

# La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

## Management Plan



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**  
**Division of Parks and Trails**

**October 2013**

## *La Salle Lake State Recreation Area management plan*

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails would like to thank all who participated in this management plan process, especially members of the Citizen Advisory Committee. Thank you.



A portion of the funding for the La Salle Lake State Recreation Area comes from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

October 2013, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

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*October 2013*

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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**Department of Natural Resources Approval of the  
La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Management Plan**

*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 and state recreation areas. The Laws of Minnesota for 2011 (Special Session chapter 6, article 3) established La Salle Lake State Recreation Area as part of the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.013, subd. 15a).

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources worked in partnership with Minnesota citizens and an interdisciplinary resource team to develop the management plan (master plan) for La Salle Lake State Recreation Area. The management plan was reviewed by the Northwest Regional Management Team during July 2012.

Erika R. Rivers

Erika Rivers  
Assistant Commissioner

Oct 4, 2013

Date

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## Executive Summary

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area was established as part of a multidisciplinary effort within the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR's vision is to manage and operate the state recreation area from a similar multidisciplinary perspective to "demonstrate a diversity of DNR programs and initiatives" (see **Vision Statement for La Salle Lake State Recreation Area** – page 6).

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) will be different from other SRAs. La Salle Lake SRA was established as a partnership among multiple disciplines within the DNR and is an opportunity to focus on a wider range of recreational activities. Hunting and trapping will be regular recreational activities supported and promoted at La Salle Lake SRA. Although hunting and trapping are allowed to a limited extent at some other state parks or SRAs or are utilized as a resource management tool, they are not considered primary recreational activities at those units. Fishing is allowed in all state parks and state recreation areas, but like hunting and trapping, will have a greater emphasis as a recreational activity at La Salle Lake SRA.

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) encompasses high quality natural and cultural resources. The property contains several native plant communities, including mesic hardwood forest, fire-dependent forests and woodlands, wetland forest, and open wetland ecosystems. A portion of the SRA is designated as a scientific and natural area, or SNA. The unit also contains important cultural resources – archaeological research has revealed evidence of very old American Indian presence at the site. In addition to the terrestrial resources, the SRA encompasses high value water-related resources including stretches of the Mississippi River and LaSalle Creek, as well as the 240 acre LaSalle Lake. The lake shoreline and fishery have been minimally impacted by prior use. The DNR utilized an interdisciplinary team to develop a natural and cultural resource plan for the unit. (See **Natural and Cultural Resources** – page 12).

Interpretive and educational efforts at the SRA will pull together the variety of educational efforts supported by the DNR, with a special emphasis on youth. The SRA represents an opportunity to highlight for visitors a wide range of topics and activities including some, such as hunting and trapping, that are not usually part of interpretive programming at state parks and state recreation areas. A key component is a proposed outdoor learning center program that would offer learning opportunities in several forms including workshops, programs and program series on specific topics, multi-topic day camps as well as overnight camp options utilizing the group camp at the SRA. The DNR will seek partnerships with other education providers, local communities and other groups to help create and support these interpretive opportunities (see **Interpretive Services** – page 22).

### ***How is La Salle Lake SRA unique?***

La Salle Lake SRA is a collaborative effort across DNR disciplines offering a wide range of activities:

#### Outdoor heritage activities -

- hunting
- trapping
- fishing

#### Other SRA activities -

- camping
- hiking
- boating
- outdoor education



Youth-focused interpretive and educational efforts

La Salle Lake SRA will support a range of recreational opportunities, both within the unit and on adjacent public land. Activities with the SRA will include typical SRA activities such as camping and lodging, hiking, boating, fishing, and cross-country skiing. Hunting and trapping are also allowed activities at the SRA. Construction of a new water access site, as well as proposed reduced bag limits and a no-wake regulation, will provide opportunities for the public to enjoy the lake while protecting the fishery and steep shoreline.

The SRA will also be a hub for accessing recreational opportunities in the surrounding area, including the Mississippi River Trail, the Mississippi River Water Trail, the Great River Road, grant-in-aid snowmobile trails, and ATV trails on county-administered land. Connections for snowmobiles and ATVs from the SRA campground and lodging to trail systems outside the SRA will provide new opportunities for these groups not available at other state parks or SRAs (see **Recreational Use and Visitor Services** – page 27).

The DNR will use an interdisciplinary approach for funding and carrying out management actions on the SRA. The DNR Division of Parks and Trails will have the primary responsibility for the operation of the recreational use and visitor services facilities in the SRA. The division will operate the SRA as a satellite of Itasca State Park. As directed by the Minnesota State Legislature, the DNR evaluated the feasibility of the “resort” functions of the SRA (the campground, lodging, pool, and related services) being managed by a private entity via a contract, concession, or other relationship. The business analysis, conducted with the Minnesota Department of Management and Budget, found that at this time there was insufficient information on the costs and revenues to determine the viability of a concession or similar public-private management relationship. The DNR will manage the site for two to three seasons to collect additional cost and revenue information, and then reevaluate the feasibility of a concession or other public-private management structure (see **Operations** – page 40).



Integrating hunter education into the outdoor education opportunities at the SRA

## Introduction

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### State Recreation Area Overview

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) was established in 2011. The SRA includes nearly 990 acres of land and is located south of Bemidji and north of Itasca State Park (see Figure 1: State Recreation Area Location). The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) acquired land within the SRA in 2010 and 2011.

#### *Resources*

The SRA surrounds La Salle Lake, includes a portion of La Salle Creek, and includes frontage on the Mississippi River. La Salle Lake is 240 acres in size and 213 feet deep, with over 18,600 feet of shoreline. Portions of the forest within the SRA have been rated as areas of high and outstanding biodiversity. The northern portion of the SRA has been designated as La Salle Lake Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) recognizing the presence of high quality Jack Pine Woodland, White Cedar Swamp, and rare plants and animals.

Several types of cultural resources have also been identified in the SRA, including pre Euro-American contact and historic archaeological resources. The northern headwaters area of the Mississippi River is a cultural resource-rich area and additional cultural resource sites may be discovered on the property.

#### *Recreation Facilities and Opportunities*

Current facilities at La Salle Lake SRA include a campground (40 sites with electric, water and sewer hook-ups), a sanitation and laundry building, an indoor pool (with a sauna, whirlpool, dry deck area, restrooms, catering kitchen and office space), two year-round rental cabins, a swimming beach, a small water access site with limited parking, and hiking trails. Other structures on the property include two houses (which may be converted to lodging), barn, corrals, several garages and storage buildings.

Some initial improvements and repairs will be made to the facilities to prepare them to be open to the public in 2012. Additional improvements to the existing facilities, and the development of new facilities, will be conducted in the future as funding is secured.

Much of the land surrounding the SRA is publicly-owned – the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest and county-administered forest lands. There are opportunities to link the SRA with recreational uses on these adjacent lands including hunting, trapping and ATV riding. There is also the potential to connect the SRA with other recreational systems such as the grant-in-aid



Aerial view looking north

snowmobile trail system, the Mississippi River Trail, and the Great River Road.

#### *Interdisciplinary Involvement*

Establishing and acquiring the SRA was a multi-disciplinary effort within the DNR. The DNR intends to manage the SRA to support the range of resource protection and recreation opportunities represented by this multi-discipline effort. The resource management actions and visitor experiences will be different from what would be typical of any single DNR unit, whether a state forest, wildlife management area, state park, or scientific and natural area. The DNR will develop an interdisciplinary approach to fund and implement management actions on the SRA.

The DNR Division of Parks and Trails will have the primary responsibility for managing the recreational use and visitor services facilities such as the campground, cabins, day use facilities and water access site; and coordinating the interpretive services programming for the SRA.

#### **Statutory Authorization**

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area was established by the Minnesota State Legislature in 2011:

*Sec. 6. Minnesota Statutes 2010, section 85.013, is amended by adding a subdivision to read:*

*Subd. 15a. LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, Hubbard County.*

#### **Sec. 8. LASALLE LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA.**

*Subdivision 1. **LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, Hubbard County.** The LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area is established in Hubbard County.*

*Subd. 2. **Boundaries.** The following described lands are located within the boundaries of the LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, all in Hubbard County:*

*(1) the Southwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter and the Northwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter, except the East 10 acres thereof, of Section 29; the Northeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter, the Northwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter, the Southwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter, the Northeast Quarter of the Southwest Quarter, the Southeast Quarter of the Northwest Quarter, the Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter, and Government Lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, of Section 30; Government Lots 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, of Section 31; and Government Lots 1 and 4 of Section 32; all in Township 145 North, Range 35 West; and*  
*(2) Government Lot 12, Section 19, Township 145 North, Range 35.*

*Subd. 3. **Administration.** The commissioner of natural resources shall administer the area according to Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 3, subject to existing rules and regulations for state recreation*



Day use area entrance road

*areas. LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area shall be administered as a satellite unit of Itasca State Park.*

**Sec. 9. LASALLE LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA MANAGEMENT OPTIONS.**

*By March 1, 2012, the commissioner of natural resources shall submit a report to the senate and house of representatives committees and divisions with jurisdiction over natural resources policy and finance evaluating options for the management of the resort within the LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, including an evaluation of the option to lease the resort to a nonstate entity. The evaluation shall include potential financial arrangements or mechanisms that would make the equivalent of local taxes or payments in lieu of taxes the responsibility of the nonstate entity.*

*Laws 2011 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Chapter 6, Article 3, Sections 6, 8, 9*

## **Planning Process**

The La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Management Plan is a 20-year strategic vision for the SRA. It guides the development of facilities and management of unit resources. *Minnesota Statutes*, Section 86A.09 requires a management plan be developed for certain units of the outdoor recreation system – including state recreation areas. The DNR is to prepare and approve a management plan prior to requesting money from the Minnesota State Legislature for the construction of new facilities or other development.

Management plans are developed through an open public process. Division staff and planners work with other Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff, other agencies, local government officials, local legislators, and citizens during the planning process.

The management plan process for La Salle Lake SRA included several methods for involving the public. The process began with an open house, held at the SRA on December 1, 2011. In addition to the open house, an online survey was utilized to gather public input about the future development and management of the SRA.

A citizen advisory committee (CAC) also provided input during the planning process. The CAC was made up of representatives from the local communities, state park and SRA users, and interested citizens. The committee met three times during the planning process:

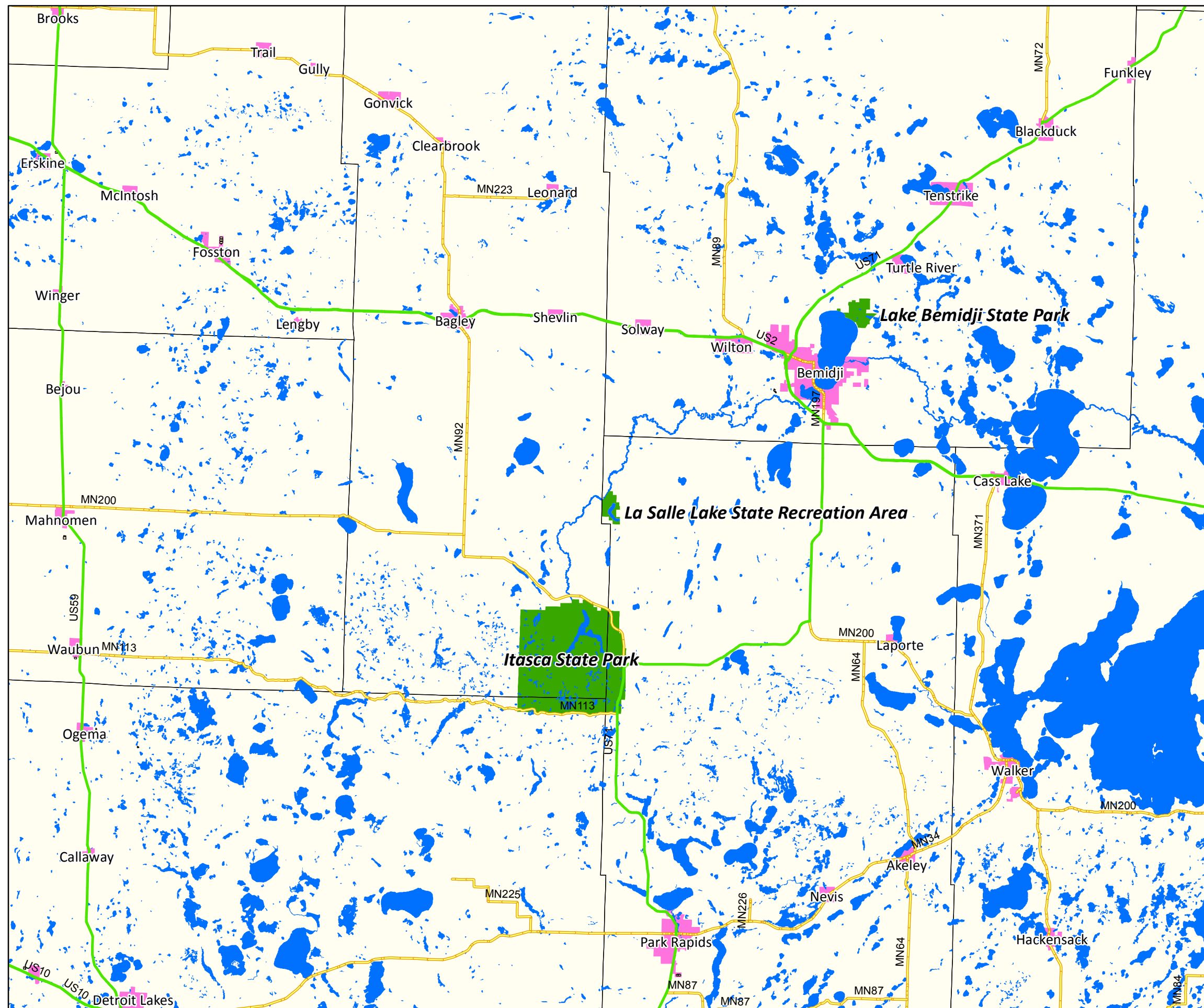
- December 19, 2011 – La Salle Lake State Recreation Area
- January 17, 2012 – Itasca State Park
- April 3, 2012 – Itasca State Park



The committee reviewed information collected during the planning process, provided input on the SRA vision and management issues, and reviewed draft recommendations for the plan.

Two other planning-related efforts contributed to the development of the SRA management plan. An interdisciplinary group of DNR staff developed a natural and cultural resources management plan for the SRA. The inventory information and proposed management actions from this more narrowly-focused resource plan were utilized as the base for decision-making during the process for developing the La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Management Plan. A summary of the natural and cultural resources management plan's findings and recommended management goals can be found in the **Natural and Cultural Resources** section of this plan. The second planning-related effort was the development of the report called for in the SRA's establishing legislation to analyze the management options for the resort elements of the SRA. The report's major findings are summarized in the **Operations** section of this plan.

A draft of the La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Management Plan was released for public review in May 2012, with an open house held on June 12, 2012 at Itasca State Park.

