

Amendment



Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan

Gold Rock Point Parcel
September 13, 2000





STATE OF
MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER

DNR INFORMATION
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**Department of Natural Resources Approval
of Management Plan Amendment for Split Rock Lighthouse State Park**

Minnesota Statutes 860A.09 requires that a master plan be prepared for units of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, including state parks and state recreation areas. Laws of Minnesota for 1945, established Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. In 1997, the Gold Rock Point parcel was added to the park.

Over the past year and a half, the DNR has worked in partnership with local citizens to develop the Gold Rock Point amendment to the park management plan. The plan amendment was approved through the DNR's CTECH/Senior Managers' review process in July of 2000.

10/2/2000

Allen Garber, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Date

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Planning Process.....	4
Inventory of Existing Resources and Services.....	4
Recreation Resources, Interpretive & Environmental Education Services...4	
Natural and Cultural Resources.....	6
Management Goals.....	8
Physical Development and Recreation Management Recommendations.....	8
Resource Management Recommendations.....	11
Literature Cited.....	12

List of Figures

Figure 1. Gold Rock Point Parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.....	3
Figure 2. Existing recreational resources located within the Gold Rock Point Parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.....	5
Figure 3. Existing natural resource communities and known rare species located within the Gold Rock Point Parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.....	7
Figure 4. Recommendations for physical development, recreation resource management, and natural resource management at the Gold Rock Point Parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.....	10

Introduction

In 1997, approximately 81 acres were added to the statutory boundary of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park (Laws of Minnesota 1997, Chapter 236, Section 4, Subd. 4). The acquisition of this property, referred to as the Gold Rock Point parcel (figure 1), was made possible by the Minnesota Council of Parks and Trails. The Council had earlier purchased the land as part of its ongoing mission to further the establishment, development, and enhancement of parks and trails within the state of Minnesota to encourage their prudent use and protection.

Whenever significant events change the character of a particular State Park, it is the policy of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Recreation to determine whether or not there is a need to revise the park's management plan or develop an amendment to the park's plan. Upon consideration, it was determined that the addition of the Gold Rock Point parcel to Split Rock Lighthouse State Park necessitated the development of an amendment to the Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan of 1979.

The intent of this amendment is not to supercede the overall management direction provided by the Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan. The Gold Rock Point parcel will be managed as an integral part of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. As such, specific goals, objectives, and strategies identified in the park's comprehensive management plan apply to the Gold Rock Point parcel. The purpose of this amendment is to outline specific goals and recommendations for the Gold Rock Point parcel that are not addressed in the park's management plan.

