to the plan.	Management plans provide long-term guidance for park development. Prioritization takes place within budget and project proposal processes.
Provide more specificity to the recommendations.	Added information about some recommendations.	See response to winter use, camping, and office space comments.

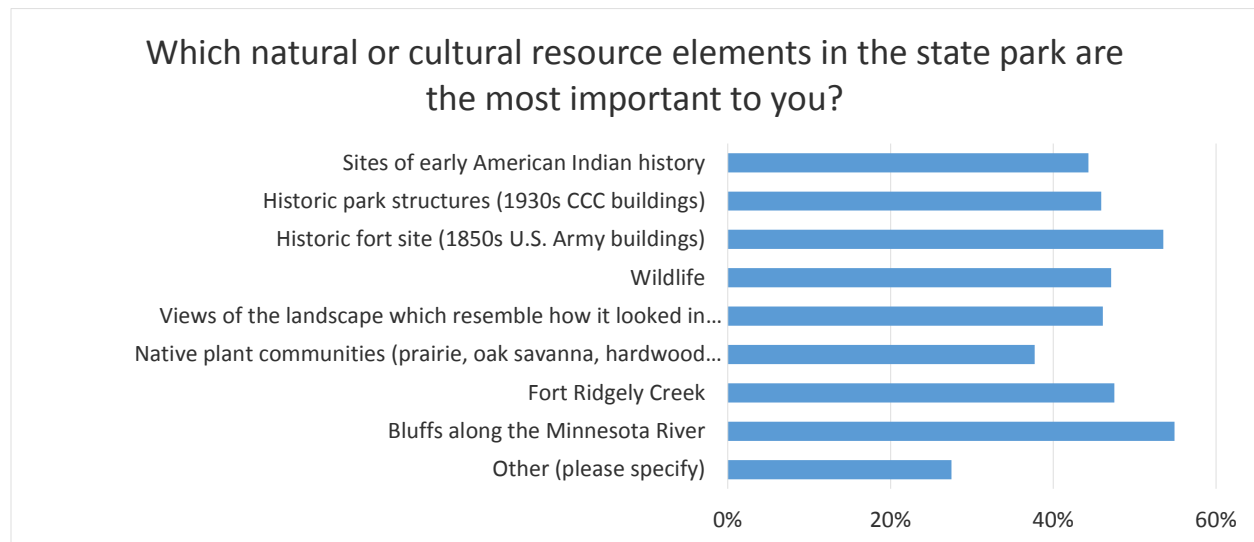
Public Comment	DNR Response	DNR Explanation
Support for the plan and the recommendations.	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	N/A
All of the recommendations in the plan are things that have been neglected in the past. These actions should have been completed already.	No change to the plan.	The DNR received significant public input regarding increasing investments in existing and new facilities, amenities, and services at the park. This public input is reflected in the plan's recommendations. The closure of the golf course will allow over 50% of the existing park budget to be redirected to provide these new and existing services and amenities.
DNR should follow through on the recommendations and invest in Fort Ridgely State Park.	No change – supporting draft plan recommendations.	The plan provides a long-term vision and guidance for the park. Implementation of recommendations will depend on funding as appropriated by the Minnesota Legislature, operational support, and implementation of the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan.
<p>Comments on the planning process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the information about how the plan relied on public opinion. • Expand the scope of the plan. • Should have included more input from Dakota communities. • How did public input influence the plan? • Process was designed to make it appear as if DNR used public input. • The golf course should have been included in the planning process. • Listen to people in the local area. • Did DNR involve staff from Fairfax and neighboring communities, like youth organizations or schools? • CAC members didn't have a real voice during the process. • This should have been done before DNR decided to close the course. 	Description of public process updated following public review. Summaries of public input added to appendix.	<p>The DNR sought public input throughout the planning process with a public questionnaire, stakeholder meetings, citizen advisory committee (CAC), and public review period.</p> <p>The DNR is required, by statute (<i>M.S. 86A.09</i>), to make the draft plan available for public review. The DNR met this requirement and sought public input through additional venues. The DNR met with the Friends of Fort Ridgely, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, the Minnesota Historical Society and Nicollet County Historical Society, and park staff.</p> <p>The DNR and CAC considered public input when developing preliminary recommendations. The DNR incorporated all of the CAC's priority recommendations in the plan.</p>

Public Input Questionnaire

The questionnaire generated 529 responses between August 24 and October 31, 2016. The questionnaire was promoted on the Fort Ridgely State Park Web page, the DNR planning Web page, through the CAC and on the Minnesota State Parks and Trails Facebook page. Most comments were submitted online but some people completed hard-copies of the questionnaire at the park office.

The input covered a wide range of topics and opinions; this summary only covers the major themes. This questionnaire is not a scientific survey, and these responses are not necessarily representative of local views or state park visitors.

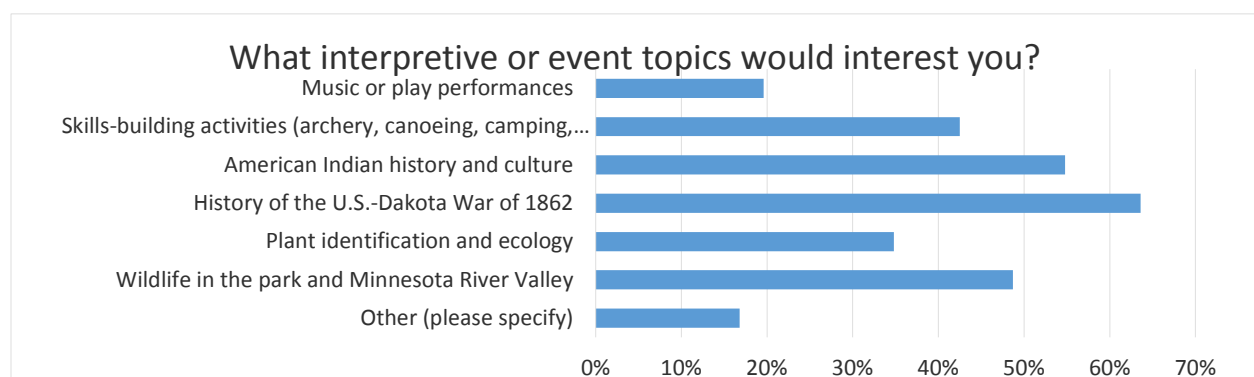
People value the fort, history, and setting of the park



Respondents value site-based interpretation; and have suggestions for many diverse interpretive or visitor services

Overall, survey respondents have a slight preference for self-guided interpretation and orientation over naturalist-led events. The average response was 4 on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being self-guided.

Many people suggested having more special events and activities in the park. Ideas included having activity oriented programs like equestrian rides, golf lessons, or kayak training. Some people suggested activities for kids and school trips. Others were in favor of having more reenactments, pageants and music, reminiscent to how the amphitheater was used in the past.



Hiking, horseback riding, camping, and visiting historic sites have the most potential

Respondents who indicated they have visited the park were asked what activities they participate in at Fort Ridgely State Park and which activities have the most potential to attract new visitors to the park. In addition to the activities in the table, people said the park is an important place for traditional family events like reunions, visiting the cemetery, and group photos.