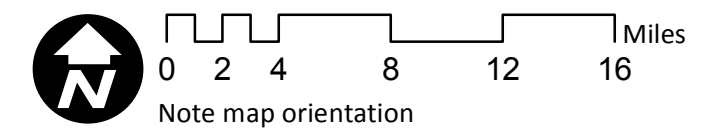
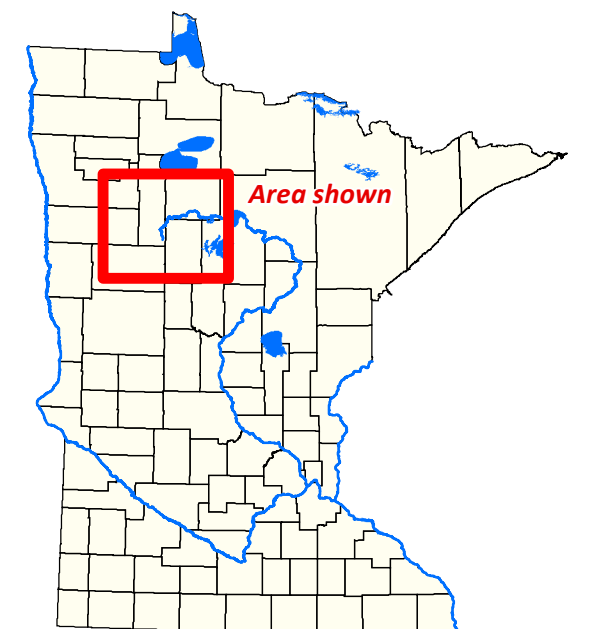


## La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

Figure 1:  
State Recreation Area Location

### Legend

- State Parks and State Recreation Areas
- City Boundaries
- County Boundaries
- U.S. Trunk Highway
- Minnesota Trunk Highway



## Vision for La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

The DNR has a three-part mission that encompasses its interactions with the environment and the public:

*The mission of the Department of Natural Resources 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.*

The multi-disciplinary nature of La Salle Lake State Recreation Area means future development and management decisions for the SRA will reflect many of the elements present in the department mission.

### Vision Statement for La Salle Lake SRA

The vision statement was developed during the management plan process to capture the DNR's intent for developing and managing the SRA as a multi-disciplinary unit:

*La Salle Lake State Recreation Area will demonstrate a diversity of DNR programs and initiatives:*

- *Protected and well-managed natural and cultural resources*  
  
DNR resource efforts will include protecting the existing high quality resources present at the site, controlling the introduction and spread of invasive species, and working to restore disturbed areas to native plant communities.
- *Interpretive and educational programming on a wide range of topics - with a focus on connecting youth and the outdoors*  
  
DNR will work to integrate the array of interpretive and education efforts in the department as part of the interpretive and education programming at La Salle Lake SRA. Programming will have an emphasis on youth - to engage them in the natural world and help develop the next generation of outdoor leaders.
- *A hub for many activities – facilities and programs that draw people to visit for opportunities on the SRA and connections to other opportunities nearby*

La Salle Lake SRA can support some activities within its borders, such as camping, hiking, boating, swimming, fishing, hunting and

### **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.*

trapping. The SRA can also be a hub to recreational opportunities on nearby publicly-owned lands, like snowmobile and ATV riding, and on nearby recreational systems, such as the Mississippi River Water Trail, Mississippi River Trail, and the Great River Road.

- *Opportunities that attract visitors to the area and serve local communities*

DNR will develop facilities, programs and recreational opportunities at La Salle Lake SRA that attract visitors to travel to the area. Marketing and promotional connections with Itasca State Park can be utilized to raise awareness of the SRA. The SRA will also provide opportunities for residents of local communities that surround the SRA, including through connections with local schools, community organizations and other groups.

- *Opportunities that attract visitors year-round*

The bulk of visitation to state parks and state recreation areas occurs in the summer and spring and fall “shoulder” seasons. DNR intend to develop and promote opportunities at La Salle Lake SRA to attract visitors year-round, such as four-season cabin and lodging facilities that are connected to the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system and cross-county-ski and snowshoe trails. The close proximity of Itasca State Park will create shared promotional opportunities as well as offer operational support for year-round activity at La Salle Lake SRA.

- *High amenity facilities in a natural, minimally disturbed setting*

The existing facilities at La Salle Lake SRA have a high level of amenities – such as year round cabins with kitchens and bathrooms, and campsites with full service hookups. The proposals in this plan will seek to cluster any new facilities near existing development and in already disturbed areas, leaving the remaining acreage of the SRA untouched. The remainder of the property would be managed largely for resource values and low-impact recreation, such as hiking and hunting. The result will be separate areas within the SRA with a different emphasis for resource protection and public use. Yet having both within the unit will enable the department to use La Salle Lake SRA as a place to help more people foster deeper connections with the outdoors. This high amenity-natural environment interface will be especially useful for attracting people with less experience with the outdoors.



Entrance gate at SRA

## Regional Setting

### Political and Demographic Setting

La Salle Lake State Recreation Area is located in Fern Township in northwestern Hubbard County. The western boundary of the SRA shares its border with Clearwater County. Hubbard County has a population of 20,428 in 2010, an 11.2% increase since 2000. Clearwater County, with a population of 8,695 in 2010, grew 3.2% over the last decade.

The largest municipalities nearby the SRA are Park Rapids and Bemidji. Park Rapids, approximately 35 miles south of the SRA on US Highway 71 in Hubbard County, has a 2010 population of 3,709. Bemidji, approximately 22 miles to the northeast in Beltrami County, has a population of 13,431.

### Recreational Opportunities Setting

There are a wide range of recreational opportunities within a 30-mile radius of La Salle Lake Recreation Area (see Figure 2: Regional Recreation Opportunities). These opportunities include federal and state-managed facilities, as well as numerous local and privately-run facilities. This section lists several major categories of state and federally-managed facilities located within the 30 mile radius of the SRA that offer similar nature-based opportunities.

#### *National Wildlife Refuges*

Two national wildlife refuges are located within 30 miles of the SRA - Tamarack National Wildlife Refuge and Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge.

#### *National Trails*

The North Country Trail (NCT) is a federally-designated National Scenic Trail extending from New York to North Dakota. The trail is envisioned as a non-motorized, off-road primitive footpath over 4,600 miles length when completed. A section of the trail in Minnesota is already complete, including the portion crossing through Itasca State Park. The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is a trail and on-road bicycling route that follows the Mississippi River from Minnesota to Louisiana. MRT was designated as a National Millennium Trail in 2000. The trail's designated route follows Clearwater County Road 40/Hubbard County Road 9 through La Salle Lake SRA. MRT follows the Great River Road and the Paul Bunyan State Trail for portions of its route.

#### *National Scenic Byways*

The Great River Road is a federally designated National Scenic Byway that identifies a driving route following the Mississippi River. The scenic byway promotes tourism and travel along the river and nearby communities. The



NCT kiosk – Itasca State Park



designated route follows Clearwater County Road 40/Hubbard County Road 9 through La Salle Lake SRA.

#### *State Scenic Byways*

Lake Country Scenic Byway is an 88 mile state designated corridor following Highways 34 and 71, connecting Detroit Lakes to Walker with a link north from Park Rapids to Itasca State Park.

#### *State Parks and State Recreation Areas*

Two state parks are within 30 miles of La Salle Lake SRA - Itasca State Park and Lake Bemidji State Park. Both parks offer a wide range of recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, boating, wildlife viewing and visiting historic sites. Itasca State Park will oversee the operation of the La Salle Lake SRA as a satellite unit (see **Operations** section).

#### *State Forests and Forest Recreation Areas*

Portions of nine state forests lie within the 30 mile radius from the SRA. State forest recreation opportunities vary for forest to forest, most include hunting and a range of trail-related activities such as hiking, cross country skiing, horseback riding, snowmobile and ATV riding. Four forest recreation areas – campgrounds and day use areas located in state forests - are within the 30-mile radius: Hungryman Lake, Mantrap Lake, Gulch Lake, and Rognlien Beach.

#### *Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)*

Fifty-four state-managed wildlife management areas are located with 30 miles of the SRA. These areas offer primarily hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing opportunities.

#### *Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA)*

Four scientific and natural areas (not including the La Salle Lake SNA within the SRA boundary) are within the 30-mile radius. Recreational opportunities at SNAs are typically limited to hiking and wildlife viewing.

#### *State Trails*

Portions of the Paul Bunyan State Trail and Heartland State Trail are within the 30-mile radius of the SRA. The state trails are paved surface trails that support biking, in-line skating, hiking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling. Lake Bemidji State Park and the cities of Park Rapids and Bemidji are major trailheads and access points for the state trails near the SRA.

#### *Water Trails*

The Mississippi River Water Trail is a state designated canoe, kayak and boating route from the river headwaters at Lake Itasca to the Iowa border. Coffee Pot Landing, just west of the SRA boundary, is a designated access point for the water trail.



Coffee Pot Landing – trail bridge & canoe access

*Water Access Sites*

There are over 180 water access sites administered by federal, state, or local governments within 30 miles of the SRA.

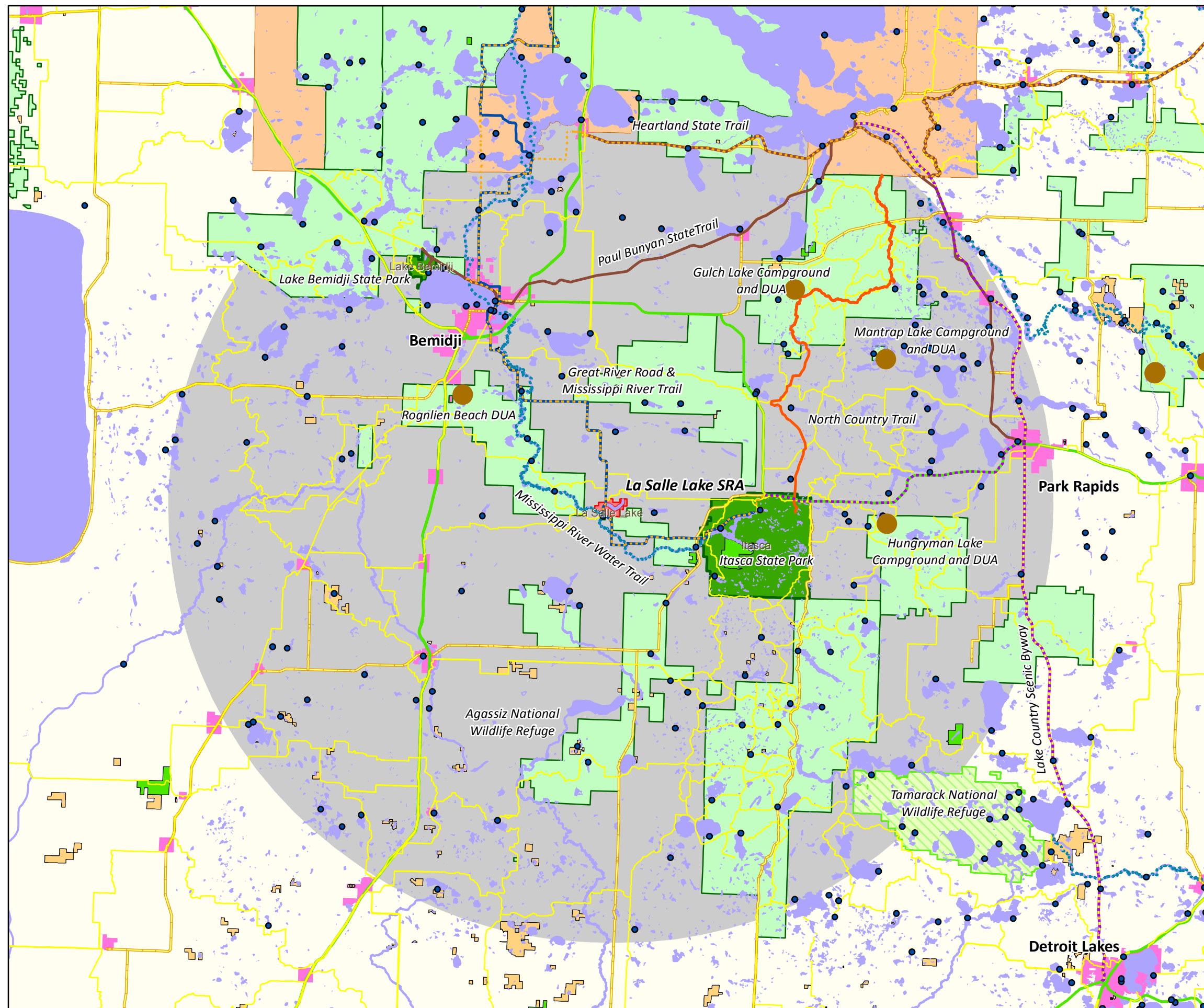
*Grant-in-Aid Snowmobile Trails*

Over 1,220 miles of snowmobile trails are managed by local clubs as part of the state-administered grant-in-aid system within 30 miles of the SRA. A current grant-in-aid route passes along to the west boundary of the SRA.

*Off-Highway Vehicle Riding Opportunities*

Off-Highway Vehicle riding opportunities exist on forest roads and designated trails in several state forests and on other designated routes within the 30-mile radius. Some county-administered lands are also open to motorized recreation, including some Hubbard County-administered lands adjacent to the SRA.

There are numerous local parks and recreation sites within a 30-mile radius of La Salle Lake SRA. These mainly county and municipal parks are typically not large, nature-based recreation sites similar to La Salle Lake SRA. The area is also home to privately-run recreational sites including resorts, amusement parks, campgrounds and other amenities. These sites may offer complementary opportunities to the type of experiences offered at La Salle Lake SRA and have the potential to cross-promote and share visitors with the SRA, enhancing the tourism attraction of the area.

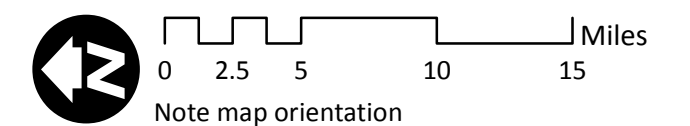


## La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

Figure 2:  
Regional Recreation Opportunities

### Legend

- La Salle Lake SRA
- 30-mile radius of La Salle Lake SRA
- City Boundaries
- State-Designated Opportunities**
  - State Parks
  - State Forest Boundaries
  - State Forest Campgrounds and Day Use Areas
  - Wildlife Management Area Boundaries
  - Scientific and Natural Area Boundaries
  - Water Trails
  - Snowmobile Trails
  - State Trails
  - Water Access Sites
  - Lake Country Scenic Byway
- Federally-Designated Opportunities**
  - Superior National Forest
  - National Wildlife Refuges
  - North Country Trail
  - Great River Road
  - Mississippi River Trail



## **Natural and Cultural Resources**

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### **Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan**

A DNR interdisciplinary team was created to develop a resource-focused plan to guide future management activities for the natural and cultural resources at La Salle Lake SRA. The *La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan* includes an assessment of the natural and cultural resources present in the SRA and identifies goals and recommended management actions.

This approach reflects the multi-disciplinary effort that was involved in establishing and funding the purchase of the SRA. Given the combination of funds used to acquire the property and the multiple statutory (SRA) and administrative (SNA) designations applied to portions of the unit, implementation of resource management activities on the SRA will also be interdisciplinary.

Information and recommendations from *La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan* was utilized during the development of the broader statutorily-required management plan for the SRA – helping to shape the interpretive themes, proposed recreational uses, and potential facility locations described in this plan.

The major findings from the *La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan* are summarized below.

### **Natural Resource Assessment**

#### *Ecological Classification System (ECS) Context*

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources uses an Ecological Classification System (ECS) for ecological mapping and landscape classification in Minnesota. Ecological land classifications are used to identify, describe, and map progressively smaller areas of land with increasingly uniform ecological features. The ECS uses biotic and environmental factors, including climate, geology, topography, soils, hydrology, and vegetation. ECS mapping enables resource managers to identify areas with similar management opportunities or constraints. The levels of ECS units in Minnesota are Provinces, Sections, Subsections, and Land Type Associations.

