

# Rice Lake State Park

## Management Plan Amendment

### Resource Management Timber Harvesting





For more information on this management plan, please contact the DNR Division of Parks and Trails at (651) 259-5600.

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**Department of Natural Resources Approval  
of a Management Plan Amendment for Rice Lake State Park**

*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. Subdivision 6 requires preparation of a plan amendment to address changes proposed at a unit that vary from the approved management plan. The Laws of Minnesota for 1963 established Rice Lake State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.012, subd. 48).

The plan amendment received input and comment both within the Department of Natural Resources and from the public.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Pierce', written over a horizontal line.

Ann Pierce, Director  
MNDNR Parks and Trails Division

6-8-2026  
Date

## Introduction

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*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 Division of Parks and Trails 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 Division of Parks and Trails 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.

## **Purpose**

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The purpose of this plan amendment is to amend the *Rice Lake State Park Management Plan* (June 1983) 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 Division of Parks and Trails 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 Division of Parks and Trails 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.

## Description

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At Rice Lake State Park, initial timber harvest activities will be conducted to selectively remove ash trees that have succumb to emerald ash borer as well as some standing dead bur oak and red oak. 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. Given the number of trees to be removed in this instance, contracting with a commercial timber harvest operator is more efficient and cost effective than department staff conducting the work.

Most of the trees identified for removal are accessible from park roads and can be easily removed. Some trees are located near buildings and will 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 as part of this initial harvest project.

Future timber harvest in the state park may also 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.

Rice Lake State Park contains several native plant communities – Mesic Hardwood Forest (MHs37, MHs38, MHs39, MHS49), Upland Prairie (Ups13, UPs23), Wet Prairie (WPs54), Wet Meadow/Carr (WMs83, WMn82), and Marsh (MRn83). The initial timber harvest project is concentrated along roadways and in visitor use areas with minimal impact to these native plant communities. Future timber harvest activities may be used a part of managing forest plant communities or during native plant community restoration projects for lands within the state park that currently have non-native cover – old fields, pastures, etc.

Three state-listed threatened species have been documented in Rice Lake State Park. Two are vascular plants – Edible Valerian (*Valeriana edulis var. ciliata*) and Sillivant's Milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) – which rely on open prairie habitat, so are highly unlikely to be impacted by timber harvest activities. The third state-listed threatened species is Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) which

is also less reliant on forested habitats, preferring open sites for nesting and wetland areas for foraging and overwintering. Of the seven state-listed species of concern found at the state park, two are woodland species – Muskingum Sedge (*Carex muskingumensis*) and Lake Hawthorn (*Crataegus calpodendron*). Typically, Muskingum Sedge is restricted to the edges of vernal pools or ephemeral wetlands and drainages in the park. These sensitive sites will be avoided during timber harvest, salvage or when implementing other associated forest practices in the park. Late Hawthorn, a shrub or small tree associated with mesic hardwood forests in southeastern Minnesota, is sporadically present within the park, most often found along the shoreline of Rice Lake. Impacts to this species will be minimized through careful skidding of logs and avoidance of sub-canopy disturbance during harvest activities.

Cultural resources within the park include multiple known pre-contact and historic archaeological sites, including habitation sites and temporary camps. One archaeological site overlaps with a public use area where some trees will be removed as part of the initial timber harvest. There is a high probability of other yet unidentified archaeological resources within the park.

The department does not anticipate any impacts on archaeological or cultural resources from the initial timber harvest activity. The initial timber harvest activity will occur in use areas and along roads where vehicles travel and soils are already compacted. Timber harvest activities will not involve digging of soils or new impacts to soils.

Prior to future timber harvest activities elsewhere in the state park, the division will conduct a resource assessment to identify any potential impacts to natural or cultural resources in the area where the timber harvest is conducted. Typically, harvest activities are conducted during frozen ground conditions which will reduce impacts to breeding birds, bats, wetlands and cultural features in the state park.

### **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 *Park 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 a number of *Resource Management Objectives* (p. 20) described in the management plan including “To manage vegetation for a diversity of habitats” and “To reestablish oak savanna in the southern portion of the park”.

The plan amendment text also clarifies one of the *Resource Management Actions* (p. 21). Action Eight; “Maintain a maximum number of snags” is revised to clarify that dead or dying timber in public use areas such as campgrounds and along trails should be removed to reduce the potential for injury to visitors or damage to visitor property (tents, cars, etc.).

## 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 March 30, 2026. An open house was held at Rice Lake State Park on April 28, 2026 with public comments accepted through May 8, 2026.

Comments received during the public review period were supportive of the use of timber harvest for resource management objectives, including to remove dead or dying trees from the state park.

## **Bibliography**

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