Respondents said hiking, horseback riding, camping and visiting historic sites have the most potential to draw new users to the park and the Minnesota River Valley. People commented that non-traditional activities, including golf, disc golf and mountain biking, had potential to draw new users.

	What activities do you participate in at FRSP?	Which 3 activities do you think have the most potential to draw new users?
Hiking	52.0%	40.9%
Biking	9.6%	19.2%
Horseback riding	36.4%	46.0%
Skiing/snowshoeing	3.9%	9.7%
Snowmobiling	6.7%	8.2%
Camping	48.4%	66.8%
Viewing wildlife and/or scenery	47.0%	28.9%
Visiting historic sites	50.6%	47.6%
Picnicking	21.2%	8.4%
Attending programs and events	15.9%	16.1%
Golfing	31.3%	18.8% ¹
Other (please specify)	5.6%	11.6% ²

Wide range of ideas to improve the park

Fort Ridgely State Park visitors provided suggestions to improve the park in response to several questions. Ideas included:

- Keep the golf course open
- Improve park maintenance (trail maintenance, maintaining existing facilities, mowing, etc.)
- More public contact hours
- Improve overnight opportunities (screening/spacing, shower facility, more electric sites) and add new overnight accommodations (modern group camp, teepees, cabins, and full-hookup sites)
- Provide activities and spaces for kids, like a playground or 'safe' play area
- Enhance equestrian amenities, including a safer trail connection between north and south unit and allowing access to day-use areas in south unit
- Make the park more accessible (ADA compliance and financial, i.e. dual entrance fee)
- Hold and publicize events and activities in the park
- Maintain and enhance park scenery (overlooks and close/restore the golf course)
- Increase marketing and promotion of the park and events

¹ These responses were write-in comments.

² Write-in comments other than golf. Responses included disc golf, equestrian events, mountain biking, and improved campground amenities.

People haven't visited Fort Ridgely because of lack of awareness and geography

Eighty-two people, or 15 percent of respondents, indicated they have not been to the park. People cited lack of awareness, distance from the park, and preference for parks in other parts of Minnesota as reasons they have not been to Fort Ridgely State Park. These people had several suggestions for what would make them consider visiting in the future:

- Disc golf, or other recreational uses like mountain biking and cross-country skiing
- Lodging opportunities including cabins and yurts
- Better equestrian camping and trails
- Integrated historical experience similar to Fort Snelling SP/HS
- Advertise: social media, web page, with partners, and locally

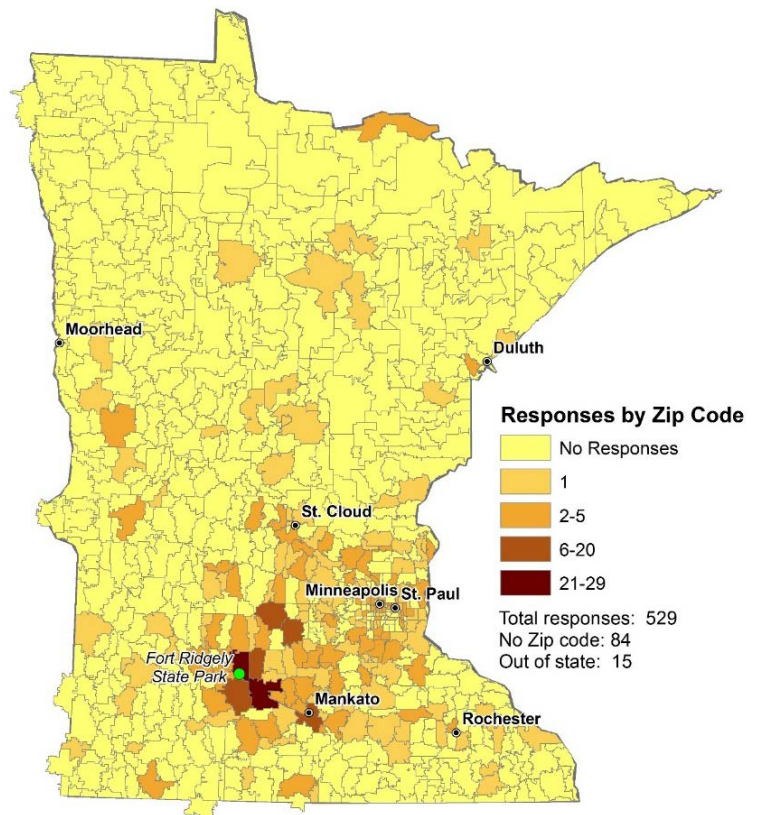
Ways to attract new visitors...

- *"Do a stronger tie to other 1862 sites, putting them together for a weekend history tour for families."*
- *"I had never heard of it. Just getting the word out. Let people know what makes it great. Advertise on Facebook."*
- *"Add more variety for your equestrian campers!"*
- *"Fix or replace the bath/shower building to attract new and former campers."*
- *"Keep the golf course open – more people come to the park because of the golf course than if it's turned into prairie again."*

Respondent Characteristics

About 84% of respondents indicate they have visited the park before. Many of these individuals are frequent visitors who visit multiple times a year.

The majority of respondents were from the local area near New Ulm and Fairfax, with others responding from other parts of greater Minnesota. The metro area was underrepresented among responses. Several people responded from out of state.



Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #1: Introductions and Process Overview

Wednesday, August 3 (6:00pm-8:00pm)

New Ulm Civic Center

1212 North Franklin St.

New Ulm, MN 56073

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

Present: Bix Baker; County Commissioner Bruce Beatty; Ron Bolduan; County Commissioner Marie Dranttel; Lisa Filter; Rhonda Fjeldberg; Dennis Hoffbeck; Loran Kaardal; Ben Leonard (remote participant); Sarah Maass; David Runck; Jeff Sieve; Cheyanne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community); Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

Absent: Naomi Evenson

DNR Staff

Kathy Dummer, regional manager; Rachel Hopper, lead planner and facilitator; Phil Leversedge, deputy director; Darin Newman, planner

Welcome and Introductions

DNR staff welcomed meeting attendees and CAC members and staff introduced themselves.

Planning Process

DNR staff provided an overview of the role of state parks in the outdoor recreation system, the purpose of master planning, and why the Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan is being amended. Changes in park operations, as identified in the unit's master plan, require the completion of a plan amendment. The decision to close the golf course is a change to the master plan, thus initiating a plan amendment process.

The DNR decided to close the golf course after the 2016 season. Recently participation in golf has declined at the park, and nationwide; meanwhile maintenance costs for the golf course have risen. Golfing is not a typical state park activity and it is not central to the purpose of state parks. The Parks and Trails System Plan recommends a differentiated system focusing on each unit's unique niche.

The committee clarified that Fort Ridgely State Park is in the Core-Classic investment group in the system plan. The committee compared the role of Fort Ridgely State Park with other park and recreation areas in the Minnesota River Valley. The CAC also discussed the status of the Minnesota River and Minnesota Valley state trails, and their relationship to Fort Ridgely State Park.