The La Salle Lake State Recreation Area's ECS context is:

- Province – Laurentian Mixed Forest (212)
- Section – Northern Minnesota Drift & Lake Plains (212N)

- Subsection – Chippewa Plains (212Na)
- Land Type Association – Becida Till Plain (212Na22)

Detailed descriptions of the ECS units are available in *The Field Guide to the Native Plant Communities of Minnesota: the Laurentian Mixed Forest Province*.

#### *Surficial Geology and Soils*

La Salle Lake SRA is located on the Guthrie Till Plain. The Guthrie Till Plain is a ground moraine feature in the northern third of Hubbard County that was formed by active (advancing and/or retreating) ice. This landscape is nearly level to sloping, except along river channels, and is dominated by calcareous sandy loam and loam with an abundance of boulders, stones, and cobbles

The La Salle Creek drainage valley is a tunnel valley that formed during the Quaternary Period (See Figure 3: LIDAR-Based Contours). Topographic relief ranges from an elevation of 1,384 feet at the surface of LaSalle Lake to nearly 1,570 feet at the top of the ridge above the lake. The campground area sits at roughly 1,500 feet, approximately 120 feet above the lakeshore. The steep and rugged valley slopes average between 20-40%. Dramatic ridges and tributary valleys, or drainage valleys, are common along the slopes.

Upland soils in the SRA are predominantly well-drained sandy loams that are very stony. Moderately well-drained loamy fine sands are present to a lesser extent. Many of the wet to wet-mesic forested communities are in areas with loamy, fine sands with a perched water table and groundwater seepage. The La Salle Creek bed is made up of mucky, very poorly drained soils that consist of organic materials over outwash materials. Only a small segment of the SRA has very poorly drained soils that are derived from woody or herbaceous materials (i.e., peat).

Portions of the SRA with steep terrain and sandy soils are vulnerable to erosion.

#### *Hydrologic Features*

The SRA is located in the Mississippi River – Headwaters major watershed. Most of the SRA is within the La Salle Creek minor watershed. Some of the western side of the SRA drains directly to the Mississippi River and a very small area on the east side of the SRA is in the Hennepin Creek minor watershed.

La Salle Creek originates within Itasca State Park near the east arm of Lake Itasca and flows north to the Mississippi River. The confluence of these two waterways is just north of Hubbard County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 9 and east of the Clearwater-Hubbard county line. The creek traverses approximately 11 miles and passes through four lakes before joining with



Aerial view of tunnel valley and LaSalle Lake



the Mississippi River. Seeps and springs occur along the entire length of La Salle Creek.

La Salle Lake, located almost entirely within the SRA, covers 240 acres and is also known as Lower La Salle Lake.

### Land Cover

Land cover within the SRA includes open water habitats, native plant communities with varying degrees of disturbance such as logging, and more recently managed or developed areas (see Figure 4: Land Cover – System-Level Classifications).

**Table 1: Land Cover**

Category	Acres
Mesic Hardwood Forest System	282
Fire-Dependent Forest/Woodland System	138
Wet Meadow/Carr System	56
Forest Rich Peatland System	22
Wet Forest System	9
Acid Peatland System	2
Other Natural System – open water (lake, creek, river)	267
Non-Natural System - young forest, old fields, pasture	397
Facilities System - developed & use areas	61
<b>Total</b> (includes LaSalle Lake and Mississippi River)	<b>1,234</b>

System-level land cover and native plant community descriptions can be found in *The Field Guide to the Native Plant Communities of Minnesota: the Laurentian Mixed Forest Province*.

### Native Plant Communities

The native plant communities in the SRA were mapped and analyzed during the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) of Hubbard County in 2008. Portions of the SRA south of County Highway 9 were rated as an area of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance while portions north of the highway were rated as High Biodiversity Significance. The SRA contains mesic hardwood forest, fire-dependent forests and woodlands, wetland forest, and open wetland ecosystems. Mesic hardwood forests are the most prevalent terrestrial ecosystem.

### Disturbed Areas

Disturbed areas are classified as non-natural systems. The disturbed areas in the SRA include young forest, old fields and pastured woodlands. The young forest (258 acres) consists of forested uplands that have been harvested within the last 30-40 years. In time these young forests will likely develop characteristics similar to adjacent forested native plant communities. The areas mapped as old fields or pastured woodland have been managed as agricultural lands in the recent past. These areas are



Old field in La Salle Lake SNA

candidates for reconstruction to native plant communities suited to the site or as preferred areas for future development.

#### Developed Areas

Developed and use areas such as the campground, farm yard, water access site, and roads as classified in the facilities system. The areas mapped as developed areas or road have been extensively modified.

#### Rare Plants

The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) provides information on Minnesota's rare plants, animals, native plant communities, and other rare features. The NHIS is continually updated as new information becomes available, and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota's rare or otherwise significant species, native plant communities, and other natural features. To date, three rare plants have been documented within the SRA.

#### Invasive Species

Several terrestrial invasive species have been identified in the SRA. Currently they are present in relatively low numbers and limited locations. The lake has not been surveyed for aquatic invasive species of plants and animals. The following terrestrial invasive plant species are known to occur in the SRA:

- Common tansy *Tanacetum vulgare*
- Spotted knapweed *Centaurea stoebe*
- Musk thistle *Carduus nutans*
- Smooth brome *Bromus inermis*
- Common burdock *Arctium minus*
- Crown vetch *Coronilla varia*
- Thistles *Cirsium spp.*

These species are usually associated with road ditches, minimum maintenance roads, old fields, use areas, and trails.

#### Wildlife

Wildlife within the SRA is typical of the Laurentian Mixed Forest Province. White-tailed deer are a common large mammal, along with eastern timber wolf, and American black bear. River otter are present, along with other fur-bearer species such as long-tailed weasel and beaver.

#### Birds

Birds of the northern forests found in the area include a number of warblers, including yellow-rumped, palm, mourning and chestnut-sided warblers. Other common insect-eaters include least flycatcher, eastern phoebe, eastern wood pewee and great crested flycatcher. Both black-capped and boreal chickadees are observed here, as well as red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches. Numerous sparrow species include song sparrow, savannah sparrow, chipping sparrow and vesper sparrow. With



Common tansy and spotted knapweed



Beaver activity on LaSalle Creek

the varied habitats which include lowland conifer forest, mature and young deciduous forest, medium-aged mixed hardwood/conifer forest, field, and lake, there is the potential for over 75 species of birds to breed on-site.

#### Fisheries

LaSalle Lake is 240 acres in size. The tunnel valley-formed basin is steep-sided and extremely deep (over 200 feet at its deepest point). The part of the lake generally most productive for fish is the area less than 15 feet deep, called the littoral zone. Because of the steep sides and depth, only 16 acres or 7% of the lake is littoral, so the potential for fish production is limited. LaSalle Lake provides fishing opportunities for northern pike, largemouth bass, panfish, and walleye. Other species found in the lake include tullibee, yellow perch, white sucker, rock bass and hybrid sunfish, and low numbers of pumpkinseed, yellow bullhead, and shorthead redhorse.

The Mississippi River and LaSalle Creek fisheries within the SRA offer minimal opportunities for game fish species, however a portion of LaSalle Creek upstream of the SRA is designated as a trout stream.

#### Rare Animals

The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) provides information on Minnesota's rare plants, animals, native plant communities, and other rare features. The NHIS is continually updated as new information becomes available, and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota's rare or otherwise significant species, native plant communities, and other natural features. Two rare animals have been documented within the SRA. It is possible that other rare animals live within or visit the SRA. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife* identified 292 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) statewide. SGCNs are species that are rare, declining, or vulnerable in Minnesota, including species with legal protection status (federal or state endangered or threatened species). Nearly 60 SGCNs that have been documented in or are reasonably expected to occur in habitats present within the SRA.

### **Cultural and Historic Resource Assessment**

There are several types of cultural resources that have been identified in the SRA, including pre- Euro-American contact and historic archaeological resources.

#### *Archaeological Sites*

An American Indian archaeological site is present on the property. The LaSalle Creek site (21HB26) is a Woodland Period habitation that was discovered in 1993 during the reconstruction of Hubbard County Highway 9. Subsequent to acquisition of the property by the DNR, additional

archaeological surveying has been conducted on the site, which found additional evidence of the site beyond the original site boundary.

Extensive archaeological investigations found cultural evidence including pottery, burned bone, fire-cracked rock, stone tools, and flakes. Dating of some of the pottery from the site has yielded some of the earliest dates for ceramics in the state, 2,700 years old. There is a current proposal to name this horizontal corded pottery style LaSalle Creek ware. Approximate dates for use of the site include Early Woodland (3,000 to 1,600 years ago) and Late Woodland (1,200 to 600 years ago). The LaSalle Creek site is a significant archaeological site that has been determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### *Logging Era Structures*

Evidence of logging operations exists in the SRA, including the remains of a dam, an access road, and a building depression. At the time of the logging operation, the dam spanned LaSalle Creek to aid the movement of timber being cut on the land surrounding the lake and floated down the creek to the Mississippi River. These features are within the designated scientific and natural area.

#### *Early Resort and Farm Yard Structures*

Evidence of structures from earlier resort development is still visible, primarily building foundations of former cabins. Although these structures may not be of historic significance, they offer an opportunity to interpret the past use of the land as a recreational site and homestead in relation to its current use as a state recreation area.

#### *Identification of Additional Cultural Resources*

It is likely that archaeological sites will be found in other locations within the state recreation area boundary. Other than examinations of the vicinity north of the outlet of LaSalle Lake, there have been no other archaeological surveys completed in the state recreation area. Archaeological assessments will be conducted as part of resource assessments for the development of new facilities, trails or other structures to prevent or mitigate disturbance to cultural resources.

### **Timber Harvest as a Resource Management Tool**

The DNR uses timber harvesting as a tool to meet its resource management goals and to facilitate interpretive and recreation activities. Timber harvests take place in state parks and state recreation areas primarily to restore or manage native plant communities. In some cases, a harvest is necessary to restore visitor usage and reduce fuel loads following a storm event.



Artifact sample from recent archaeological survey work



Logging on LaSalle Lake - 1908

Timber harvests are conducted in state parks and state recreation areas to achieve various results:

- Stands of trees or other woody species not native to the state park or SRA may be removed.
- Trees are harvested as part of restoring native plant communities such as oak savannas and prairies or to integrate planted stands into surrounding forest communities.
- Trees are sometimes harvested to prepare a site for regular resource management through prescribed fire – the timber harvest is used first to reduce the fuel load.
- Trees may be harvested to address an insect or disease issue, or to thin a stand for better growth.
- Trees may be harvested to enhance habitat for wildlife.
- On occasion, trees are harvested to restore visitor access by clearing trails and other facilities, and to reduce fuel loads following a storm event.

The Department may contract with a commercial operator to conduct timber harvest activities. It is often more efficient and effective for a commercial operator to use their specialized equipment for this purpose.

## **Natural and Cultural Resource Recommendations**

Natural and cultural resource recommendations listed here consist of the Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan's management goals and objectives that describe the desired future conditions for the natural and cultural resources at La Salle Lake SRA.

### *Plant Communities and Rare Species*

The long-term goals for La Salle Lake SRA's land cover and rare plants are to:

- Maintain or improve the ecological quality of the native plant communities in the SRA.
- Preserve, perpetuate, and protect high quality resources present in the SRA.
- Restore old fields and pastures to native plant communities, using the best available science and current department policies to inform both the restoration methodology and the plant community re-establishment plant sources.
- Re-establish pine as a component in forested areas where it has been removed by logging.
- Identify, evaluate, and manage mature and old-growth forest stands and legacy trees.
- Protect populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern plant species documented in the SRA and any other ecologically



vulnerable species that persist or become established as climate change occurs.

### *Native Wildlife*

The long-term goals for management of La Salle Lake SRA's wildlife are to:

- Maintain the diversity of ecosystems and their characteristic wildlife populations.
- Maintain the diversity of all the faunal groups known to occur on the site, including invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals.
- Maintain or improve water quality, aquatic habitat, and quality fish populations.
- Aid in the recovery of populations of invertebrate and vertebrate species that are state-listed or otherwise considered rare by applying management that enhances or does not degrade necessary habitat.
- Manage the plant communities of the SRA so they continue to be viable nesting areas for forest birds, including species showing world-wide declines.
- Manage populations of white-tailed deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not overly impacted.
- Provide for hunting and trapping of protected species during open seasons.

### *Cultural Resources*

The long-term goals for cultural resources at La Salle Lake SRA are to:

- Protect all known cultural resources from vandalism.
- Locate trails and other development so as not to impact cultural resources.
- In those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, conduct mitigation so as to preserve the artifacts and information.

### *Development and Use*

Development and public use of the SRA will be guided by the following principles:

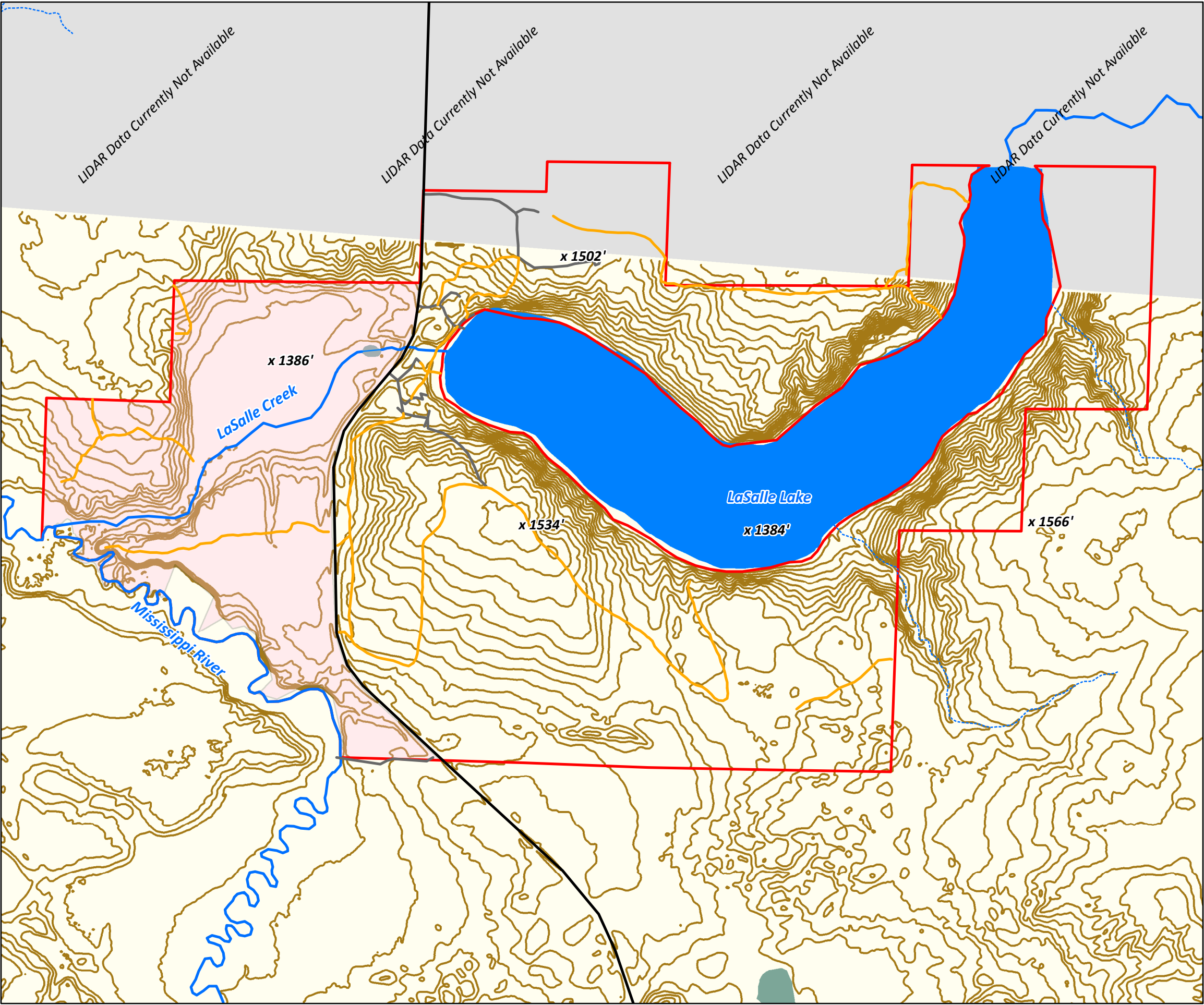
- To the extent possible, developed facilities will be sited in previously disturbed areas as opposed to native plant communities.
- Minimize development impacts on natural and cultural resources via a resource assessment process that includes review by all disciplines.
- Rules for public use of the SRA will be reasonable, understandable, enforceable, and as consistent as possible across the entire SRA.