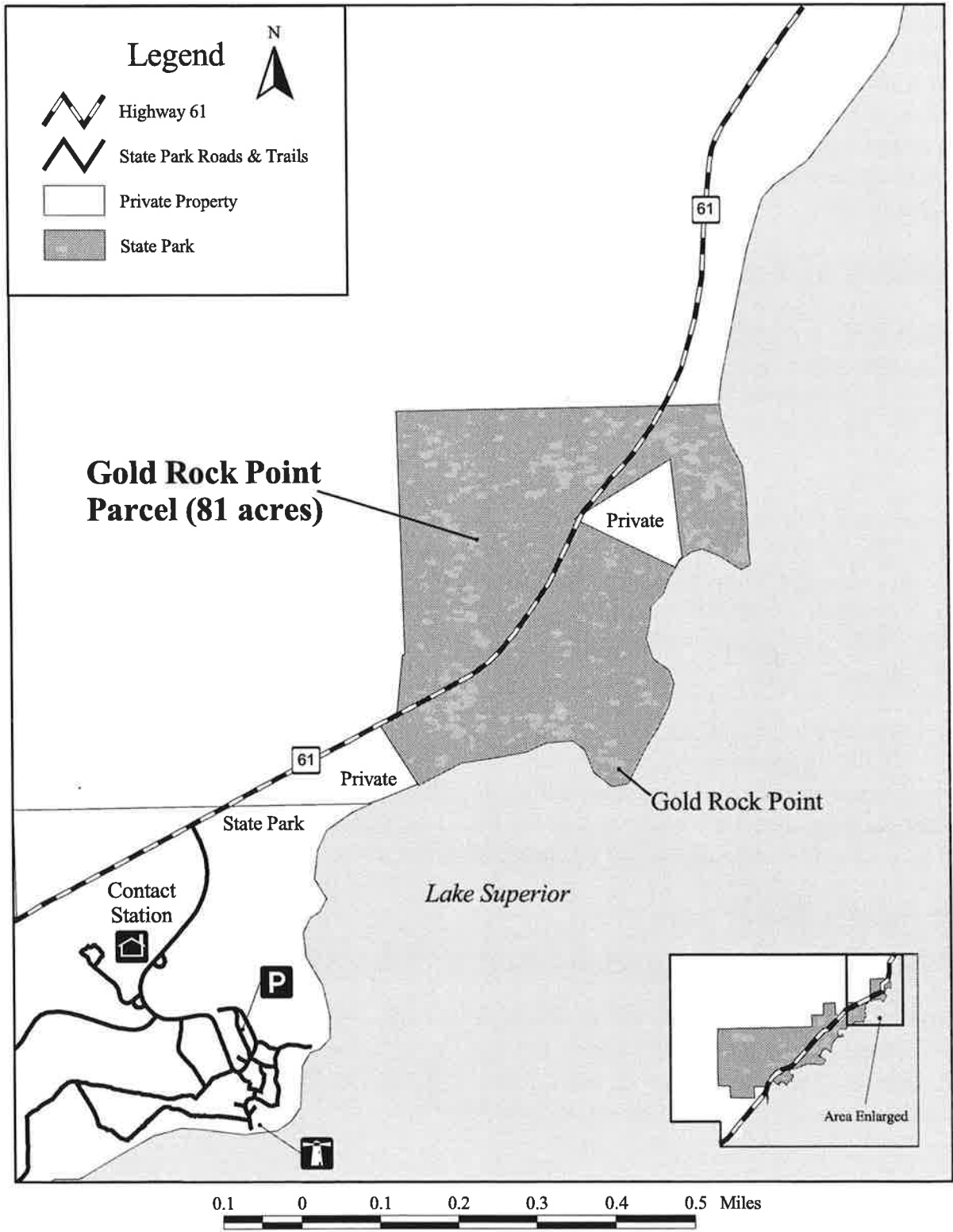
This amendment is divided into six parts.

- The first section provides introductory information.
- The second section describes the planning process which led to the development of this amendment.
- The third section provides an abbreviated inventory of existing resources and services located on the Gold Rock Point parcel.
- The fourth section outlines management goals identified for the Gold Rock Point parcel.
- The fifth and sixth sections identify specific management recommendations. In an effort to parallel the style for the current Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan, these management recommendations are organized under two separate headings:
 - (1) physical development and recreation management recommendations and
 - (2) resource management recommendations.

The Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan addresses both recreation resource management and interpretive and environmental education services in a single section entitled "Physical Development and Recreation Management". Similarly, the plan addresses both natural resource management and cultural resource management in a single section entitled "Resource Management".

- The seventh and final section of this amendment documents literature cited.

Figure 1. Gold Rock Point parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.



Planning Process

The planning process for the Gold Rock Point parcel began in 1998. Early in the planning process, park staff contacted key public stakeholder groups to discuss ideas, issues, and concerns related to use and management of the parcel. Following the discussions with stakeholder groups, a preliminary list of management goals and recommendations was identified and reviewed by the Division of Parks and Recreation management team. These goals and recommendations were presented to the general public at an open house meeting held at the Minnesota Historical Society Visitor Center at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park on July 14, 1999. After receiving public comment at this meeting, a draft amendment was written. Following another review period, a revised amendment was completed and approved for implementation by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in September of 2000.

Inventory of Existing Resources and Services

Gold Rock Point is the largest of only a few exposures of granite found along the North Shore of Lake Superior. It is named for the golden-colored lichens growing on the granite rocks. Views of the point from Lake Superior, Split Rock Lighthouse, and other park locations are quite spectacular. Equally spectacular are the views of Lake Superior and its shoreline offered from Gold Rock Point itself.