DNR Action Items:

- Send past management plan documents to CAC for information and review.
- Extend meeting time for the final CAC meeting on recreational opportunities.
- Provide informational update to Naomi prior to CAC meeting #2.
- Update project Web page with handouts from CAC meeting #1 and meeting summary.
- Send materials and agenda for meeting #2 to CAC.
- Add operations to CAC meeting #3

CAC Action Items:

- Prepare for outside hike at meeting #2.

Citizen Advisory Committee Process

Group Exercise

The CAC completed a small group exercise and answered the following questions: what do you like about Fort Ridgely State Park, and why are you here? Summary of the responses:

- Fort Ridgely is the only civil war site interpreted in MN. I'm here because of the history of the war.
- We enjoy camping and hiking at the park. Want to ensure that basic amenities, like showers, water and campgrounds, are kept up so people can continue to use the park.
- I value the horsetrails; want to be involved in planning the future of the park.
- We have incredible interest in the history of the park and the war. Interested in protecting the resources, of the war and prehistory, while maintaining public use.
- Focus on environmentally sensitive progress. Trails and development could increase the park's profile and draw more people to the area.
- We don't like how facilities are currently maintained at the park.
- Basic park facilities are in disrepair and we need to focus on maintaining them. Fort Ridgely could attract people to the Minnesota River Valley to play and learn about the history of the area.
- The park was an important part of growing up in the area.
- I want to consider how Fort Ridgely fits within the state system of parks.

Committee Expectations

The CAC discussed ground rules and expectations for meetings and the committee's process. Some of the suggestions included:

- Respect for other's opinions.
- All committee members have an equal voice and participation.
- Respect for the planning process.
- Members keep an open mind and acknowledge divergent views.
- Have flexible timing for members to discuss topics completely.
- Start and end meetings on time.
- Make sure members have information needed to discuss topics.
- Decide as a group to place topics in 'parking lot.' Park topics until best time and place to discuss.

One CAC member questioned whether operations (e.g. staffing, budget and golf course) would be included in CAC discussions. DNR staff reiterated that the purpose of the committee was to advise on the future of Fort Ridgely State Park. The DNR will continue to use existing processes to consider

operations at Fort Ridgely State Park during the planning process. The DNR will keep the CAC informed about any new proposals regarding the golf course, or other park operations.

Meeting logistics

DNR staff and committee members discussed logistics for upcoming meetings. CAC members should prepare for spending time outside at meeting #2. The meeting will include a guided hike to see the park's natural and cultural resources. CAC members agreed to extend the length of the final CAC meeting to discuss recreational opportunities.

Fort Ridgely State Park Overview

DNR staff gave an overview of the history of Fort Ridgely State Park, why it was established, and development at the park. Staff also outlined some of the key natural and cultural resources which are present in the park.

The CAC discussed the current management structure for Fort Ridgely State Park. The DNR co-manages Fort Ridgely and Flandrau state parks. The DNR, Minnesota Historical Society, and Nicollet County Historical Society cooperate to manage and operate the historic fort site.

Committee members discussed things that excite them about the future of Fort Ridgely State Park. Some of the ideas included:

- Possibility of more historical interpretation.
- Preservation of natural resources.
- Upgraded and maintained amenities.
- A trail connection through the Minnesota River Valley.
- Fort Ridgely State Park as a recreational gateway.
- Revitalizing community interest and activities at the park.

Meeting Evaluation

The DNR will review meeting evaluation results at CAC meeting #2.

Next Steps

The DNR will post next steps and public input opportunities on the project Web page, and communicate them to the CAC.

Public Comments

DNR staff and the CAC listened to public comments at the end of the meeting. Several individuals made verbal comments. Other comments were submitted in writing. Themes from the public comments were:

- The friend's group has always been willing to work with the DNR and Minnesota Historical Society to keep facilities open and running. This process feels like we are being forced out. We are willing to keep working with the DNR.
- The golf course remains open and we still support it. The setting and views of the golf course are phenomenal and we may be selling ourselves short by closing it.
- I learned to play golf at Fort Ridgely. There's nothing like it in the U.S. or the state, which makes it unique.

- The park also needs many maintenance repairs (e.g. trail bridge, shower building, amphitheater, and trail clearing)
- The committee is qualified and the DNR should respect their recommendations.
- Options to increase revenue: replacing the honor system for golf, and requiring fees for hikers, bikers, and other trail users.

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #2: Natural and Cultural Resources

Tuesday, August 30 (5:00pm-8:00pm)

Ft. Ridgely State Park – Picnic Shelter

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

Present: Bix Baker; County Commissioner Bruce Beatty; Naomi Evenson; Lisa Filter; Rhonda Fjeldberg; Dennis Hoffbeck; Loran Kaardal; Ben Leonard; Sarah Maass; David Runck; Jeff Sieve

Guest: Drew Brockman, Tribal Representative (Upper Sioux Community Tribal Historic Preservation Office)

Absent: Ron Bolduan; County Commissioner Marie Dranttel; Cheyanne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community); Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

DNR Staff

Kathy Dummer, regional manager; Rachel Hopper, lead planner and facilitator; Phil Leversedge, deputy director; Darin Newman, planner; Ed Quinn, resource management supervisor; Dave Radford, DNR/MHS state parks and trails archaeologist; Joanne Svendsen, Fort Ridgely State Park Manager, Molly Tranel Nelson, regional resource lead

Welcome and Introductions

Committee members and staff began the meeting with dinner.

DNR staff reviewed action items and meeting evaluations from CAC #1.

Natural and Cultural Resources Overview Presentation

DNR staff presented an overview of cultural and historic resources at Fort Ridgely State Park. The park was established in 1911 to memorialize Fort Ridgely and the U.S.-Dakota War battles that occurred in the park in 1862. The park contains two National Register historic districts and 11 archaeological sites. The Fort Ridgely Historic District contains the resources from the fort and battles from the 1850s and 1860s. The Fort Ridgely State Park CCC/Rustic Style Historic District contains 26 contributing elements constructed during the 1930s. The fort site was also evaluated by the National Park Service as a civil war battlefield.

DNR Action Items:

- Propose possible dates for a 5th CAC meeting
- Clarify mileage reimbursement process for CAC members
- Formulate framework for draft natural and cultural resource recommendations for CAC members to review

CAC Action Items:

- Review information provided by the DNR

Staff presented information about the park's natural resources. The park's current vegetation is much different from prairies and oak savannas, which were prevalent in the 1800s. The CCC impacted the park's natural resources by planting trees, re-sloping bluffs, and draining wetlands. Tree planting and lack of fire have led many areas of the park to transition into hardwood forest. Out of the park's current 552 managed acres, 12 acres are remnant prairie and 106 acres are restored prairie. Prairie and savanna plant communities provide important habitat for the park's wildlife. Prescribed fire is an important tool for managing these plant communities. Fort Ridgely Creek provides high quality aquatic habitat due to protection of stream corridor within the state park; however, the creek is severely impacted by rain events and lack of natural drainage controls outside the park.

CAC Walking Tour

DNR resource staff led the CAC on a tour to several areas in the park. The first stop was the fort quadrangle, where staff outlined the significance of the site and discussed cultural resource management priorities. Natural and cultural resource management has prioritized protecting the viewsheds to and from the fort site. One committee member noted that the Dakota perspective could be highlighted more than it currently is in interpretation and visibility of resources.