Maintain or improve water quality, aquatic habitat and fish populations



Manage deer populations to protect native vegetation and provide hunting opportunities

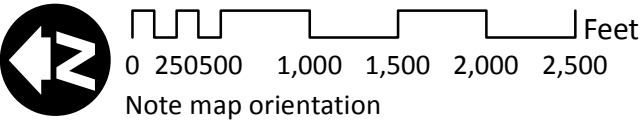


**La Salle Lake State Recreation Area**

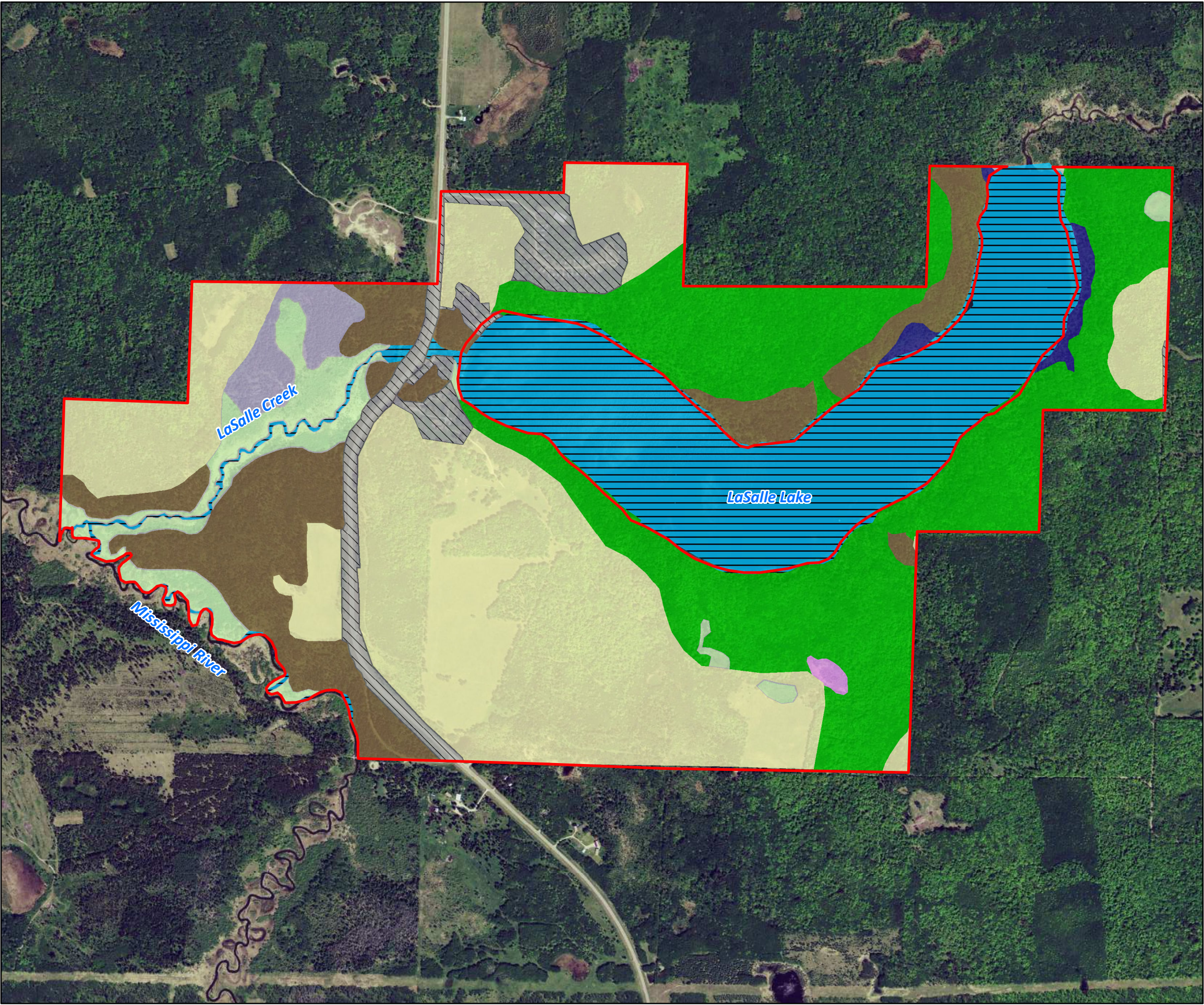
Figure 3:  
LIDAR-Based Contours

**Legend**

- 10 foot interval contours
- County Highways
- Existing roads within SRA
- Existing trails within SRA
- SRA Statutory Boundary
- LaSalle Lake SNA















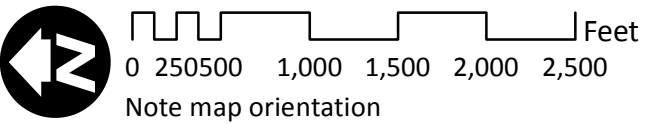


**La Salle Lake State Recreation Area**

Figure 4:  
Land Cover - System-Level Classifications

**Legend**

-  Facilities System - Developed & Use Areas
-  Non-Natural System - Young Forest, Old Fields
-  Other Natural System - Open Water
-  Acid Peatland System
-  Fire-Dependent Forest/Woodland System
-  Forested Rich Peatland System
-  Mesic Hardwood Forest System
-  Wet Forest System
-  Wet Meadow/Carr System
-  SRA Statutory Boundary



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Trails

October 2013



## Interpretive Services

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The mission of the DNR Division of Parks and Trails interpretive program is:

*To create a sense of stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage by illuminating the changing relationships between people and landscapes over time.*

The division's interpretive services program focuses its efforts on connecting people with the outdoors, with first-hand discovery, guided by resource professionals. 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.

Because La Salle Lake SRA was established as a partnership among multiple agencies within the DNR, it represents an opportunity to highlight for visitors a wide range of department values. Interpretive services will offer visitors an opportunity to learn about many different topics and activities including some, such as hunting and trapping, that are not usually part of the division's interpretive programming.

DNR is also proposing a strong focus on youth - connecting young people and the outdoors - for the programming and other offerings at La Salle Lake SRA. Programming for youth is an important element for interpretive services across all the divisions' units. At La Salle Lake SRA, the intent is to go further by offering state park and SRA outdoor education and skills-building youth-related programs in combination with other department youth-focused efforts such as hunter education and firearms safety. Existing division programming, such as the "I Can" outdoor skills program series, can be integrated into the outdoor education efforts at La Salle Lake SRA.

### Interpretive themes

Interpretive themes for La Salle Lake SRA can be organized in three main groups.

#### *Natural resource themes –*

- Biodiversity significance – connections to other surrounding lands, scientific and natural area status within the SRA
- Geology – glacial ecology, tunnel valley
- Water – watershed connections, water quality, unique lake characteristics, springs
- Native plant communities – 17 native plant communities within the SRA

- Rare species – plants and animals that inhabit La Salle Lake SRA and surround area
- Resource management activities – native community restoration, invasive species management, timber harvest, fisheries and game management

*Cultural resource themes –*

- Prehistoric and American Indian use of the area – archaeological sites
- Logging and early settlement history – logging dam and other evidence, resulting forest cover today
- Early resort development- recreational history at the lake, evidence of former structures

*Outdoor skills themes -*

- Hunter education – archery, firearm safety, trapping
- Typical state park and SRA outdoor skills - camping, fishing, snowshoeing, orienteering, geocaching, etc. including the “I Can” program series topics.
- Team building, leadership, wilderness ethics – developing new outdoor leaders, challenge course, Leave No Trace

## **Audiences**

Several potential audiences have been identified for interpretive services at La Salle Lake SRA. Overlap exists within these groups and programming options will likely be developed that cut across and serve several audiences.

*Youth –*

Youth and families with children will be a focus audience.

*Overnight guests –*

Visitors staying in the campground or lodging units within the SRA.

*Day visitors –*

Visitors on a day trip from their home or on a trip but staying overnight elsewhere.

*School or community groups –*

Groups may be day visitors or overnight visitors utilizing the campground or lodging in the SRA. Groups will likely be drawn to La Salle Lake SRA for a specific program, activity or use of a facility. Organized youth groups (school and community based) will likely comprise a significant portion of this audience, but it will also include adult groups such as college clubs, Elderhostel and tour groups.



*Itasca State Park visitors –*

A subset of day visitors, but different in that they are likely drawn to La Salle Lake SRA by information provided to them at Itasca State Park or programming offered through the park but held at the SRA.

*Local communities –*

Residents of local communities and the surrounding area.

## **Partnerships**

Partnership can enhance interpretive services in several ways, from assisting with program design or supporting programs directly to providing avenues for reaching specific audiences such as youth. The core partners for interpretive services at La Salle Lake SRA will be the other divisions within the DNR – integrating their interpretive and educational efforts into the interpretive programs at the SRA.

Several other potential partners were identified during the planning process for this management plan, including Bemidji State University, University of Minnesota Biological Station, University of Minnesota Extension Service (4-H, Master Naturalist), recreational equipment manufacturers and retailers, local school districts, and community groups. The DNR will actively seek partnerships to expand the potential topics and reach of the interpretive services programs at La Salle Lake SRA.

The DNR will also work to promote the SRA as a site to host educational programs and special events sponsored by other groups. The DNR will review prospective programs and events to ensure they are in line with the department's mission and policies.

## **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

### *Further Research and Planning*

Develop a unit interpretive plan. The unit interpretive plan will gather additional background information on specific themes and audiences to be served by interpretive efforts at the SRA and refine the concepts discussed in the management plan. The unit interpretive plan will also provide detail to the delivery methods for providing interpretation at the site. It will provide long-term guidance for the creation of interpretive opportunities, beyond the investments necessary to meet the immediate needs for SRA visitors. The Division of Parks and Trails will lead the planning process and involve other department disciplines in developing the plan.



Park visitors and interpretive displays at Itasca State Park

Integrate new resource information into interpretive programs and materials. As La Salle Lake SRA is a very recent acquisition, new information is still being gathered about the natural and cultural resources at the site. As this new information becomes available and further development of resource management efforts get underway, these topics should be folded into the interpretive offerings at the SRA. Examples include:

- Develop interpretive signage, brochures or other materials including technology-based methods to educate visitors about native community restoration, invasive species control, and other resource-related projects as they are identified and implemented.
- Investigate the logging history of the La Salle area to aid in identifying additional potential logging-related cultural resources within the SRA.
- Collect information about the early resort development from local individuals to establish what structures previously existed related to the remaining foundations or other evidence.

### *Creating Interpretive Opportunities*

Develop self-guided interpretive materials. Interpretive kiosks, signs, displays, brochures and other materials will be developed for the existing facilities including the lodging units, campground and water access site. Interpretation and orientation signage along trails will also be provided. Examples include:

- Welcome kiosk near the campground loop entrance to provide orientation, interpretation, and camper self-registration.
- An interpretive trail to the confluence of the Mississippi River and La Salle creek, utilizing the existing trail.
- A kiosk at the water access site providing interpretive information about the unique character of the lake, special fishing and surface use regulations, and aquatic invasive species.

Provide staff-led interpretive programs and events. Staff-led opportunities will provide interpretive experiences on the wide range of interpretive themes for the SRA. Staff-led programs are especially valuable for engaging youth and visitors less experienced with the outdoors. Possible forms include campfire programs, naturalist-led hikes, and skills-building programs.

Coordinate interpretive services efforts with Itasca State Park. Itasca State Park interpretive staff and other park resources will help develop and support interpretive offerings at La Salle Lake SRA. Sharing program topics, audiences, and equipment will help provide interpretive opportunities at La Salle Lake SRA beyond what would be possible relying solely on the SRA's staff and resources.



Interpretive kiosk at Itasca State Park



View of Mississippi River from confluence trail overlook

Consider developing an outdoor learning center program that integrates natural and cultural resource interpretive and learning opportunities, outdoor skills building, and leadership skills. The program would be targeted at youth and incorporate the range of interpretive themes for the SRA. Other education efforts sponsored by the DNR could be incorporated into the program's schedule, such as water quality education and hunter education. The program could offer learning opportunities in several forms including workshops, programs and program series on specific topics, multi-topic day camps as well as overnight camp options utilizing the group camp. A facility or structure will be needed as a base for the learning center program – for shelter during inclement weather, equipment storage, group assembly, etc. (See **Recreational Use and Visitor Services**).

### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with other divisions within DNR to integrate other department education and outreach efforts into interpretive programming at the SRA, especially hunting, trapping, fishing-related efforts. The multi-division partnership nature of the SRA will carry through in the interpretive offerings available to visitors, touching on all the recreation activities supported at the unit.

Investigate partnerships for creating and providing interpretive programming. The DNR will seek partnerships with institutions or groups with an outdoor education interest - such as Bemidji State University, University of Minnesota Biological Station, and recreational equipment manufacturers and retailers - to help design, support, or provide interpretive efforts at the SRA. The intent is to leverage expertise and resources that support the missions of the involved organizations, especially for youth-focused programming.

Pursue outreach and educational efforts with school districts and community groups. Strong ties with Bemidji State University, school districts and community groups will help build awareness and participation by youth in programs at the SRA.

Promote the SRA as a site to host outdoor-focused educational programming and special events. Prospective programs and events will be evaluated by the DNR to ensure they are in line with the department's mission and policies.



Hunter education as part of outdoor learning program



Work with other division to integrate programming

## Recreational Use and Visitor Services

Because La Salle Lake SRA was established as a partnership among multiple disciplines within the DNR, it represents an opportunity to focus on a wider range of recreational activities than typical for a state recreation area. Hunting and trapping, although allowed to a limited extent at some other state parks or SRAs or utilized as a resource management tool, will be regular recreational uses at La Salle Lake SRA. Fishing is allowed in all state parks and state recreation areas, but like hunting and trapping will be a greater focus for the recreational activities at the SRA.

DNR is also proposing a strong focus on youth - connecting young people and the outdoors - for the programming and other offerings at La Salle Lake SRA. Facility design and development will take into account how to support efforts to connect youth and the outdoors. Proposed developments such as a group camp and outdoor skills instruction facilities will be designed to work together to support youth-focused efforts as part of an outdoor learning center program (see **Interpretive Services**).