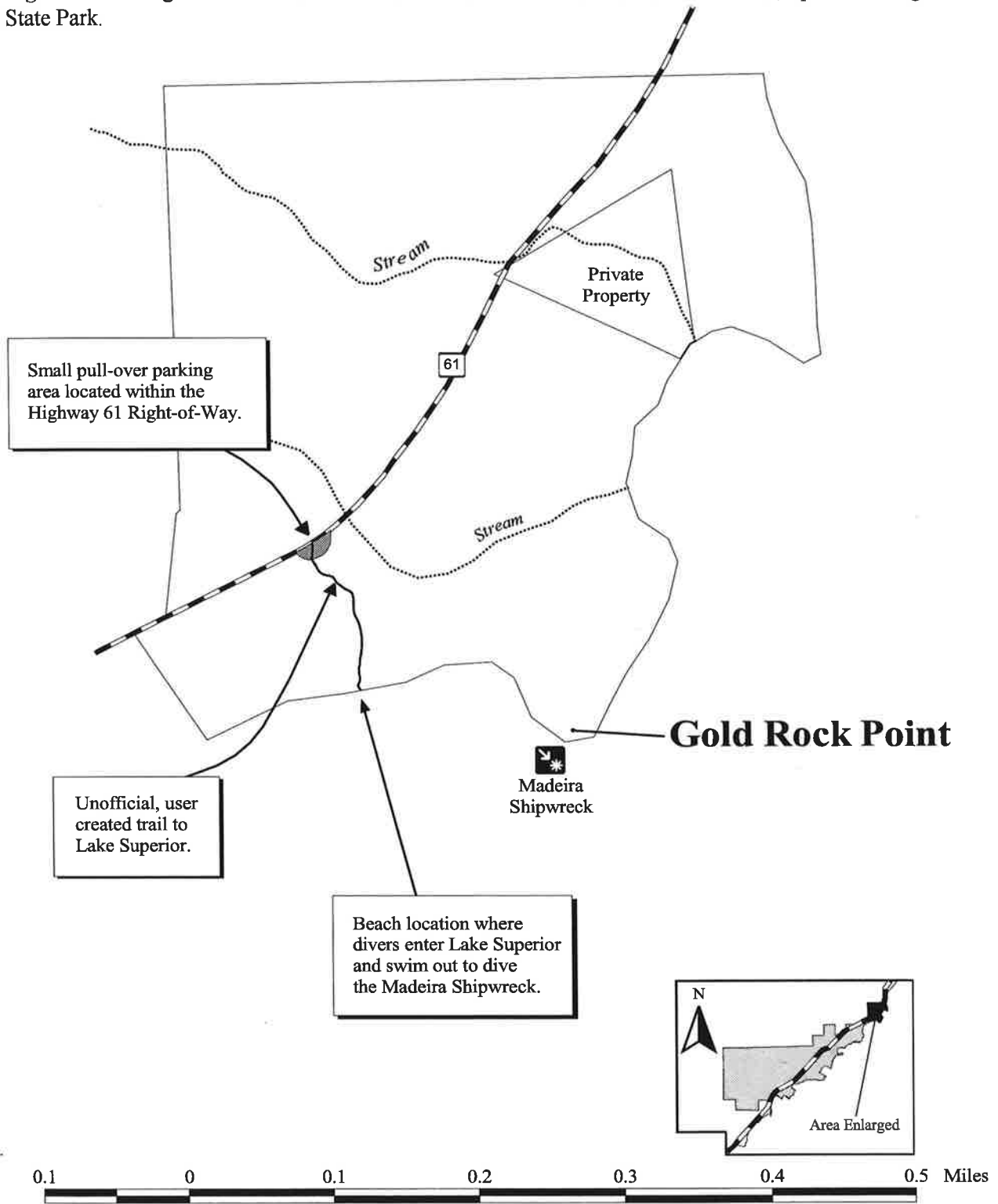
The parcel has historically provided limited, unofficial, recreation opportunities. It provides diver access to Lake Superior in the vicinity of the Madeira, an historic shipwreck located just offshore of Gold Rock Point. The Madeira is one of the most popular diving sites located in the Great Lakes region. Although it is estimated that at least 1,000 people annually dive Lake Superior specifically to view the Madeira, the actual number of divers who use the Gold Rock Point parcel as an access point is unknown.

In addition to divers, a small number of day-use visitors come to the parcel to visit nearby beach locations on Lake Superior and experience the view from the point as well as catch a glimpse of the shipwreck which can be seen in the water below on calm days. Also, some dispersed (unauthorized) overnight camping use occurs on the parcel. The actual number of people per year who visit the parcel for overnight or day-use recreational purposes is unknown.