Staff discussed how archaeological evidence has uncovered elements of the battle at the stable site.

The CAC discussed prairie restoration along the seventh hole fairway. The appearance of prairies continues to evolve year to year as conditions shift, after prescribed fire, and as prairies are supplemented with new seed sources. The DNR may burn prairies during any season, but springtime is the most common time for prescribed fire. The DNR has a rotation for burning prairies in the park to minimize resource demands and impacts to wildlife. Restored prairies are important habitat for grassland-dependent wildlife like grasshopper sparrow, meadowlark, bobolink, badgers, and ladybugs.

Staff provided information about a check dam in a ravine along fairway #7. The dam was built by the CCC in the 1930s as an erosion control device. One of the Dakota attack positions on the fort was from this location, near the check dam.

The final stop at the walking tour took committee members to remnant prairie near an overlook. Staff asked the CAC to imagine the Minnesota River Valley as it would have looked in the 1800s, with few if any trees. Ridges and bluffs like this tend to have high potential for archaeological sites as well. Archaeologists found a 770-year-old bison scapula hoe at a similar site in the park.

Natural and Cultural Resources Recommendations Discussion

The CAC clarified the existing resource management goals for the park; these include more prescribed fire (increased frequency and number of sites), manage invasive species, and restore prairie and savanna plant communities. Cultural resource management goals focus on preserving known archaeological resources and protecting viewsheds to and from the fort site. Not much cultural resource site work has occurred at the park since 2007 when the golf course was redesigned; future archaeological work is likely to be performed in conjunction with specific projects.

The CAC discussed observations and reflections from the walking tour. Some of the thoughts included:

- I cannot imagine the Minnesota River Valley without trees. It would be a dramatic difference.

- There are other important cultural resources in the park, such as the amphitheater.
- I'm concerned about the transitions of understory plant communities. Is it possible to restore these communities after they have changed so much?
- Golf course is costly to maintain for a single user-group. Alternative land uses could be easier to maintain and allow a wider variety of recreational activities.
- National Park Service assessed Fort Ridgely as a civil war battlefield in 2007 but this has not been advanced to date.
- Fort Ridgely is a much stronger historic site because of the state park.

One CAC member questioned the historic significance of the golf course. The golf course is not historically significant because the current course no longer resembles the course that was designed in the 1920s. The course does not have other qualities that could make a golf course significant, like design by a prominent golf course architect, awards for design or playability, and it is not one of the earliest courses in Minnesota.

One member questioned how the resources of the north unit relate to the main unit of the park. The north unit contains some high quality native plant communities but little work has occurred to identify cultural resources in this area. DNR staff also explained that some parts of the park management plan from 1983 match current thinking for resource management while others are now outdated.

DNR staff clarified that resource management tends to be driven by mandates and the purpose of state parks. The information from this meeting may serve as a foundation for upcoming discussions, but the CAC could offer additional guidance on resource management priorities. Staff acknowledged challenge of making recommendations without information about all subject areas; a fifth meeting could provide members an opportunity to evaluate all information and make recommendations. The committee discussed resources that are important to them or opportunities for the future; ideas included:

- Identify key overlooks or cultural viewsheds and focus on resource management in those locations.
- The amphitheater could be restored.
- DNR could continue to partner with Minnesota Historical Society and Nicollet County Historical Society to identify priorities and complete projects.
- Fort Ridgely Creek is hidden from view and underappreciated.
- Potential to partner with college archaeology programs to do future work in the park.
- Protecting water quality of Fort Ridgely Creek is important.

Meeting Evaluation

The DNR will review meeting evaluation results at CAC meeting #3.

Next Steps

CAC members were in general agreement to hold a 5th CAC meeting to discuss recommendations. The DNR will post materials on the project Web page and send information to the CAC prior to meeting #3.

Public Comments

No verbal or written public comments were received at the meeting. People can provide input by completing a questionnaire found on the [project Web page](#).

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #3: Interpretive Services

Tuesday, September 13 (6:00pm-8:00pm)

New Ulm Civic Center

1212 North Franklin St.

New Ulm, MN 56073

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

Present: Ron Bolduan; County Commissioner Marie Dranttel; Naomi Evenson; Lisa Filter; Rhonda Fjeldberg; Dennis Hoffbeck; Loran Kaardal; Ben Leonard; Sarah Maass; David Runck

Absent: Bix Baker; County Commissioner Bruce Beatty; Jeff Sieve; Cheyanne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community); Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

DNR Staff

Kathy Dummer, Regional Manager; Rachel Hopper, Lead Planner and Facilitator; Phil Leversedge, Deputy Director; Darin Newman, Planner

Resource Experts

Amber Bentler, Nicollet County Historical Society; Jennifer Conrad, Visitor Services Supervisor; Alexander Watson, Regional Naturalist

Welcome and Updates

DNR staff provided an overview of the agenda and meeting packet. Staff reviewed informal feedback given by CAC members between meetings.

DNR Updates

Staff reviewed several updates on developments that have occurred alongside the CAC process. The DNR is holding meetings with other stakeholders throughout the fall to give them an opportunity to weigh in on the future of Fort Ridgely State Park.

DNR management met with the Friends of Fort Ridgely Board on August 31st. The DNR will not operate the golf course, but may consider operation by another entity. An external group is developing a proposal for alternative management of the golf course; this proposal is due by November 1st. DNR staff will have additional meetings with this group. This outside group is proposing a future for Fort Ridgely State Park with the golf course; CAC members should focus on developing an alternative without the golf course.

DNR Action Items:

- Provide information on Fort Ridgely State Park visitation, camping, revenue, etc.
- Arrange CAC meeting #5
- Clarify mileage reimbursement process for CAC members

CAC Action Items:

- Respond to potential dates for meeting #5
- Review information provided by the DNR

A committee member commented that the DNR meeting with the Friends of Fort Ridgely Board was good and transparent. They clarified that the external group proposing alternative management for the golf course currently includes representatives from the Friends of Fort Ridgely, City of Fairfax, and Mayflower Country Club, with potential interest from Nicollet and Renville counties.

Recommendations Framework

DNR staff introduced the recommendations framework to describe how goals for natural resource management, cultural resource management, and interpretive services at Fort Ridgely State Park fit within statewide direction for the park and trail system. CAC members may use the framework as a worksheet during CAC process. The DNR may review these worksheets when preparing draft recommendation statements.

Interpretive Services Presentations

Presentations

Jennifer Conrad and Alex Watson from DNR presented on the state park and trail interpretive services program and interpretation at Fort Ridgely State Park. The presentation described goals for statewide interpretive services, the difference between a topic and interpretive theme, and provided examples of different types of interpretive services.

The area naturalist is responsible for interpretation at Minneopa, Flandrau and Fort Ridgely state parks, as well as other park and trail facilities throughout the middle-Minnesota River Valley. The area naturalist has led about 3,200 participants at Fort Ridgely State Park since May 2012. Twenty-six programs, primarily geared towards new users, were held at the park in 2015. Signage, brochures, and other methods are used to convey information to recurring users and at times when staff are not present. Interpretive opportunities at Fort Ridgely State Park include more self-guided services, a civil-war battlefield designation, and continued efforts to cross-promote with the Nicollet County Historical Society.