A key concept for how the DNR envisions providing recreational opportunities at La Salle Lake SRA is described in the vision for the SRA - "high amenity facilities in a natural, minimally disturbed setting." The facilities that had been developed prior to DNR ownership have a high level of amenities – campsites with electric, water, and sewer service, year-round cabins with kitchens and bathrooms, and an indoor pool with sauna and whirlpool. Yet much of the rest of the property has been minimally disturbed. The DNR's intent is to continue this pattern by concentrating as much as possible the development of new facilities in those areas adjacent to existing development and in areas of lower natural or cultural resource quality. The remainder of SRA will be managed to protect and preserve natural and cultural resource values but be open to low-impact recreational use such as hiking and hunting.

Another important concept for recreation at La Salle Lake SRA is that there are many other recreation opportunities in the surrounding area. Opportunities at nearby Itasca State Park, on adjacent county-administered lands, and via connections to other recreation systems - grant-in aid snowmobile trails, the Mississippi River Trail, the Mississippi River Water Trail, the Great River Road - will be an important part of the experiences promoted and made available to La Salle Lake SRA visitors.

### Existing Facilities and Activities

#### *Campground –*

The campground consists of 40 campsites with electric, water and sewer service (see Figure 5: Existing Major Facilities and Structures). The



Facilities designed to support outdoor learning programs

campground was designed for seasonal camping use – the campsites spurs are perpendicular to the campground road, with minimal spacing or screening between sites. The campground sanitation building has private shower and toilet stalls, as well as space for laundry and game tables. The campground road access is from Hubbard County Road 9. The pool building is located just east of the campground loop and is served by the same access road. The campground area also includes a small fish cleaning house. Initial changes in the campground will include creation of one to two handicap-accessible sites with site improvements and an accessible trail to the pool building for sanitation.

#### *Cabins –*

There are two cabins located west and north of the campground. The cabins were identified by name under previous management. Lone Wolf cabin is a 2 bedroom cabin, located closer to the campground. Black Bear cabin is a two-story, three bedroom cabin located near the existing water access site and swimming beach. Both cabins have kitchen and bathroom facilities. Both cabins can accommodate year-round use.

#### *Pool building –*

The pool building includes a 30' X 60' indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, bathrooms with showers, catering kitchen, and office space. The dry deck area adjacent to the pool has the capacity for 75-100 people. Initial investigations of the building raised several concerns, including lack of an HVAC system and related moisture/humidity issues. Further evaluation of the structural soundness as well as the operation and maintenance costs of the building need to be conducted, including evaluation of operation as an indoor pool or for other possibilities.

#### *Water access site –*

A small water access site is located on the north end of LaSalle Lake, east of the outflow of LaSalle Creek below the Black Bear cabin. The access has a concrete plank ramp and a narrow gravel roadway. The road leading to the access from Hubbard County Road 9 is narrow with a curve and sharp incline leading away from the lake. The access site has minimal room for parking or turn around area. The location of the access impacts the size of the adjacent swimming beach area and the viewshed and visitor experience of cabin users.

#### *Swimming beach -*

A small swimming beach is located next to the existing water access. The size of the beach is constrained by the proximity of the water access and lake bed drop off. During the previous operation, rental boats and several docks were also located in this area. Although the cool water temperature and presence of the pool may reduce the attraction of swimming in the lake, swimming is a popular activity for state park and SRA visitors system-wide, especially among visitors camping and boating as part of their visit.



Black Bear cabin



Lone Wolf cabin



Swimming beach area



*Houses –*

Two houses are located in the farm yard area, west of LaSalle Creek. Both homes offer views of the lake. One of the houses was used as a caretaker's residence under the previous owner. The homes will be evaluated for reuse as rental lodging and if not feasible will be considered for removal.

*Barn –*

A barn is located on the west side of the farm yard area. The barn was used for livestock by the previous owner. The barn will need further evaluation to determine rehabilitation costs and potential reuses. The barn foundation has significant structural issues that may make reuse impractical.

*Other structures -*

A number of other structures exist within the SRA, primarily in the farm yard area. Several garages and storage buildings on the property will be evaluated to potential reuse or removal. The wood-frame classroom building will be removed. The shop building is in good condition, but equipment storage and maintenance needs at the SRA may be minimal with most equipment maintenance and storage activities being served by the maintenance complex at Itasca State Park. The shop building will be evaluated for use for other DNR purposes, such as firefighting equipment or watercraft storage.

*Trails and trail uses –*

Several segments of trail were developed and maintained by the prior owners of the property. Trails connect the main use areas – the campground, cabins, and farm yard area. Two other trails connect to viewpoints – one south from the campground to a location on the southeast lakeshore, and another north from CR 9 to an overlook above the confluence of LaSalle Creek and the Mississippi River. Other trails extend from the farm yard to the open areas west and to the south along the west side of the lake. Trail use was primarily hiking, with connecting trails between facilities being wider for travel via golf cart for maintenance purposes. The department will evaluate the existing trail segments as part of developing a trail network to serve the needs and interests of SRA visitors.

**Accessibility**

State and local governments may not discriminate on the basis of disability (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 | 28 CFR Part 36). Access must be provided to services, programs, and activities. All services, when viewed in their entirety, must be useable by individuals with disabilities. This includes facilities such as parking, pedestrian access routes, restrooms, drinking water and recreation facilities.



Houses in farm yard



Barn in farm yard



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidance for accommodating the natural environment's variable character when providing accessibility. ADA delineates modifications and exceptions that can be applied when necessary to maintain the integrity of an outdoor recreation setting, accommodating such elements as hydrology, terrain, surface characteristics and vegetation. Information regarding accessibility will be available in brochures and on the DNR website to guide visitor expectations.

## **Partnerships**

Several partnerships for providing recreational opportunities were identified during the management plan process. The DNR will investigate the potential for partnerships with recreational equipment manufacturers and retailers for providing rental equipment at the SRA - canoes, kayaks, snowshoes, or other equipment. Typically, the department purchases equipment to rent to visitors. The department will also investigate the use of a concessionaire to provide rental equipment, as already exists at Itasca State Park. A partnership or use of a concessionaire may lower the cost of providing rental equipment and enhance recreational opportunities for SRA visitors.

The DNR will also work with Clearwater and Hubbard counties to coordinate on providing recreational activities in the area surrounding the SRA. Some of the opportunities identified include:

- Making a connection from the camping and lodging facilities to the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail network and to the ATV-riding opportunities on nearby county-administered lands. Snowmobile or ATV trails would not be provided elsewhere within the SRA.
- Identifying and promoting on-road biking routes between the SRA and Itasca State Park. The DNR would work with both counties to evaluate county and township roads that would provide safe and enjoyable biking experiences between the two units.
- Establishing a hiking trail circling LaSalle Lake. A trail around the entire lake, which would utilize SRA and county-administered lands, would likely be a popular amenity for SRA visitors.
- Establishing surface water use restrictions on LaSalle Lake. The DNR would request Hubbard County establish a speed limit, no wake zone, or other regulation for LaSalle Lake to protect the lake shoreline from erosion, maintain the quiet nature of the lake and minimize user conflicts.

The DNR will work with the Mississippi River Trail, Inc. and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to promote the SRA as a destination along the Mississippi River Trail and Great River Road. The Mississippi River Trail is a designated biking route following the Mississippi River from Minnesota to

Louisiana. The designated route for both the Great River Road and the Mississippi River Trail is Hubbard County Road 9.

Another important partnership in providing recreational opportunities is with the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber has a long history of working with Itasca State Park to promote the park as part of the recreation and tourism attractions of the area. DNR will continue to work with the chamber on marketing and promotional efforts for La Salle Lake SRA and Itasca State Park.

## **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations**

### *Water-related Opportunities*

Establish and enforce fishing harvest regulations to sustain fish populations and quality of the fishing experience. Reduced bag limits or catch-and-release regulations are being considered for some species. (see **Natural and Cultural Resources**) Signage and other materials will be developed to communicate the special regulations to SRA visitors.

Develop a water access site to improve access to the lake. The feasibility of moving the water access site to the west side of LaSalle Creek will be evaluated. Moving the water access would provide more space for the ramp and parking as well as provide greater separation from the swimming beach and rental cabin. The design will incorporate best management practices for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. The design will also consider the feasibility of a fishing pier or shore fishing opportunity in conjunction with the access site. Rental equipment – canoes, kayaks, or boats – could be staged from the access site area (see Figure 6: Proposed Facility Development and Improvements).

Maintain a swimming beach or wading area on LaSalle Lake. The small swimming and wading area will be retained at its current location. Relocation of the water access site to the west side of LaSalle Creek would provide additional shoreline for the beach area as well as the possibility of staging rental canoes and kayaks in this area. If moving the water access is not feasible, further evaluation of the compatibility of the beach and access at the site will be needed.

Provide watercraft as rental equipment for use by SRA visitors. The availability of rental equipment would allow visitors that do not have or did not bring their own equipment to experience the lake. Rental watercraft may include canoes, kayaks, pontoons or other small boats. The DNR will investigate the feasibility of a concession or public-private partnership to provide rental equipment. (See *Partnerships and Outreach*)



Establish regulations to sustain fish populations and quality fishing experiences

Promote La Salle Lake SRA as a destination along the Mississippi River Water Trail. La Salle Lake SRA will be a destination for canoe or kayak day trips from Itasca State Park. The SRA can also serve as a stopping point with lodging and camping facilities for people on longer trips along the water trail. Access to the SRA facilities could be via a portage from Coffee Pot Landing just west of the SRA boundary, or up LaSalle Creek if it is navigable between the Mississippi River and LaSalle Lake.

### *Camping and Lodging*

Reconfigure and rehabilitate the existing campground. The campground was designed and constructed for seasonal camping use with straight-in spurs and minimal spacing or screening. The campground will be reconfigured to create level sites and angled spurs that will allow easier setup and movement for shorter-term campers. Replacement of the sanitation building and other utility improvements could be undertaken at the same time.

Expand the campground and add camper cabins or yurts. Adding approximately 40 more campsites and a number of camper cabins or yurts would provide additional revenue opportunities and help attract a broader range of camping visitors by diversifying the type of sites available. The new sites would offer more typical state park/state recreation area camping experience with more screening and separation. Most of the new sites will have electric service but not water and sewer hookups. A number of non-electric sites or walk-in type sites could also be included. The expanded campground would require developing an additional sanitation building or replacement of the existing building with a larger-capacity facility. The area proposed for the expansion would be the young aspen forest complex southeast of the existing campground, accessed from the existing campground and pool building road.

Consider developing canoe-in and/or walk-in campsites. One or several remote campsites accessible either by water or from a trail could be developed to offer an additional type of camping experience.

Evaluate the potential to convert the two houses into lodging units. The feasibility of converting the two former houses within the farm yard area to rental lodging units will be evaluated. If the houses are converted into lodging, landscaping or other screening will be considered to provide separation from the rest of the farm yard area as that area will likely be open for general visitor use or maintenance purposes. If conversion is not cost-effective, the buildings may be removed.

Build an accessible cabin. A new cabin designed and built to meet accessibility standards will provide a fully accessible facility. The cabin would have amenities comparable to the two existing cabins – including



Existing campground

kitchen and bathroom facilities. A potential location for the cabin would be near the other cabins west of the campground.

Develop a Group Camp. The group camp will serve general group use as well as host the outdoor learning center overnight programs. Initial group camp development would include a picnic shelter with electricity and water. Future development should consider adding a sanitation building with showers. The proposed location for the group camp is on top of the hill above the farm yard. Water and electric service are already available at the site.

### *Outdoor Skills Instruction*

Develop an archery range and archery trail. The archery range and trail will be designed to support programs teaching archery skills and allow general use by the public. The proposed location for these facilities is the open field upland area west of the farm yard.

Consider development of a firearm range. The firearms range would be developed to support firearms safety and hunter education programs for youth. The facility would not be open to the general public, except as part of an interpretive/education program or special event. If developed, the range should be located near to the archery facilities to facilitate coordinated use, as well as separation from other facilities.

Develop a challenge course, ropes course, climbing wall or similar facility. The purpose of the challenge course-type facility is to support leadership and team-building activities as part of an outdoor learning center concept (see **Interpretive Services**) or as a facility open to the public by reservation for group use. The proposed location for this facility is the upland area west of the farm yard.

### *Trails and Trail Use*

Develop a trail network for the SRA. The intent is for trail corridors to be designed to minimize resource impacts, provide a high quality experience with the surrounding environment, and maintain the natural appearance of the property. The trail network will be designed to:

- Connect the facilities and use areas of the SRA – provide access for visitors to all SRA facilities and minimize use of vehicles within the SRA.
- Provide access to interpretive and scenic locations – including the development of interpretive trails.
- Create opportunities for trail-based recreation – trail uses inside the SRA will include hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Skiing trails will be limited because of steep terrain and the intent to



Potential group camp area  
above farm yard



Old field area for outdoor  
skills facilities – looking north



Old field area for outdoor  
skills facilities – looking  
northwest

keep trail corridors narrow. Trail corridors will also provide hunting access.

- Connect with recreational opportunities outside of the SRA – trail connections will be made to the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system and to ATV riding opportunities on county-administered land adjacent to the SRA. Snowmobile trails will be limited to those necessary to allow riders to access the lodging and pool facilities from the grant-in-aid system. ATV use will be limited to a connecting trail (or use of the park road) from the campground and lodging units that leads to riding opportunities on county-administered land north of County Road 9. No other ATV trails will be developed within the SRA. (See additional discussion under *Partnerships and Outreach* below.)

Identify and promote on-road biking connections between La Salle Lake SRA and Itasca State Park. A paved route and unpaved route utilizing local roads will provide opportunities for visitors interested in biking to ride safely between the two units. Potential routes were identified during the planning process and will be field verified before any materials such as maps or route descriptions are developed for use by the public (see Figure 7: Potential On-Road Biking Connections). The DNR will work with county and township officials on the evaluation of the potential on-road routes.

#### *Other Uses, Activities and Facilities*

Provide access for hunting activities along the west boundary of the SRA. A wildlife management area-style access point - a fenced, natural surface parking area and signage with hunting regulations and SRA rules – will provide a place for hunters to park and walk in to the SRA and adjacent public lands open to hunting. The proposed site is the existing open field area within the SRA along Clearline Road.

Develop day-use facilities in the farm yard area. The farm yard area will be developed as the main access point for day use activities. Facilities and trailhead amenities will include a lake overlook, picnic shelter, parking, restrooms, and interpretive and orientation signage.

Evaluate options for the long-term use of the pool building. The pool building represents a unique attraction as well as unknown operational and maintenance costs. The department will need to assess the viability of the pool building from several perspectives: code compliance, maintenance needs, visitor use and benefits, and operational costs.

Explore potential uses for the barn in the farm yard area. The barn could be reused to host interpretive and outdoor skills programming, as a trailhead, or for recreation equipment storage. However, the structure may require extensive rehabilitation and stabilization beyond its value for reuse. Further



Entrance road to campground



Day use in farm yard area



Farm yard area lake view

evaluation of the structure is needed to determine if it can be reused or if it will be removed.

Develop a facility to support the outdoor learning center program. Space needs for the program include indoor and outdoor classroom space, equipment storage, and office space for program staff. Multiple use of the facility - for community events or other rental use – should also be considered during the design process. Locating the facility near the group camp and outdoor skills instruction facilities would be preferable. Potential locations for the facility are the farm yard area or on top of the hill above the farm yard. The long-term use analysis for the pool building should also consider the outdoor learning center program needs.

### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with Hubbard and Clearwater counties on providing connections to recreational opportunities on adjacent county-administered lands. Much of the land surrounding the SRA is publicly owned – either state forest or county-administered land. The DNR will work with the counties to provide connections where appropriate to these opportunities from SRA facilities and trail networks. Connection opportunities include:

- A snowmobile trail connection from the grant-in-aid trail network to the lodging facilities and pool building to provide access for winter use of these facilities by snowmobile riders.
- An ATV trail (or park road) connection from the campground and lodging to ATV trail-riding opportunities on County-administered land north of Hubbard County Road 9. No other ATV trails would be provided on the SRA.
- Walk-in access from SRA facilities to adjacent public land for hunting and trapping activities.
- A hiking trail that circumnavigates LaSalle Lake utilizing SRA and county-administered lands.

Work with Hubbard County to establish surface water use regulations for LaSalle Lake. A no-wake or speed limit regulation would protect the steep lake shoreline from erosion and maintain the quiet, minimally disturbed nature of the lake and minimize user conflicts.

Investigate partnerships for providing rental equipment for use by SRA visitors. The DNR will investigate concession agreements and partnerships with outdoor equipment retailers and manufacturers to provide rental equipment – including canoes, kayaks, pontoons, other boats or other equipment – for use by SRA visitors.

Work with the Mississippi River Trail, Inc. and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to promote La Salle Lake as a destination along the Mississippi River Trail and Great River Road. La Salle Lake SRA can serve as a



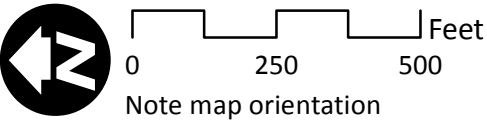
stopping point for bicyclist and motorists on trips along the Mississippi River Trail and Great River Road. The DNR will work with Mississippi River Trail, Inc. and MnDOT to include information about La Salle Lake SRA's facilities and amenities in brochures, webpages, and other materials.

Work with the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and other local tourism organizations on marketing and promotional efforts for La Salle Lake SRA and Itasca State Park. DNR will seek to continue its relationship with the chamber for promoting the SRA, state park, and other DNR-supported recreation opportunities as part of the recreation and tourism attractions of the area.



La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

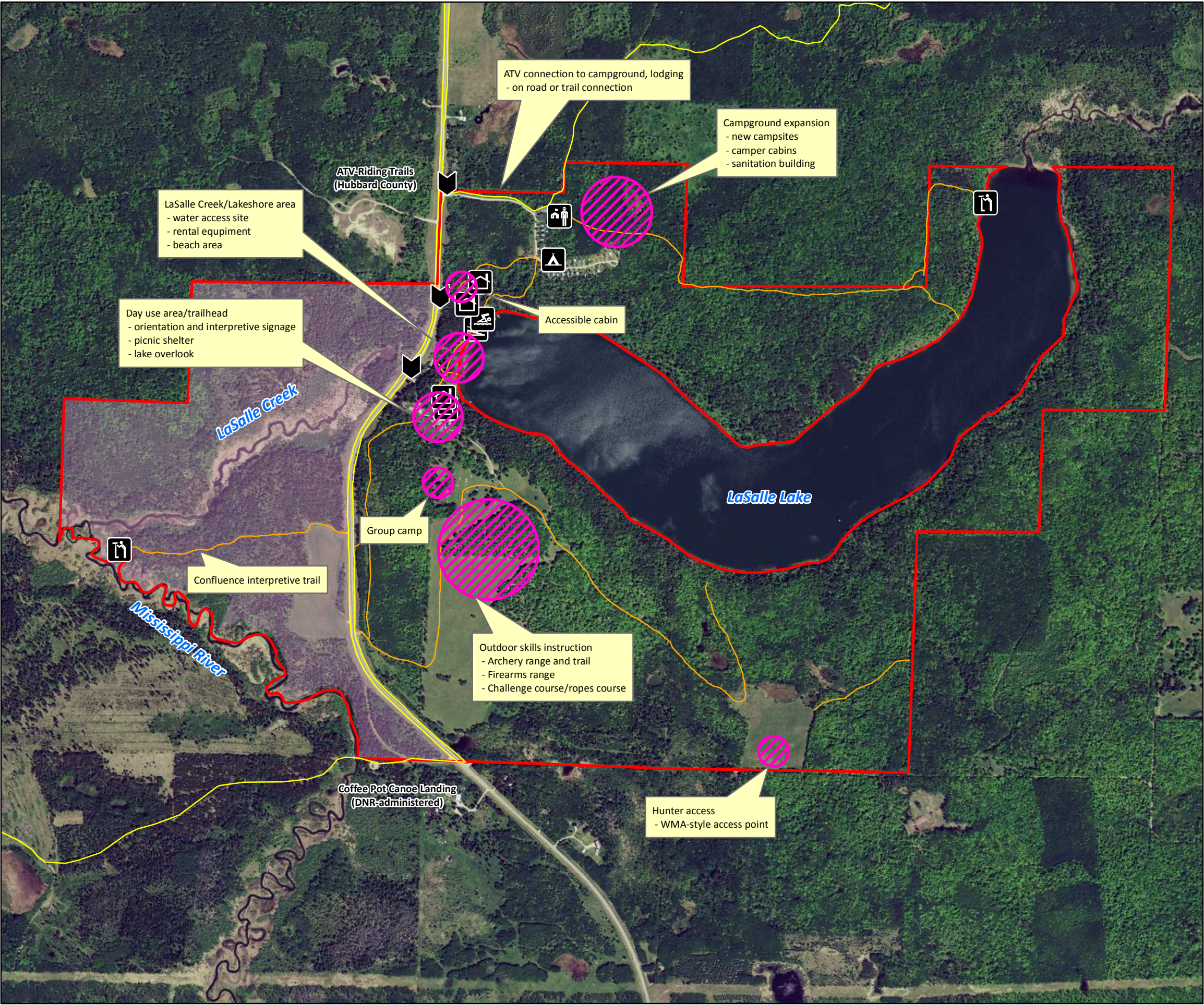
Figure 5:  
Existing Major Facilities and Structures





La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

Figure 6:  
Proposed Facility Development and Improvements



Legend

Area of Proposed Facility or Improvement

Existing facilities

Office and Pool Building

Campground

Water Access Site

Swimming Beach

Road Entrances

Lodging/Cabin

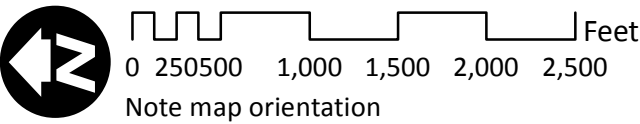
Overlook/Point of Interest

Existing trails within SRA

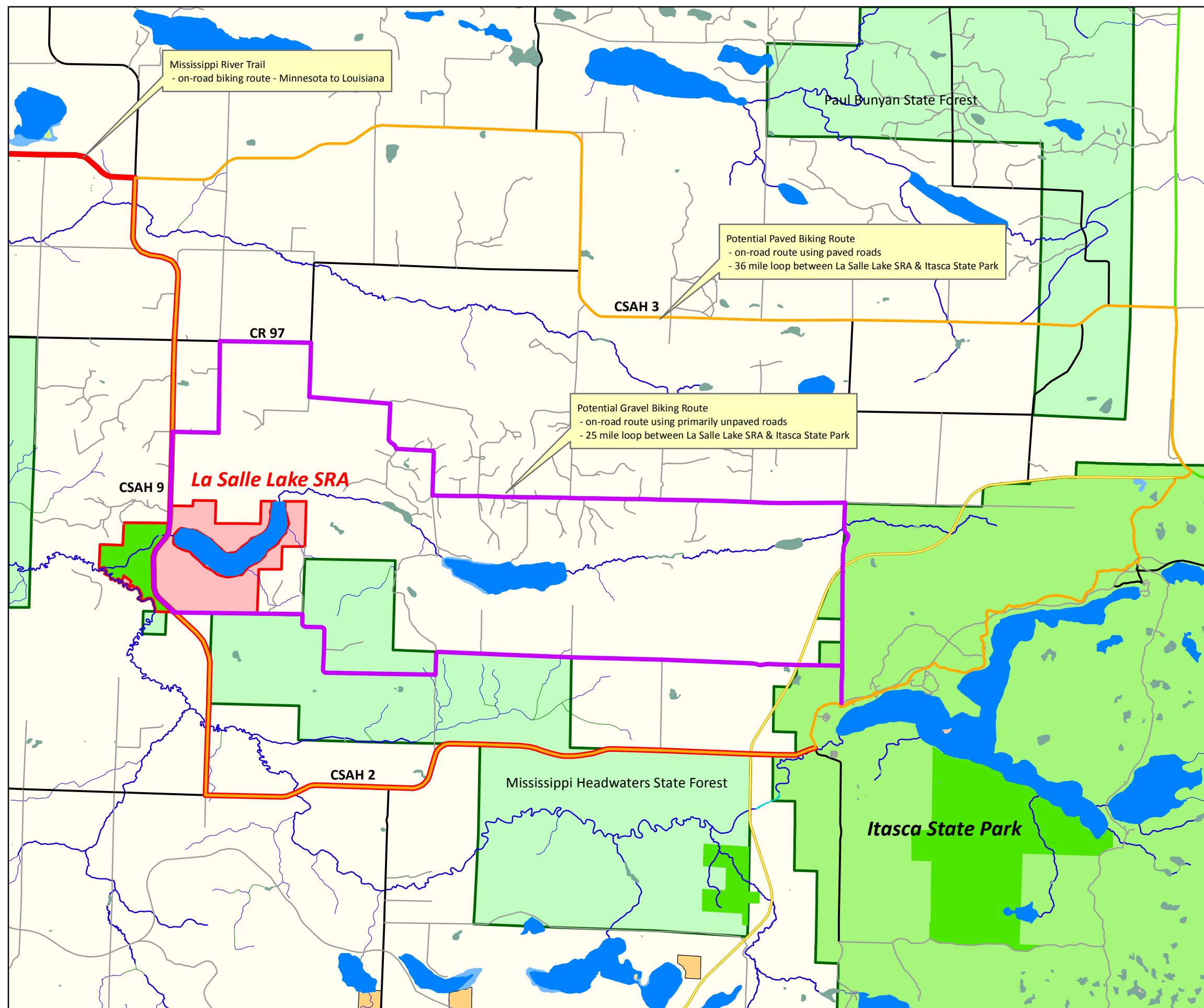
Grant-in-aid Snowmobile Trail

SRA Statutory Boundary

La Salle Lake SNA







## La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

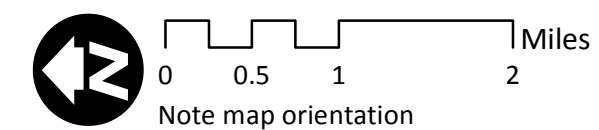
Figure 7:  
Potential On-Road Biking Connections

### Legend

- Potential Gravel On-Road Biking Route
- Potential Paved On-Road Biking Route
- Mississippi River Trail Route
- La Salle Lake State Recreation Area
- State Parks
- Scientific and Natural Areas
- State Wildlife Management Areas
- State Forest Boundaries

### Roads

- U.S. Trunk Highway
- MN Trunk Highway
- County Highway
- Municipal Road
- Township or Other Road



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Trails

October 2013

## Operations

### Interdisciplinary Coordination

DNR will use an interdisciplinary approach to funding and carrying out resource-related management actions on the SRA. The department is establishing a La Salle Lake State Recreation Area Team to implement management actions based on the goals, objectives, and recommendations in the Natural and Cultural Resource Management Plan. The team will develop and implement an annual work plan. DNR Division of Parks and Trails will have an active role as part of the team and will coordinate resource management actions with its responsibilities for managing the recreational use and visitor services and interpretive services at the SRA.

### Legislative Direction

The legislative language that established La Salle Lake SRA provided direction to the DNR on two issues related to the operation of the unit – that it be operated as a satellite of Itasca State Park and that the DNR submit a report evaluating options for managing the “resort” within the SRA, including the option of leasing it to a non-state entity.

### Relationship with Itasca State Park

The statutory language establishing La Salle Lake SRA included direction to the DNR that the SRA be administered as a satellite of Itasca State Park:

*Subd. 3. **Administration.** The commissioner of natural resources shall administer the area according to Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 3, subject to existing rules and regulations for state recreation areas. LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area shall be administered as a satellite unit of Itasca State Park.*

*Laws 2011 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Chapter 6, Article 3, section 8*

This type of shared management relationship is currently utilized for other state parks and state recreation areas in the system. Some department staff may have their primary work location be at La Salle Lake SRA for visitor contact, interpretive services, security and maintenance functions. For other activities and tasks, staff and equipment sharing between the two units will be utilized to efficiently accomplish the needed work. Management staff at Itasca State Park will provide higher level supervision and oversight functions of activities and staff assigned to the SRA.



La Salle Lake SRA will be a satellite of Itasca State Park

## Management Options Report

The statutory language establishing the SRA also directed the DNR to study management options for the resort portion of the unit:

***Sec. 9. LASALLE LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA MANAGEMENT OPTIONS.***

*By March 1, 2012, the commissioner of natural resources shall submit a report to the senate and house of representatives committees and divisions with jurisdiction over natural resources policy and finance evaluating options for the management of the resort within the LaSalle Lake State Recreation Area, including an evaluation of the option to lease the resort to a nonstate entity. The evaluation shall include potential financial arrangements or mechanisms that would make the equivalent of local taxes or payments in lieu of taxes the responsibility of the nonstate entity.*

*Laws 2011 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Chapter 6, Article 3, section 9*

The DNR contracted with the Minnesota Department of Management and Budget Management Analysis Division to conduct the management options analysis for La Salle Lake SRA. The analysis investigated the feasibility of the “resort” functions of the SRA (campground, cabins, and pool building operation) being operated by a non-state entity by a lease, as a concession, or as a contract for services. The analysis was complicated by a lack of financial information about the site’s revenue potential and operating costs.

The findings from the Management Analysis Division report concluded that the resort operation would not be successful as a lease or concession until (1) a baseline track record of financial and operational performance is established, and (2) constraints on operations and limitations of the current configuration of assets are addressed. The report recommends that the DNR operate the unit for 2-3 years as a state-run entity to provide the necessary financial data to better evaluate or develop a public-private partnership for managing La Salle Lake SRA as a concession or a lease.

## Operations and Facility Considerations of Non-Public Management Options

The potential for operating the resort portion of the SRA as a lease or concession with a non-public entity may alter the development proposals and anticipated use of existing facilities in the SRA.

Pursuing a lease or concession option for managing the resort functions of the SRA may place greater focus on constructing revenue-generating facilities beyond those described in this management plan, such as additional campsites,



cabins or other lodging facilities. The proposed development described in this management plan is based on public management of the unit. Other avenues for funding these improvements would also need to be evaluated, including lessee or concessionaire funding of a portion of the capital development costs.

Operating the resort functions via a non-public entity would also result in additional shop and storage needs at the SRA. The DNR anticipates minimal shop and equipment storage needs at the SRA if the site is managed by the department. Most equipment storage and maintenance activities would be conducted at Itasca State Park. The existing shop and storage facilities at the SRA could be used for other DNR needs, such as storage of firefighting equipment or watercraft. However, if the resort functions are managed as a concession or lease, the private concessionaire may have equipment storage and maintenance needs that would require the use of these structures.