Recreation Resources and Interpretive & Environmental Education Services

There are no officially designated recreational facilities located on the Gold Rock Point parcel. However, there is a small pull-over parking area located on the lake side of Highway 61 where a limited number of divers and other visitors can park their vehicles (figure 2). Users have created a trail from this location to a nearby beach on Lake Superior.

Figure 2. Existing recreational resources located within the Gold Rock Point Parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.



Also, there are no onsite interpretive and environmental services provided at the Gold Rock Point parcel. However, information is provided to visitors at the park contact station. Additionally, the Minnesota Historical Society conducts an extensive interpretive program at the Split Rock Lighthouse Historic Site, located within Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.

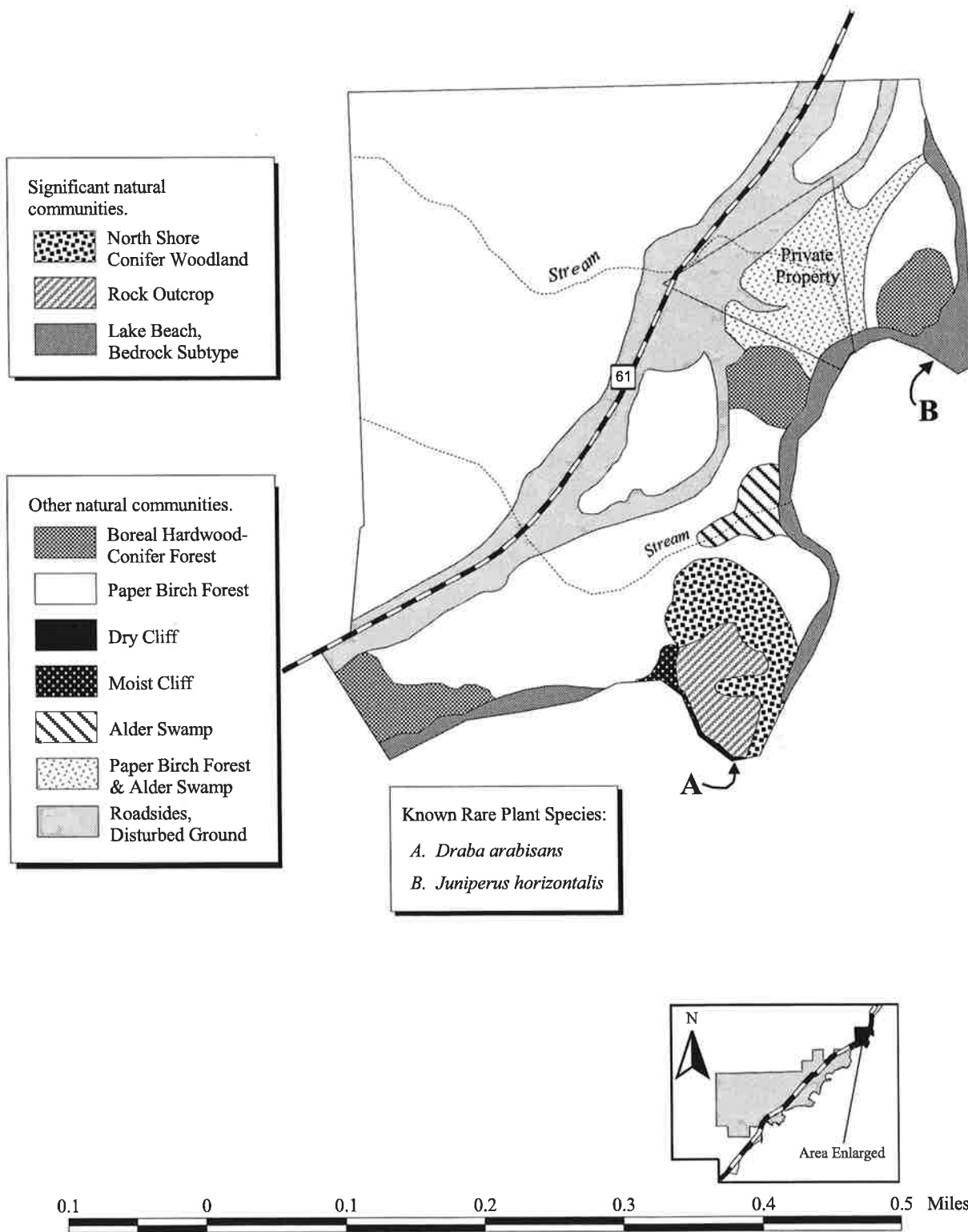
Natural and Cultural Resources

Eight distinct natural community types have been identified on the Gold Rock Point parcel by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources's Division of Parks and Recreation (Minnesota Natural Heritage Database; K. A. Chapman, 1998). These include Boreal Hardwood-Conifer Forest, Paper Birch Forest, Northern Conifer Scrubland, Rock Outcrop, Dry Cliff, Moist Cliff, Lake Beach, and Alder Swamp. Three of these communities are somewhat rare in the region and are considered significantly important park resources (figure 3):