Amber Bentler, from Nicollet County Historical Society, gave an overview of interpretive services at the fort site. The goal is to educate visitors, which is done primarily through exhibits in the commissary and tours. Programs and events, including reenactments, attract large numbers of people. The fort site hosts many school field trips because Fort Ridgely is part of the Northern Lights curriculum for 6th graders.

Discussion

Several committee members emphasized the importance of marketing and promotion and asked about how Fort Ridgely is promoted. The DNR markets the system of state parks and trails with a variety of methods including radio and TV media campaigns, social media, email marketing and brochures. The online events calendar is important for marketing interpretive programs and other events. Relationships between local DNR staff and local media are important for promoting individual parks.

One CAC member asked what makes Fort Ridgely significant as a civil war battlefield. The National Park Service evaluated Fort Ridgely while Wood Lake was pursuing designation as a civil war battlefield. The Fort Ridgely battle is significant because it was a fort site, took place on public land, involved federal troops, and marked a pivotal moment in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

Interpretive Services Recommendations – Preliminary Discussion

Committee members discussed feedback and reactions to the presentation. The discussion focused on ways to increase outreach to new groups, and promotion of the fort. Comments included:

- Coordinate with local media and social media outlets. Local groups may be more effective at reaching nearby populations.
- Promotion needs to focus on people who are not currently using the parks.
- The biggest thing is getting the word out.
- MHS and DNR partnership could do more to cross-promote events and advertise.
- Need to invest in staff, because they can do events outside of parks where people already go.
- Fees (at historic site and state park) may be a barrier for potential visitors.
- Some of the existing programs could support additional participants.
- Battlefield designation could enhance exposure.
- The stories being told now focus on what happened at the fort and within the state park. There are much larger stories to tell, like glacial processes, settlement, American Indian history, etc.

The CAC considered what brings users back to Fort Ridgely for repeat visits:

- The beauty of the site and trails. Some people visit the fort multiple times.
- Fort Ridgely is only one part of the Minnesota River Valley, or Tatanka Bluffs Corridor. There is potential for this area to serve as a tourist attraction, providing outdoor recreation, food/drink, lodging and historic sites.

Committee members stressed importance of programs with schools, and the all-schools day hosted by the friends group. The programming with school groups provides samples of many topics and leaves kids with memorable experiences, like the cannon fire. Members considered ways to enhance Fort Ridgely's role among school groups, including:

- Sending information about the fort home with school kids.
- Continuing to provide funding assistance for transportation to the fort.
- Raising Fort Ridgely's profile as a part of the Northern Lights curriculum for 6th graders.
- Partnering with Minnesota Valley History Learning Center's teachers symposium.

Committee members asked DNR staff for information on how DNR tracks success of parks and programs, research on recreation trends, and data on camping and visitation at Fort Ridgely State Park.

Meeting Evaluation

CAC members completed a meeting evaluation.

Next Steps

There was no consensus among committee members on selecting a date for the 5th CAC meeting. Staff will contact committee members to select a time and date that works with the greatest number of CAC members.

Public Comments

People can submit input by going to the project [Web page](#) to complete an online questionnaire. One person provided a comment at the end of the meeting:

I am a day-user of Minneopa and Fort Ridgely state parks; and I can see some of the challenges you have. I like seeing the optimism around opportunities for the future.

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #4: Recreation Opportunities

Thursday, September 29 (5:00pm-8:00pm)

New Ulm Civic Center

1212 North Franklin St.

New Ulm, MN 56073

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

Present: Dennis Hoffbeck, Bix Baker, Ben Leonard, Jeff Sieve, David Runck; Naomi Evenson; Rhonda Fjeldberg; Sarah Maass; County Commissioner Marie Dranttel; County Commissioner Bruce Beatty; Cheyenne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community)

Absent: Loran Kaardal (attended briefly via phone); Ron Bolduan; Lisa Filter; Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

DNR Staff

Kathy Dummer, Regional Manager; Rachel Hopper, Lead Planner and Facilitator; Phil Leversedge, Deputy Director; Arielle Courtney, Planner

Resource Experts

Dr. Mae Davenport from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Welcome and Updates

DNR staff provided an overview of the agenda and the meeting packet.

Presentations

Dr. Mae Davenport, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities shared an expert presentation on outdoor recreation trends for park planning. Dr. Davenport is an associate professor in the University's Department of Forest Resources and the Director of the Center for Changing Landscapes. She specializes in social science research on topics ranging from agriculture and water quality to outdoor recreation. Her presentation covered relevant demographic trends in Minnesota and Nicollet County, overall outdoor recreation trends, and preliminary findings from a 2016 Minnesota Parks and Trails Survey (a collaboration of Greater MN Regional Parks & Trails Commission, Metropolitan Council, and the DNR).

Dr. Davenport discussed the aging population in the State and in Nicollet County. She also mentioned that youth ages 18 and under will make-up one-fifth of the state's population by 2050. The fastest growing non-white, non-Hispanic group in South Central Minnesota is African Americans. Outdoor recreation activities on the rise are paddle sports, snow sports, trail running, and adventure racing. Projected areas of growth include challenge activities, equestrian activities, motorized water activities,

and viewing/photographing nature. She also shared some information from the 2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey ([results available on the DNR website](#)). You can also find more recent state park visitor survey information [from 2012 online](#). Finally, she shared several initial results from a recent statewide park visitor survey. DNR parks surveyed for this project were located in Northeast and Northwest Minnesota.

DNR Southern Regional Parks & Trails Manager, Kathy Dummer, shared statistics and information about Fort Ridgely State Park's operations. She presented an overview of the park's recreation and visitation numbers as well as revenue information. For park visits, day use consistently makes up the large majority of visits, ranging from 60,000 to 80,000 visits annually since 2012 (based on vehicle counts). The number of overnight visitors has been in the 6,000 to 8,000 range since 2012 (flooding resulted in much lower overnight use in 2014). Camping and lodging represented the highest category of park revenue (\$52,503 in 2015), followed by tours & golf (\$24,186 in 2015), and annual vehicle permits (\$23,843 in 2015). Kathy also compared Fort Ridgely to nearby parks in terms of the Parks and Trails System Plan. Notably, Fort Ridgely State Park has more horse campsites and miles of horse trails.

CAC members had a few questions about the DNR presentation. One question was related to staffing changes from 2003 to 2016. Park staffing was reduced from more daily hours of approximately 8 to 4 to Thurs-Sun 10 to 4. However, DNR staff promised to check this number and follow-up with members. There was another question about how we count visitors who don't cross the traffic counter. DNR staff reports that it is exceedingly difficult to find a consistent, standardized way to count what we don't know. Suggestions are welcome and encouraged. A final question was about the decreased revenue in equipment rental. DNR staff will look into that question and report back.

Small Group Exercise

The CAC members broke out into three small groups to discuss and brainstorm future ideas for park day use, overnight use, and trails. Members also outlined ideas on a map of the park, where geographic specificity was necessary.