Shop building in farm yard

## **Operations Recommendations**

### *Operational Framework and Further Evaluation*

Manage La Salle Lake SRA as a satellite of Itasca State Park. Higher level supervision and oversight of the SRA would continue to be the responsibility of Itasca State Park management staff whether the site remains a state operation or transitions to a concession or lease arrangement.

Operate the SRA for the initial two to three seasons as a state-operated unit. Operating as a state-run unit will allow the site to produce some revenues in the short term while additional knowledge about the site's operating costs and revenue potential can be collected.

Reevaluate the feasibility of operating the lodging, camping and other visitor use elements of the SRA as a concession or private-public partnership after sufficient data becomes available following two to three seasons of operation. Financial information and management experience from several seasons of operation will provide more information to help assess the feasibility for a concession or lease arrangement with a private entity to operate the site.

Reevaluate potential development options if concession-operated. Additional development and operational flexibility may be needed to help establish and support a viable concession or lease arrangement. This may include the development of additional visitor use facilities as well as equipment and material storage and maintenance facilities.

## **State Recreation Area Boundary**

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The Minnesota State Legislature establishes state recreation area boundaries. A state recreation area statutory boundary defined in Minnesota Statutes provides staff, citizens and policy makers with a common understanding of which lands are appropriate for inclusion in the state recreation area. It is the policy of the DNR Division of Parks and Trails to include within a statutory boundary only those lands where the landowner has agreed to inclusion. The DNR is then authorized to negotiate with willing sellers for acquisition of lands contained within that statutory boundary.

Being within a statutory boundary does not affect the landowner's use of their property. They retain full ownership and rights to the land until they sell their land to the state or another private owner.

### **Current State Recreation Area Statutory Boundary**

The current statutory boundary for La Salle Lake SRA was established with the creation of the SRA in 2011. The statutory boundary includes 989.52 acres. Within that acreage, 268.66 acres are designated as the La Salle Lake Scientific and Natural Area. All of the land within the SRA statutory boundary is owned by the State of Minnesota. There is no private land within the statutory boundary. The exact acreage of the SRA and SNA will be subject over time to the meander of the Mississippi River and water level of LaSalle Lake.

The statutory boundary of the SRA and the adjoining land administered by Hubbard County at the inlet of LaSalle Creek encompass the entire shoreline of LaSalle Lake. The lake itself – approximately 240 acres – is not included within the SRA statutory boundary or acreage total above (see Figure 8: Adjacent Land Ownership).

The SRA is surrounded primarily by other publicly-owned land including the state-owned land within the Headwaters State Forest, and lands administered by Hubbard and Clearwater counties. The presence of other publicly-administered land surrounding the SRA presents opportunities for the DNR to work cooperatively with Hubbard and Clearwater County on land and resource management efforts. Several privately-owned parcels border the SRA on its west and east sides along Clearwater County Road 40/Hubbard County Road 9.

### **Proposed Boundary Modification**

At the time of the development of the management plan, no additional lands were proposed to be included in or deleted from the state recreation area statutory boundary.

## **State Recreation Area Boundary Recommendations**

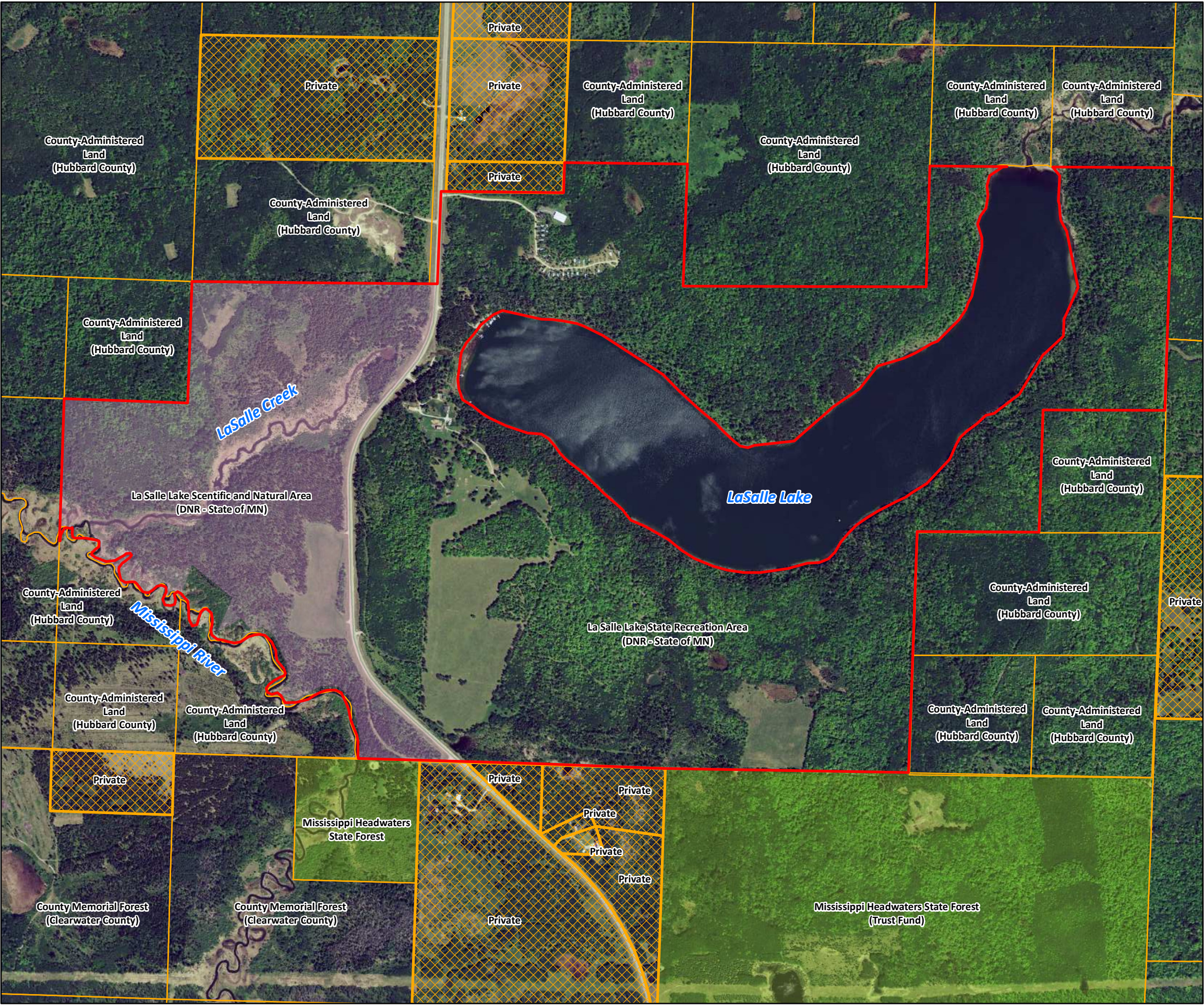
### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with Hubbard and Clearwater counties to consider coordination of resource management activities on SRA and adjacent lands. Much of the land surrounding the SRA is other publicly-owned land – lands within the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest or county-administered lands. Possible activities could include:

- Cooperate on invasive species management activities.
- Coordinate access where appropriate across SRA lands for timber management activities on neighboring county-administered lands.

Collaborate with Hubbard County and other landowners within the La Salle Creek watershed to maintain and enhance the noteworthy rare species populations, high-quality native plant communities, healthy aquatic systems, and ecological integrity of the area. DNR Minnesota County Biological Survey has identified lands within the LaSalle Creek and Chain of Lakes area that rank as having High and Outstanding Biodiversity Significance.



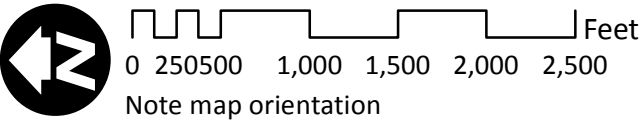


**La Salle Lake State Recreation Area**

Figure 8:  
Adjacent Land Ownership

**Legend**

- Parcel Lines
- Privately-owned Parcels
- State Forest (DNR owned)
- SRA Statutory Boundary
- La Salle Lake SNA





## Plan Modification

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

### Plan Amendment

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

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

#### *Plan Amendment Process*

The Plan Amendment Process consists of five steps:

1. The existing plan is reviewed at the park and regional levels to determine which stakeholders are potentially impacted by a resource condition or proposed change.
2. If the proposed change involves other DNR divisions, the issue should be resolved by staff of involved divisions and approved by the division directors.
3. If the proposed change involves other state agencies, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by the appropriate division directors from all involved agencies.
4. If the proposed change is potentially controversial among elected boards, user groups or the public, a citizen advisory committee should be established to address the proposed change. A locally advertised open house will be held to encourage public input on the matter, after which point the DNR Division of Parks and Trails division director will determine whether the proposed change should be reviewed by the department in consultation with the Regional Management Team, in keeping with La Salle Lake SRA's multidisciplinary management framework.
5. All plan amendments will be coordinated, documented and distributed by the DNR Division of Parks and Trails planning section.

## **Plan Revision**

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

### *Plan Revisions Related to Physical Constraints and Resource Protection*

Detailed engineering and design work may not allow the development to be completed exactly as it is outlined in the plan. A relatively minor modification, such as moving a proposed building site to accommodate various physical concerns, is not uncommon. Plans should outline a general direction and document the general “areas” for development rather than specific locations. For the most part, plans are conceptual, not detail-oriented. Prior to development, proposed development sites are examined for the presence of protected Minnesota Natural Heritage Program elements and historical/archaeological artifacts. If any are found, the planned project may have to be revised to accommodate the protection of these resources.

### *Program Revisions*

The resource management section and interpretive services sections of the plan should be updated periodically as needed. The DNR Division of Parks and Trails’ resource management and interpretive staff will determine when an update is needed and coordinate the revision with the DNR Division of Parks and Trails planning section.

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## Appendices

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### Management Plan Recommendations Summary

#### Natural and Cultural Resource Recommendations

##### *Plant Communities and Rare Species*

The long-term goals for La Salle Lake SRA's land cover and rare plants are to:

- Maintain or improve the ecological quality of the native plant communities in the SRA.
- Preserve, perpetuate, and protect high quality resources present in the SRA.
- Restore old fields and pastures to native plant communities, using the best available science and current department policies to inform both the restoration methodology and the plant community re-establishment plant sources.
- Re-establish pine as a component in forested areas where it has been removed by logging.
- Identify, evaluate, and manage mature and old-growth forest stands and legacy trees.
- Protect populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern plant species documented in the SRA and any other ecologically vulnerable species that persist or become established as climate change occurs.

##### *Native Wildlife*

The long-term goals for management of La Salle Lake SRA's wildlife are to:

- Maintain the diversity of ecosystems and their characteristic wildlife populations.
- Maintain the diversity of all the faunal groups known to occur on the site, including invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals.
- Maintain or improve water quality, aquatic habitat, and quality fish populations.
- Aid in the recovery of populations of invertebrate and vertebrate species that are state-listed or otherwise considered rare by applying management that enhances or does not degrade necessary habitat.
- Manage the plant communities of the SRA so they continue to be viable nesting areas for forest birds, including species showing world-wide declines.



- Manage populations of white-tailed deer such that native vegetation and tree regeneration are not overly impacted.
- Provide for hunting and trapping of protected species during open seasons.

#### *Cultural Resources*

The long-term goals for cultural resources at La Salle Lake SRA are to:

- Protect all known cultural resources from vandalism.
- Locate trails and other development so as not to impact cultural resources.
- In those cases where impacts cannot be avoided, conduct mitigation so as to preserve the artifacts and information.

#### *Development and Use*

Development and public use of the SRA will be guided by the following principles:

- To the extent possible, developed facilities will be sited in previously disturbed areas as opposed to native plant communities.
- Minimize development impacts on natural and cultural resources via a resource assessment process that includes review by all disciplines.
- Rules for public use of the SRA will be reasonable, understandable, enforceable, and as consistent as possible across the entire SRA.

### **Interpretive Services Recommendations**

#### *Further Research and Planning*

Develop a unit interpretive plan. The unit interpretive plan will gather additional background information on specific themes and audiences to be served by interpretive efforts at the SRA and refine the concepts discussed in the management plan. The unit interpretive plan will also provide detail to the delivery methods for providing interpretation at the site. It will provide long-term guidance for the creation of interpretive opportunities, beyond the investments necessary to meet the immediate needs for SRA visitors. The Division of Parks and Trails will lead the planning process and involve other department disciplines in developing the plan.

Integrate new resource information into interpretive programs and materials. As La Salle Lake SRA is a very recent acquisition, new information is still being gathered about the natural and cultural resources at the site. As this new information becomes available and further development of resource management efforts get underway, these topics should be folded into the interpretive offerings at the SRA. Examples include:

- Develop interpretive signage, brochures or other materials including technology-based methods to educate visitors about native community restoration, invasive species control, and other resource-related projects as they are identified and implemented.
- Investigate the logging history of the La Salle area to aid in identifying additional potential logging-related cultural resources within the SRA.
- Collect information about the early resort development from local individuals to establish what structures previously existed related to the remaining foundations or other evidence.

### *Creating Interpretive Opportunities*

Develop self-guided interpretive materials. Interpretive kiosks, signs, displays, brochures and other materials will be developed for the existing facilities including the pool building, lodging units, campground and water access site. Interpretation and orientation signage along trails will also be provided. Examples include:

- Welcome kiosk near the campground loop entrance to provide orientation, interpretation, and camper self-registration.
- An interpretive trail to the confluence of the Mississippi River and La Salle creek, utilizing the existing trail.
- A kiosk at the water access site providing interpretive information about the unique character of the lake, special fishing and surface use regulations, and aquatic invasive species.

Provide staff-led interpretive programs and events. Staff-led opportunities will provide interpretive experiences on the wide range of interpretive themes for the SRA. Staff-led programs are especially valuable for engaging youth and visitors less experienced with the outdoors with the natural environment and new outdoor activities. Possible forms include campfire programs, naturalist-led hikes, and skills-building programs.

Coordinate interpretive services efforts with Itasca State Park. Itasca State Park interpretive staff and other park resources will help develop and support interpretive offerings at La Salle Lake SRA. Sharing program topics, audiences, and equipment will help provide interpretive opportunities at La Salle Lake SRA beyond what would be possible relying solely on the SRA's staff and resources.

Consider developing an outdoor learning center program that integrates natural and cultural resource interpretive and learning opportunities, outdoor skills building, and leadership skills. The program would be targeted at youth and incorporate the range of interpretive themes for the SRA. Other education efforts sponsored by the DNR could be incorporated into the program's schedule, such as water quality education and hunter education. The program could offer learning opportunities in several forms

including workshops, programs and program series on specific topics, multi-topic day camps as well as overnight camp options utilizing the group camp. A facility or structure will be needed as a base for the learning center program – for shelter during inclement weather, equipment storage, group assembly, etc. (See **Recreational Use and Visitor Services**).

#### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with other divisions within DNR to integrate other department education and outreach efforts into interpretive programming at the SRA, especially hunting, trapping, fishing-related efforts. The multi-division partnership nature of the SRA will carry through in the interpretive offerings available to visitors, touching on all the recreation activities supported at the unit.

Investigate partnerships for creating and providing interpretive programming. The DNR will seek partnerships with institutions or groups with an outdoor education interest - such as Bemidji State University, University of Minnesota Biological Station, and recreational equipment manufacturers and retailers - to help design, support, or provide interpretive efforts at the SRA. The intent is to leverage expertise and resources that support the missions of the involved organizations, especially for youth-focused programming.

