Nerstrand Big Woods State Park

Management Plan Amendment

Resource Management Timber Harvesting







DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DRAFT - November 2026

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Insert division director approval letter

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Introduction

Minnesota Statutes, section 85.011 describes the legislative intent at the foundation of creating state parks, state recreation areas, and state waysides:

> *The legislature of this state has provided for the creation and establishment of state parks, designated state recreation areas, and waysides of the purpose of conserving the scenery, natural and historic objects and wildlife and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in a manner that will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.*

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Parks and Trails Division undertakes many different efforts to meet this statutory obligation to conserve the natural resources within these units. The types of projects and techniques used vary depending on the type and quality of plant or animal community. Different efforts are needed, for example, to manage largely intact native communities such as remnant prairies or old growth forests than to conduct restorations on properties that have been disturbed by logging, agriculture or other impacts. Different types of communities – prairies, pinelands, savannas, wetlands, hardwood forests – also require different approaches to successfully preserve and perpetuate the plant and animal resources they contain.

The Parks and Trails Division employs a variety of tools as part of its resource management activities, such as prescribed burning, control of invasive species, seed collection, planting of trees and other vegetation, mowing and timber harvest. These tools are often used in combination as part of multistep, often multi-year, efforts to improve the extent and quality of the unit's native plant and animal communities.

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Purpose

The purpose of this plan amendment is to amend the *Nerstrand Big Woods State Park Management Plan* (May 1998) to clarify the use of timber harvesting as a resource management tool in the state park. Master plans (management plans) are required for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks and state recreation areas, under *Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.09, subd. 1.

The DNR Parks and Trails Division 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 access and reduce fuel loads following a storm event.

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

- 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 the stand for better growth.
- On occasion, trees are harvested to remove hazards, to restore visitor access by clearing trails and other facilities, and to reduce fuel loads following a storm event.

The Parks and Trails Division 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 to conduct the timber harvest than for department staff to conduct the work.

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Description

At Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, initial timber harvest activities will be conducted to selectively remove ash trees that have succumbed to emerald ash borer. The trees identified for removal are located along park roads or adjacent to park infrastructure where they present a hazard to park visitors or visitors' property, department staff or park infrastructure. Department staff frequently remove individual trees that pose a hazard to people or property. If many trees need to be removed or if removal of trees requires specialized equipment, contracting with a commercial timber harvest operator may be more efficient and cost effective than department staff conducting the work.

In most cases, trees identified for removal are accessible from park roads and can be easily removed. Trees located near buildings or other park infrastructure may need to be felled in sections with an aerial lift.

Ash trees and other dead standing trees located elsewhere in the state park that do not pose a potential hazard will not be removed.

Future timber harvest in the state park may be conducted to address other resource management situations including forest community management, native plant community restoration, or removal of trees impacted by windstorms or by other insect or plant diseases.

Natural and Cultural Resources Impact

Timber harvest is one tool among a set of resource management activities the division will use to pursue its statutory obligations for resource protection and restoration.

As part of a natural resource management regime, selective timber harvest can have positive benefits for the native plant communities in the state park. Removing non-native tree species, reducing fuel loads, and preventing encroachment of woody species into prairie and savanna communities are some of the positive resource outcomes associated with timber harvest activities. Selective harvesting can also leave some dead or dying timber as habitat for native species and as part of natural forest regeneration cycles.

There is one plant species found in the park listed as Federally Endangered – dwarf trout lily (*Erythronium propullans*). The spring wildflower is endemic to only three counties in Minnesota and is considered one of rarest plants in North America. Timber harvest activity will not impact known dwarf trout lily areas.

In most cases, harvest activities are conducted during frozen ground conditions which will reduce impacts to rare plants. breeding birds, bats, wetlands and cultural features in the state park.

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The department does not anticipate any impacts on archaeological or cultural resources from timber harvest activity. Timber harvest activities will occur in use areas and along roads where vehicles travel and soils are already compacted. Timber harvest activities typically will not involve digging into soils or new impacts to soils. Stumps of harvested trees can be cut flush to the ground to avoid soil disturbance. If stumps are to be removed, additional archaeological review will be conducted.

Prior to timber harvest activities in a state park, the division conducts a resource assessment to identify any potential impacts to natural or cultural resources in the area where the timber harvest is conducted.

Interpretive Services Impact

Timber harvest activity, like other resource management activities, presents an opportunity to educate park visitors about Minnesota's native plant communities, the impacts of invasive/non-native plants, and the division's resource management responsibilities and efforts.

The department may use temporary signage or include messaging on existing signs or kiosks to inform visitors while the timber harvest project is underway. Information about emerald ash borer and the need to prevent the further spread of invasive species can be communicated as part of visitor warning/facility closure alerts. Interpretive signs, naturalist-led programs, or other methods may be used in the long term to describe the purpose and intended benefits of using timber harvest for the state park's natural resources.

Recreational Use and Visitor Services Impact

There may be short term impacts on visitors during timber harvest activities – trails and other nearby facilities may be closed during the harvest activity or parking areas being used for staging equipment may not be available for public use.

Long term impacts for visitors of timber harvests will be positive. Removing timber will improve access and safety for visitors using trails and other facilities. Future timber harvests that are part of restoring native plant communities in the state park will enhance visitor experiences.

Management Plan Text Revisions

The plan amendment text supplements portions of the *Natural and Cultural Resources* section in the current management plan to authorize the use of timber harvest as a resource management tool within the state park. Timber harvest may be utilized to achieve several *Resource Objectives* (p. 55) and *Resource Management Actions* (p. 56) described in the management plan including Action 1: Implement management towards native vegetation patterns,

Action 3: Determine areas for old growth, future old growth, prairie/savanna restoration, and young hardwoods growth, and Action 7: Actively and aggressively monitor and control invasive exotic species.

Public Review

In accordance with *Minnesota Statutes*, section 86A.09, subd. 3., the plan amendment was released for a 30-day public review period beginning on November 4, 2026. An open house was held at Nerstrand Big Woods State Park on November 24, 2026 with public comments accepted through December 11, 2026.

Comments received during the public review period were . . . (add summary of comments following conclusion of public review).

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