Day Use Ideas

- Disc golf – target younger age groups
- Foot golf – for people to develop soccer skills
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Archery field range; interpretive programs with archery
 - Only one place to do it in New Ulm
 - Age restrictions
 - Expand archery in the parks program
- Improvements in day use horse facilities
 - More connecting trails
 - Hitch rails
 - Bathroom facilities
- Improve shower facilities
- Swimming facilities – a lot of kids play in the creek – anything we can do to make swimming in the creek more accessible? (Or swimming pool)

- Irrigation pond is a valuable asset for fishing, etc. Make this more user-friendly: plant trees and add a picnic table, etc.
- Repair amphitheater – theater, musicals (high school or college)
- Downhill skiing
- Golf course – managed by Fairfax, Mayflower, Friends of Fort Ridgely
- Ball field – partner with nearby teams to get games scheduled at the park
- Tetherball
- Shooting range
- 5k running races
- Lacrosse in open field/ball field (same partnership idea)
- More snowmobiling trails on golf course
- Petting zoo or bison
- Bring tubes back for sledding hill
- Deer feeding/viewing area
- Music – get trampled by turtles to play again!
- 1860's baseball
- Overflow grass parking – no need to pave
- Chalet – market this option more for weddings, facility rental, add a fire pit and picnic tables outside, good for retreats or other meetings
- Zip line – contract with company for construction
- Indoor recreation building (games)

Trail Ideas

- More use of connecting trails to existing trails (horse use); some trails are in low areas that can't be used very often
- Easement/lease private land to connect horse trails
- Bicycle trails – Asst. Mgr: bike use increased since campground road paved
- Bike lane on road going through park
- Airplane hill – south end of the bike trail dead ends (engineering review about steep grade)
- Mountain bikes – would like to cut own trails going through rugged terrain
- Motorized trail option
- Guided interpretive information on trails
- Night trails – lit trails
- More snowmobile trails
- Keep bike and horse trails separate
- Accessibility for everyone
- Motorized vehicle – lower trail tends to flood
- Overlook opportunities
- Bike trail counter
- Groomed XC skiing (more)
- Snowshoeing (more)

Overnight Use Ideas

- Pavilion/covered picnic area in horse campground
- Camper cabins
- Tipi in prairie
- Glamping
- Yurts
- Longer camping sites, more electric, more horse campsites, more amps
- Repair/upgrade shower facilities
- Repurpose chalet and park
- New park office
- Build additional campsites that are closer to the core of the park (closer to other park amenities); chance to camp on the prairie
- Separation between types of campers that are there (late night/early night)
- More private campsites having electricity
- Opportunity with park residence; integrity has to be maintained; converted to rental unit?
- After bridge is built, develop more horse camping sites across creek
- Winter overnight camping
- Nature-oriented, less bugs, community activities, ability to meet other people (or not)
- Separate tents and campers
- More hike-in/cart-in sites
- Repurpose chalet and park residence
- New park office

Next Steps

- The 5th CAC meeting will either be on October 13 or October 27 – to be determined.
- Update “site nights” error for camping and lodging visitor information.
- Ask about decreased revenue for rental equipment and change in staffing hours.
- Follow-up with David R. about Camden and Upper Sioux horse camp data.

Meeting Evaluation

CAC members completed a meeting evaluation.

Public Comments

People can submit input by going to the project [Web page](#) to complete an online questionnaire. The following are questions and comments from the public at the end of the meeting:

- Question: Working on designating national battlefield?
 - Answer: Meeting with MHS & NCHS around that idea, we’ll be looking into that; first round of planning grants – we likely will put in submission to NPS to be considered for planning grant; have our name in for discussion.
- Question: Is chalet going to be open in fall and winter?
 - Answer: DNR is re-evaluating winter services; hasn’t been decided yet. Can be rented.
- Comment: Some of these ideas are in conflict if golf course stays open through proposal.

- Response: November deadline – more information to be shared at 5th meeting. This group will bring alternative visions for consideration by DNR leadership team. Could be mix of recs and golf course, could be one or the other. Want to look at park alternative options.
- Comment: Explore Minnesota is good, but I do believe that if you want to guarantee use on their website you need to pay an advertising fee. So small, newer folks may not be linked in.
- Comment: Minneopa Bison Range – when first opened needed to have someone there to remind folks that they need the permit. Now it is on the honor system. What trend did you see there? For comparison, I would like to see the bar chart better.

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #5: Recommendations Discussion

Thursday, October 27th (5:00pm-8:00pm)

Best Western, Schell's Room

2101 South Broadway St.

New Ulm, MN 56073

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

Present: Bix Baker; County Commissioner Bruce Beatty; County Commissioner Marie Dranttel; Naomi Evenson; Lisa Filter; Rhonda Fjeldberg; Dennis Hoffbeck; Loran Kaardal; Sarah Maass; David Runck (participated remotely); and Jeff Sieve

Absent: Ron Bolduan; Ben Leonard; Cheyanne St. John, Tribal Representative (Lower Sioux Indian Community); and Leonard Wabasha, Tribal Representative (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)

DNR Staff

Kathy Dummer, Regional Manager; Rachel Hopper, Lead Planner and Facilitator; Phil Leversedge, Deputy Director; Darin Newman, Planner

Welcome and Updates

Rachel Hopper introduced the agenda and summarized meeting #4 outcomes.

Phil Leversedge provided an update on the status of the alternative management proposal to operate the golf course. DNR management met with the alternative management group to discuss the proposal on October 5th. The group has submitted a draft proposal to DNR. The CAC's task is to continue to develop recommendations for an alternative future for the park without the golf course. The DNR will evaluate the alternative management proposal and the CAC's vision for the park before the end of the year.

Kathy Dummer updated CAC members on the status of projects at Fort Ridgely State Park. The southern creek bridge has been completed and the bridge near the horse camp is on track to be completed soon. Some of the horse campsites have been closed to provide space for a construction staging area. The amphitheater will not be repaired this fall. Engineers completed a structural assessment and found that the structural base is not sound and the decorative face is deteriorated. The DNR is analyzing the new information to determine options.

A CAC member asked about the status of the sanitation building closure. The existing sanitation building does not meet current ADA or septic standards. The NR issued a Request for Proposals to construct a drip septic system and did not receive any proposals. A greywater tank system could be an alternative to a drip system but access to pump the tank would be difficult and it would not address the ADA issues. We have to evaluate environmental and cultural resource impacts, and secure funding before replacing the sanitation building. A new facility will have to be located in a different area to mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources. The CAC can provide recommendations on the importance of an issue like this.

A CAC member asked why the irrigation heads have been marked on the golf course. Park staff marked these locations to protect the equipment from damage and allow for easy location in the future.

Small Group Exercise – Charrette: Generating Draft Recommendations

The CAC members broke out into three small groups to develop draft recommendations. Each group had time to consider recommendations for recreational uses, natural and cultural resources, and interpretive services. CAC members received instructions with an example recommendation and a recommendation crosswalk. The recommendation crosswalk included suggestions and input gathered from CAC meetings, stakeholder meetings, and the online public input questionnaire.