Pursue outreach and educational efforts with school districts and community groups. Strong ties with Bemidji State University, school districts and community groups will help build awareness and participation by youth in programs at the SRA.

Promote the SRA as a site to host outdoor-focused educational programming and special events. Prospective programs and events will be evaluated by the DNR to ensure they are in line with the department's mission and policies.

### **Recreational Use and Visitor Services Recommendations**

#### *Water-related Opportunities*

Establish and enforce fishing harvest regulations to sustain fish populations and quality of the fishing experience. Reduced bag limits or catch-and-release regulations are being considered for some species. (see **Natural and Cultural Resources**) Signage and other materials will be developed to communicate the special regulations to SRA visitors.

Develop a water access site to improve access to the lake. The feasibility of moving the water access site to the west side of LaSalle Creek will be evaluated. Moving the water access would provide more space for the

ramp and parking as well as provide greater separation from the swimming beach and rental cabin. The design will incorporate best management practices for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. The design will also consider the feasibility of a fishing pier or shore fishing opportunity in conjunction with the access site. Rental equipment – canoes, kayaks, or boats – could be staged from the access site area (see Figure 6: Proposed Facility Development and Improvements).

Maintain a swimming beach or wading area on LaSalle Lake. The small swimming and wading area will be retained at its current location. Relocation of the water access site to the west side of LaSalle Creek would provide additional shoreline for the beach area as well as the possibility of staging rental canoes and kayaks in this area. If moving the water access is not feasible, further evaluation of the compatibility of the beach and access at the site will be needed.

Provide watercraft as rental equipment for use by SRA visitors. The availability of rental equipment would allow visitors that do not have or did not bring their own equipment to experience the lake. Rental watercraft may include canoes, kayaks, pontoons or other small boats. The DNR will investigate the feasibility of a concession or public-private partnership to provide rental equipment. (See *Partnerships and Outreach*)

Promote La Salle Lake SRA as a destination along the Mississippi River Water Trail. La Salle Lake SRA will be a destination for canoe or kayak day trips from Itasca State Park. The SRA can also serve as a stopping point with lodging and camping facilities for people on longer trips along the water trail. Access to the SRA facilities could be via a portage from Coffee Pot Landing just west of the SRA boundary, or up LaSalle Creek if it is navigable between the Mississippi River and LaSalle Lake.

### *Camping and Lodging*

Reconfigure and rehabilitate the existing campground. The campground was designed and constructed for seasonal camping use with straight-in spurs and minimal spacing or screening. The campground will be reconfigured to create level sites and angled spurs that will allow easier setup and movement for shorter-term campers. Replacement of the sanitation building and other utility improvements could be undertaken at the same time.

Expand the campground and add camper cabins or yurts. Adding approximately 40 more campsites and a number of camper cabins or yurts would provide additional revenue opportunities and help attract a broader range of camping visitors by diversifying the type of sites available. The new sites would offer more typical state park/state recreation area camping experience with more screening and separation. Most of the new sites will



have electric service but not water and sewer hookups. A number of non-electric sites or walk-in type sites could also be included. The expanded campground would require developing an additional sanitation building or replacement of the existing building with a larger-capacity facility. The area proposed for the expansion would be the young aspen forest complex southeast of the existing campground, accessed from the existing campground and pool building road.

Consider developing canoe-in and/or walk-in campsites. One or several remote campsites accessible either by water or from a trail could be developed to offer an additional type of camping experience.

Evaluate the potential to convert the two houses into lodging units. The feasibility of converting the two former houses within the farm yard area to rental lodging units will be evaluated. If the houses are converted into lodging, landscaping or other screening will be considered to provide separation from the rest of the farm yard area as that area will likely be open for general visitor use or maintenance purposes. If conversion is not cost-effective, the buildings may be removed.

Build an accessible cabin. A new cabin designed and built to meet accessibility standards will provide a fully accessible facility. The cabin would have amenities comparable to the two existing cabins – including kitchen and bathroom facilities. A potential location for the cabin would be near the other cabins west of the campground.

Develop a Group Camp. The group camp will serve general group use as well as host the outdoor learning center overnight programs. Initial group camp development would include a picnic shelter with electricity and water. Future development should consider adding a sanitation building with showers. The proposed location for the group camp is on top of the hill above the farm yard. Water and electric service are already available at the site.

#### *Outdoor Skills Instruction*

Develop an archery range and archery trail. The archery range and trail will be designed to support programs teaching archery skills and allow general use by the public. The proposed location for these facilities is the open field upland area west of the farm yard.

Consider development of a firearm range. The firearms range would be developed to support firearms safety and hunter education programs for youth. The facility would not be open to the general public, except as part of an interpretive/education program or special event. If developed, the range should be located near to the archery facilities to facilitate coordinated use, as well as separation from other facilities.

Develop a challenge course, ropes course, climbing wall or similar facility.

The purpose of the challenge course-type facility is to support leadership and team-building activities as part of an outdoor learning center concept (see **Interpretive Services**) or as a facility open to the public by reservation for group use. The proposed location for this facility is the upland area west of the farm yard.

#### *Trails and Trail Use*

Develop a trail network for the SRA. The intent is for trail corridors to be designed to minimize resource impacts, provide a high quality experience with the surrounding environment, and maintain the natural appearance of the property. The trail network will be designed to:

- Connect the facilities and use areas of the SRA – provide access for visitors to all SRA facilities and minimize use of vehicles within the SRA.
- Provide access to interpretive and scenic locations – including the development of interpretive trails.
- Create opportunities for trail-based recreation – trail uses inside the SRA will include hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Skiing trails will be limited because of steep terrain and the intent to keep trail corridors narrow. Trail corridors will also provide hunting access.
- Connect with recreational opportunities outside of the SRA – trail connections will be made to the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system and to ATV riding opportunities on county-administered land adjacent to the SRA. Snowmobile trails will be limited to those necessary to allow riders to access the lodging and pool facilities from the grant-in-aid system. ATV use will be limited to a connecting trail (or use of the park road) from the campground and lodging units that leads to riding opportunities on county-administered land north of County Road 9. No other ATV trails will be developed within the SRA. (See additional discussion under *Partnerships and Outreach* below.)

Identify and promote on-road biking connections between La Salle Lake SRA and Itasca State Park. A paved route and unpaved route utilizing local roads will provide opportunities for visitors interested in biking to ride safely between the two units. Potential routes were identified during the planning process and will be field verified before any materials such as maps or route descriptions are developed for use by the public (see Figure 7: Potential On-Road Biking Connections). The DNR will work with county and township officials on the evaluation of the potential on-road routes.

#### *Other Uses, Activities and Facilities*

Provide access for hunting activities along the west boundary of the SRA. A wildlife management area-style access point - a fenced, natural surface parking area and signage with hunting regulations and SRA rules – will provide a place for hunters to park and walk in to the SRA and adjacent public lands open to hunting. The proposed site is the existing open field area within the SRA along Clearline Road.

Develop day-use facilities in the farm yard area. The farm yard area will be developed as the main access point for day use activities. Facilities and trailhead amenities will include a lake overlook, picnic shelter, parking, restrooms, and interpretive and orientation signage.

Evaluate options for the long-term use of the pool building. The pool building represents a unique attraction as well as unknown operational and maintenance costs. The department will need to assess the viability of the pool building from several perspectives: code compliance, maintenance needs, visitor use and benefits, and operational costs.

Explore potential uses for the barn in the farm yard area. The barn could be reused to host interpretive and outdoor skills programming, as a trailhead, or for recreation equipment storage. However, the structure may require extensive rehabilitation and stabilization beyond its value for reuse. Further evaluation of the structure is needed to determine if it can be reused or if it will be removed.

Develop a facility to support the outdoor learning center program. Space needs for the program include indoor and outdoor classroom space, equipment storage, and office space for program staff. Multiple use of the facility - for community events or other rental use – should also be considered during the design process. Locating the facility near the group camp and outdoor skills instruction facilities would be preferable. Potential locations for the facility are the farm yard area or on top of the hill above the farm yard. The long-term use analysis for the pool building should also consider the outdoor learning center program needs.

### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with Hubbard and Clearwater counties on providing connections to recreational opportunities on adjacent county-administered lands. Much of the land surrounding the SRA is publicly owned – either state forest or county-administered land. The DNR will work with the counties to provide connections where appropriate to these opportunities from SRA facilities and trail networks. Connection opportunities include:

- A snowmobile trail connection from the grant-in-aid trail network to the lodging facilities and pool building to provide access for winter use of these facilities by snowmobile riders.

- An ATV trail (or park road) connection from the campground and lodging to ATV trail-riding opportunities on County-administered land north of Hubbard County Road 9. No other ATV trails would be provided on the SRA.
- Walk-in access from SRA facilities to adjacent public land for hunting and trapping activities.
- A hiking trail that circumnavigates LaSalle Lake utilizing SRA and county-administered lands.

Work with Hubbard County to establish surface water use regulations for LaSalle Lake. A no-wake or speed limit regulation would protect the steep lake shoreline from erosion and maintain the quiet, minimally disturbed nature of the lake and minimize user conflicts.

Investigate partnerships for providing rental equipment for use by SRA visitors. The DNR will investigate concession agreements and partnerships with outdoor equipment retailers and manufacturers to provide rental equipment – including canoes, kayaks, pontoons, other boats or other equipment – for use by SRA visitors.

Work with the Mississippi River Trail, Inc. and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to promote La Salle Lake as a destination along the Mississippi River Trail and Great River Road. La Salle Lake SRA can serve as a stopping point for bicyclist and motorists on trips along the Mississippi River Trail and Great River Road. The DNR will work with Mississippi River Trail, Inc. and MnDOT to include information about La Salle Lake SRA's facilities and amenities in brochures, webpages, and other materials.

Work with the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and other local tourism organizations on marketing and promotional efforts for La Salle Lake SRA and Itasca State Park. DNR will seek to continue its relationship with the chamber for promoting the SRA, state park, and other DNR-supported recreation opportunities as part of the recreation and tourism attractions of the area.

## **Operations Recommendations**

### *Operational Framework and Further Evaluation*

Manage La Salle Lake SRA as a satellite of Itasca State Park. Higher level supervision and oversight of the SRA would continue to be the responsibility of Itasca State Park management staff whether the site remains a state operation or transitions to a concession or lease arrangement.

Operate the SRA for the initial two to three seasons as a state-operated unit. Operating as a state-run unit will allow the site to produce some

revenues in the short term while additional knowledge about the site's operating costs and revenue potential can be collected.

Reevaluate the feasibility of operating the lodging, camping and other visitor use elements of the SRA as a concession or private-public partnership after sufficient data becomes available following two to three seasons of operation. Financial information and management experience from several seasons of operation will provide more information to help assess the feasibility for a concession or lease arrangement with a private entity to operate the site.

Reevaluate potential development options if concession-operated. Additional development and operational flexibility may be needed to help establish and support a viable concession or lease arrangement. This may include the development of additional visitor use facilities as well as equipment and material storage and maintenance facilities.

## **State Recreation Area Boundary Recommendations**

### *Partnerships and Outreach*

Work with Hubbard and Clearwater counties to consider coordination of resource management activities on SRA and adjacent lands. Much of the land surrounding the SRA is other publicly-owned land – lands within the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest or county-administered lands. Possible activities could include:

- Cooperate on invasive species management activities.
- Coordinate access where appropriate across SRA lands for timber management activities on neighboring county-administered lands.

Collaborate with Hubbard County and other landowners within the La Salle Creek watershed to maintain and enhance the noteworthy rare species populations, high-quality native plant communities, healthy aquatic systems, and ecological integrity of the area. DNR Minnesota County Biological Survey has identified lands within the LaSalle Creek and Chain of Lakes area that rank as having High and Outstanding Biodiversity Significance.



## **Public Input and Review Summary**

There were multiple opportunities for public input and review during the development of the La Salle Lake State Recreation Area management plan. Comments and input from the public were utilized throughout the planning process to help identify issues and evaluate potential management actions.

In addition to the formal input or review opportunities highlighted below, the department received comments from the public throughout the planning process.

### **Plan Initiation**

Several methods were used to communicate with the public and collect input at the beginning stages of the planning process. An introductory open house was held at the La Salle Lake State Recreation Area on December 1, 2011. Information about the site was shared with the public and comments collected about future resource management activities and recreation opportunities. Over 60 people attended the open house.

An online survey was also established to collect comments about the state recreation area. Nearly 50 survey responses were received.

Overall themes from the initial public input included:

- *Natural environment focus* – “leave it natural”, preserve the lakeshore, water quality and fishery of the lake.
- *Recreation focus* - create recreation opportunities similar to other state parks and recreation areas, support non-motorized activities
- *Trail activities should be provided* – responses were divided on motorized use, with the majority of respondents opposing motorized use within the SRA.
- *Hunting opportunities* – many respondents favored archery-only hunting.
- *Links to other opportunities* – many respondents identified the importance of connecting to other recreation sites in the area including Itasca State Park.
- *Offer a quiet, less busy experience* – especially for visitors from the local area, in contrast to Itasca State Park.

### **Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**

A citizen advisory committee provided input during the planning process. The committee was made up of representatives from the local communities, state park and SRA users, and interested citizens. The committee met three times during the planning process:

- *First CAC meeting - December 19, 2011*  
Agenda items included an overview of the management plan process, and a visioning exercise about the resource management, interpretive and recreational experiences possible at La Salle Lake SRA. The CAC committee also discussed the state recreation area classification and the business analysis process.
- *Second CAC meeting - January 17, 2012*  
Agenda items included reviewing a draft vision statement for the SRA and discussion of potential interpretive services and recreational uses for the SRA. Among the issues discussed was the development of a boat launch and surface use controls on La Salle Lake, and securing funding for development and operation of the SRA. The committee expressed concerns about potential noise and other impacts from ATV use if allowed to access the campground and lodging facilities.
- *Third CAC meeting - April 3, 2012*  
The committee reviewed a draft of the management plan, focusing on the recommendations within each section of the plan. Members present supported the overall goals and recommendations in the plan. The committee discussion mainly involved questions about implementing various recommendations, including resource management actions and facility development.

## **Public Review**

The draft management was released for public review and comment on May 21, 2012. A 30 day public review period, including an open house, is required by state statute before a management plan is adopted. The draft plan was available online at the DNR website, with copies also available for review at Itasca State Park and the DNR Regional Headquarters in Bemidji.

An open house was held on June 12, 2012 at Itasca State Park. As part of the open house, comments were solicited for the proposal to re-designate the La Salle Lake Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) to allow a non-motorized trail for hiking and snowshoeing to the confluence of the Mississippi River and LaSalle Creek, an overlook with interpretive signs, and a trailhead parking area.

Public comments were accepted via email and mail, as well as in person at the open house.

The public comments received during the review period were supportive of the proposals set out in the draft plan. Several themes from the comments included:

- *Interpretive services* – support for providing educational opportunities, including partnerships with other groups or institutions.
- *Hunting and trapping* – some concerns about how the DNR will manage these activities, especially trapping, to minimize conflict with other users.
- *Connections to other recreation opportunities* – support for connecting La Salle Lake SRA to Itasca State Park, Mississippi River Water Trail, Great River Road and other recreation systems nearby; and support for connecting the SRA campground and lodging to ATV/motorized trail use on county-administered lands.
- *Proposed trail, interpretation, and trailhead facilities in La Salle Lake SNA* – support for the facilities and uses described in the re-designation proposal.

## **Photo Credits**

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