CAC members shared the following recommendations after completing the activity [Note: staff revised these statements for clarity after the meeting]. CAC members will complete another activity after the meeting to weigh the feasibility and benefit of recommendations, and prioritize recommendations.

Recreational Uses

- RU 1: Provide a modern sanitation building accessible to campers and other park uses. The facility should be located near the campground if feasible.
- RU 2: Accommodate additional winter recreational use including access to a warming center. The division should consider adding or enhancing snowmobiling, snowshoeing, skiing, winter biking, ice skating, and sledding opportunities. Winter trail based recreational uses should have access to a warming facility, which could be provided at the existing chalet.
- RU 3: Expand paved trail connections to park amenities and connections outside of the park.
 - a. Paved interpretive trail near day-use area and MHS historical site.
 - b. Off-road paved trail connection to Fair Ridge Trail.
 - c. Enhance road shoulders to accommodate bicyclists.
- RU 4: Improve trail conditions and connections for existing trail uses (horse, hike, and bike).
- RU 5: Provide a destination equestrian experience.
 - a. Add porta-potty and hitching area (post or tie-rods) in day-use area for equestrian access.
 - b. Develop off-road trail connection between the north and south unit. (note: this option would require crossing private property. The DNR may have to acquire a lease, easement, or additional property to create this connection.)
- RU 6: Enhance existing camping opportunities by providing more electric sites and maintaining privacy between sites.

RU 7: Provide additional overnight lodging opportunities.

- a. Teepees
- b. Camper Cabins
- c. Restored historic building

RU 8: Provide a family-friendly swimming opportunity.

- a. Pool facility. (note: pools are a high cost to develop and maintain and it would be difficult to identify a feasible location for a pool)
- b. Provide opportunities for wading into the irrigation pond or Fort Ridgely Creek. (note: water quality could prevent public swimming access)

RU 9: Draw new users to the park through new and emerging recreational uses. Recreational opportunities could be located on repurposed portions of the golf course.

- a. Disc golf course.
- b. Foot golf and/or team sports area.
- c. Field archery course (note: this would require a change to park rules).

RU 10: Continue to operate the golf course through a concession agreement.

Natural and Cultural Resources

NCR 1: Improve overlook sites through resource and viewshed management. Ensure multiple user groups have access to overlooks.

NCR 2: Restore historic structures.

- a. Restore historic Fort buildings to replicate the visual appearance of the 1850's fort.
- b. Renovate historic park structures to provide overnight lodging opportunities.
- c. Renovate or replace the amphitheater.

NCR 3: Restore native plant communities on the golf course while integrating appropriate recreational opportunities.

NCR 4: Balance landscape priorities between providing cultural landscapes, native plant communities, presettlement vegetation, and recreational uses.

NCR 5: Restore oak savanna plant communities.

NCR 6: Manage portions of the park as quiet/low impact areas for the benefit of visitors and wildlife.

NCR 7: Improve water quality in Fort Ridgely Creek and increase visitors' exposure to the creek.

Interpretive Services

IS 1: Improve orientation and wayfinding to help visitors access recreational, natural and cultural resource features. Focus on self-guided opportunities like an entrance kiosk, updated park map, and directional signage.

IS 2: Partner with the Dakota Community and historical societies to increase interpretation and diversify interpretive perspectives.

IS 3: Continue to partner with Minnesota Historical Society and Nicollet County Historical Society.

- a. Collaborate on developing and promoting events and programs.

- b. Shared office space for MHS/NCHS/DNR staff, and seek staffing efficiencies to maximize the number of hours with staff on site.
 - c. Develop a combination office and sanitation building. Shared office space for DNR/NCHS/MHS staff.
- IS 4: Register Fort Ridgely as a National Civil War Battlefield on the National Register of Historic Places.
- IS 5: Continue to identify and protect cultural resource sites in the park. Consider interpretation at additional cultural resource locations.
- IS 6: Leverage local partners and social media to increase marketing and promotion. Focus on promoting to existing user groups.
- IS 7: Work with area communities and partners to provide additional special events and activities. Events could include reenactments, outdoor skills workshops, holiday events, and pow-wows.
- IS 8: Work with arts community to incorporate art into interpretation and events.
- IS 9: Develop an accessible interpretive trail to showcase additional fort site and battlefield areas, like the breastworks (non-paved trail).
- IS 10: Develop a natural surface interpretive trail to showcase natural and cultural resources. For example this could include a seasonal wildlife or plant identification hike.
- IS 11: Use alternative media and methods to provide interpretive messages. Consider use of interactive kiosks, online information and apps, cell phone tours, and seasonal brochures.
- IS 12: Position Fort Ridgely as a gateway to interpreting geology and the Glacial River Warren in the Minnesota River Valley.

Group Discussion: Categorization and Resource Allocations for Draft Recommendations

CAC members will complete this activity individually through email.

Individual Work: Prioritization Exercise

CAC members will complete this activity individually through email.

Next Steps

- DNR staff will synthesize recommendation suggestions.
- DNR will send recommendation list, with relative costs and instructions for individual activity, to CAC members.
- CAC members will complete matrix and recommendation proposal electronically.

Meeting Evaluation

CAC members completed a meeting evaluation.

Public Comments

The public input questionnaire closes on Monday, October 31. Several people provided comments at the end of the meeting.

Loran Kaardal provided an update on the alternative management proposal. The golf committee, including representatives from Mayflower Country Club, City of Fairfax, and Friends of Fort Ridgely, developed a proposed concession agreement to operate the golf course. The proposal was sent to DNR

on October 20th. The agreement is for the City of Fairfax and the Friends of Fort Ridgely to manage the golf course for 3 years. The management group needs to raise \$100,000 to fund initial operations. The management group, and DNR, both want a decision by year's end.

Loran can send the business plan and concession agreement to CAC members. Two accountants and others, with over 100 years of experience operating golf courses, created the concession agreement.

Public Comment from Bernadette Wilson: I think there is enough space and existing areas to expand on the uses of the park. The CAC has put forth time and energy to come up with recommendations. I am an accountant and have worked with the Friends of Fort Ridgely and City of Fairfax on the business plan and concessionaire agreement. Our business plan shows that we can operate the golf course at a surplus with no cost to the state. Your efforts and ours should show a unified approach to improve the state park to the greatest potential, not to choose one or the other. The golf course already brings people to the park – visitation will continue to grow as we market the course.

Public Written Comment: Will there be winter tubing? Will the chalet be open in winter? What about moving the shower and bathroom building away from the creek – that may make it easier to handle the waste.

Citizen Advisory Committee Recommendation Prioritization Exercise

The DNR asked citizen advisory committee members to complete a recommendation prioritization exercise after the last meeting. The DNR assigned a relative cost to each of the recommendations. Committee members were directed to spend their “\$100” on the highest priority recommendations. The cost categories are broad, relative estimates; actual project costs would be refined through the process of design and implementation.

- \$ (low cost), worth \$5 in exercise
- \$\$ (moderate cost), worth \$25 in exercise
- \$\$\$ (high cost), worth \$50 in exercise

Ten committee members submitted responses to the exercise. This section indicates how many CAC members included each of the recommendations in their proposal. Note: the total cost does not add up because several CAC members went over budget.

Recreational Uses

RU 1: Provide a modern sanitation building accessible to campers and other park uses. The facility should be located near the campground if feasible. \$\$\$

Included in 6 proposals

RU 2: Accommodate additional winter recreational use including access to a warming center. The division should consider adding or enhancing snowmobiling, snowshoeing, skiing, winter biking, ice skating, and sledding opportunities. Winter trail based recreational uses should have access to a warming facility, which could be provided at the existing chalet. \$

Included in 4 proposals

RU 3: Expand paved trail connections to park amenities and connections outside of the park.

- a. Paved interpretive trail near day-use area and MHS historical site. \$\$
Included in 1 proposal
- b. Off-road paved trail connection to Fair Ridge Trail. \$\$\$
- c. Enhance road shoulders to accommodate bicyclists. \$\$\$
- RU 4: Improve trail conditions and connections for existing trail uses (horse, hike, and bike). \$
Included in 6 proposals
- RU 5: Provide a destination equestrian experience.
 - a. Add porta-potty and hitching area (post or tie-rods) in day-use area for equestrian access. \$
Included in 5 proposals
 - b. Develop off-road trail connection between the north and south unit. \$\$ (note: this option would require crossing private property. The DNR may have to acquire a lease, easement, or additional property to create this connection.)
Included in 2 proposals
- RU 6: Enhance existing camping opportunities by providing more electric sites and maintaining privacy between sites. \$\$
- RU 7: Provide additional overnight lodging opportunities.
 - a. Teepees \$
Included in 1 proposal
 - b. Camper Cabins \$\$
Included in 1 proposal
 - c. Restored historic building \$\$\$
- RU 8: Provide a family-friendly swimming opportunity.
 - a. Pool facility. \$\$\$+ (note: pools are a high cost to develop and maintain and it would be difficult to identify a feasible location for a pool)
 - b. Provide opportunities for wading into the irrigation pond or Fort Ridgely Creek. \$\$\$ (note: water quality could prevent public swimming access)
- RU 9: Draw new users to the park through new and emerging recreational uses. Recreational opportunities could be located on repurposed portions of the golf course.
 - a. Disc golf course. \$
Included in 3 proposals
 - b. Foot golf and/or team sports area. \$\$
 - c. Field archery course (note: this would require a change to park rules). \$\$
Included in 1 proposal
- RU 10: Continue to operate the golf course through a concession agreement. \$\$
Included in 2 proposals

Natural and Cultural Resources

- NCR 1: Improve overlook sites through resource and viewshed management. Ensure multiple user groups have access to overlooks. \$

Included in 4 proposals

NCR 2: Restore historic structures.

a. Restore historic Fort buildings to replicate the visual appearance of the 1850's fort. \$\$\$+

b. Renovate historic park structures to provide overnight lodging opportunities. \$\$\$

Included in 1 proposal

c. Renovate or replace the amphitheater. \$\$\$

Included in 2 proposals

NCR 3: Restore native plant communities on the golf course while integrating appropriate recreational opportunities. \$\$

Included in 2 proposals

NCR 4: Balance landscape priorities between providing cultural landscapes, native plant communities, presettlement vegetation, and recreational uses. **No Cost**

Included in 1 proposal

NCR 5: Restore oak savanna plant communities. \$\$

Included in 1 proposal

NCR 6: Manage portions of the park as quiet/low impact areas for the benefit of visitors and wildlife. \$

Included in 2 proposals

NCR 7: Improve water quality in Fort Ridgely Creek and increase visitors' exposure to the creek. \$\$

Included in 1 proposal

Interpretive Services

IS 1: Improve orientation and wayfinding to help visitors access recreational, natural and cultural resource features. Focus on self-guided opportunities like an entrance kiosk, updated park map, and directional signage. \$

Included in 4 proposals

IS 2: Partner with the Dakota Community and historical societies to increase interpretation and diversify interpretive perspectives. \$

Included in 4 proposals

IS 3: Continue to partner with Minnesota Historical Society and Nicollet County Historical Society.

a. Collaborate on developing and promoting events and programs. \$

Included in 1 proposal

b. Shared office space for MHS/NCHS/DNR staff, and seek staffing efficiencies to maximize the number of hours with staff on site. \$\$

Included in 2 proposals

c. Develop a combination office and sanitation building. Shared office space for DNR/NCHS/MHS staff. \$\$\$

IS 4: Register Fort Ridgely as a National Civil War Battlefield on the National Register of Historic Places. \$

Included in 4 proposals

IS 5: Continue to identify and protect cultural resource sites in the park. Consider interpretation at additional cultural resource locations. \$\$

- IS 6: Leverage local partners and social media to increase marketing and promotion. Focus on promoting to existing user groups. \$
Included in 1 proposal
- IS 7: Work with area communities and partners to provide additional special events and activities. Events could include reenactments, outdoor skills workshops, holiday events, and pow-wows. \$
Included in 3 proposals
- IS 8: Work with arts community to incorporate art into interpretation and events. \$
Included in 1 proposal
- IS 9: Develop an accessible interpretive trail to showcase additional fort site and battlefield areas, like the breastworks (non-paved trail). \$
Included in 3 proposals
- IS 10: Develop a natural surface interpretive trail to showcase natural and cultural resources. For example this could include a seasonal wildlife or plant identification hike. \$
Included in 3 proposals
- IS 11: Use alternative media and methods to provide interpretive messages. Consider use of interactive kiosks, online information and apps, cell phone tours, and seasonal brochures. \$
Included in 4 proposals
- IS 12: Position Fort Ridgely as a gateway to interpreting geology and the Glacial River Warren in the Minnesota River Valley. \$
Included in 2 proposals

APPENDIX B: STATUTORY DIRECTION FOR STATE PARKS AND STATE HISTORIC SITES

M.S. 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;
 - (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.

86A.05 Subd. 11. State historic sites; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation.

- (a) A state historic site shall be established to preserve, restore, and interpret buildings and other structures, locales, sites, antiquities, and related lands which aptly illustrate significant events, personalities, and features of the history and archaeology of the state or nation.

- (b) No unit shall be authorized as a state historic site unless it is historically important for any of the following reasons:
 - (1) is the site of or directly associated with a significant historical event; or
 - (2) is associated with persons whose lives and accomplishments are historically unique or important; or
 - (3) embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style or method of construction which represents a particular and significant historical period, or the work of a master builder, designer, or architect; or
 - (4) has yielded, or is likely to yield, historical or archaeological artifacts, records, or other original data or information; or
 - (5) is a geographical feature of outstanding significance and includes, by way of example, the highest point in the state, the continental divide, and the source of the Mississippi River.
- (c) State historic sites shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota, governmental subdivisions of the state, or by county historical societies jointly or independently as designated by law in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision to maintain and, if necessary, restore the historical integrity of the site to commemorate or illustrate its historical importance. Ancient features of significance shall be protected from disturbance until archaeological research has been completed. Interpretive programs for visitors shall be provided including, where practicable, interpretation of research programs under supervised conditions. Recreational use of natural features shall be permitted only where this can be accomplished without detriment to historical values. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to achieve the management and use objectives.