- (1) **North Shore Conifer Woodland.** Upland forest of black spruce on lands kept cool and moist by breezes from Lake Superior. Black spruce is common in all layers of forest, with scattered mountain ash and paper birch. Feathermosses (e.g., *Pleurozium shreberi*) and other mosses (including *Sphagnum*) cover the ground. Starflower, bunchberry, and clubmosses are common as well. The community exhibits shallow soils and correspondingly shallow tree root systems, and thus is susceptible to damage from relatively minor trails or foot traffic. North Shore Conifer Woodland/Northern Conifer Scrubland is restricted to a very few sites in the immediate vicinity of Lake Superior. The specific community at Gold Rock Point is the only example found on a granite substrate, and is therefore unique in the state.
- (1) **Rock Outcrop.** Non-vertical exposure of rhyolite bedrock, typically on upper slopes and ridge lines. Vegetation is composed primarily of fruticose (e.g., reindeer) lichens and low-bush blueberry, with patches of feathermoss in sheltered areas. Grasses (e.g., poverty oat-grass) and *Potentilla tridentata* are common. Black spruce, mountain ash, and paper birch form thickets where the soil is thickest, in depressions and wide crevices. This community and the Northern Conifer Scrubland mingle and intermix with each other.
- (1) **Lake Beach.** Sparsely vegetated bare rock points and wave swept ledges, providing habitat for disjunct arctic-alpine plant species. Many species of crustose lichen cover the surfaces of rocks. Mat forming plants fill crevices, including creeping juniper and *Potentilla tridentata*. Ninebark is common.

Based on biological survey work conducted by the Division of Parks and Recreation, populations of two rare plant species have been identified on the Gold Rock Point parcel: *Draba arabisans* (rock whitlow-grass) and *Juniperus horizontalis* (creeping juniper). Both species are considered to be of Special Concern by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (State of Minnesota, 1996). A few individuals of rock whitlow-grass can be found on the southeast facing cliff top of Gold Rock Point (figure 3, map symbol A). The creeping juniper occupies many crevices from which it has spread over rock surfaces on the southwest portion of the bedrock lake beach located north of Gold Rock Point (figure 3, map symbol B). Since this survey work was done in late fall, potential exists for the presence of other uncommon species on the parcel.

Figure 3. Existing natural resource communities and known rare species located within the Gold Rock Point parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse StatePark.



Very little is known about the cultural resources of the Gold Rock Point parcel. However, a Lake Superior shipwreck, the Madeira, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Madeira rests on the bottom of Lake Superior just below Gold Rock Point in between 30 and 100 feet of water. It is a 436 foot schooner barge once used to carry grain, lumber, and iron ore. Built in 1900, it sank on November 28, 1905 in the Mataafa Storm. This storm was responsible for the sinking and/or damaging of approximately 20 vessels at the time, and is considered the worst storm in the recorded history of the Great Lakes. An inventory of the wreck was sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society prior to its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 (Agranat, B. R.; S. R. James, Jr.; and K. J. Foster; 1991).

Management Goals

The Gold Rock Point parcel will be managed as an integral part of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. As such, specific goals, objectives, and strategies identified in the Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Management Plan for resource management and physical development and recreation management apply to the Gold Rock Point parcel. The following is a list of specific goals for the Gold Rock Point parcel that are not directly addressed in the park's management plan.

- To protect scenic and aesthetic qualities associated with Gold Rock Point as viewed from Split Rock Lighthouse, Lake Superior, and other park locations.
- To maintain the natural and undeveloped character of Gold Rock Point itself.
- To maintain the natural and relatively undeveloped character of the remaining acreage comprising the Gold Rock Point parcel.
- To protect natural and cultural resources associated with the parcel.
- To provide recreational opportunities compatible with the goals stated above.

Physical Development and Recreation Management Recommendations

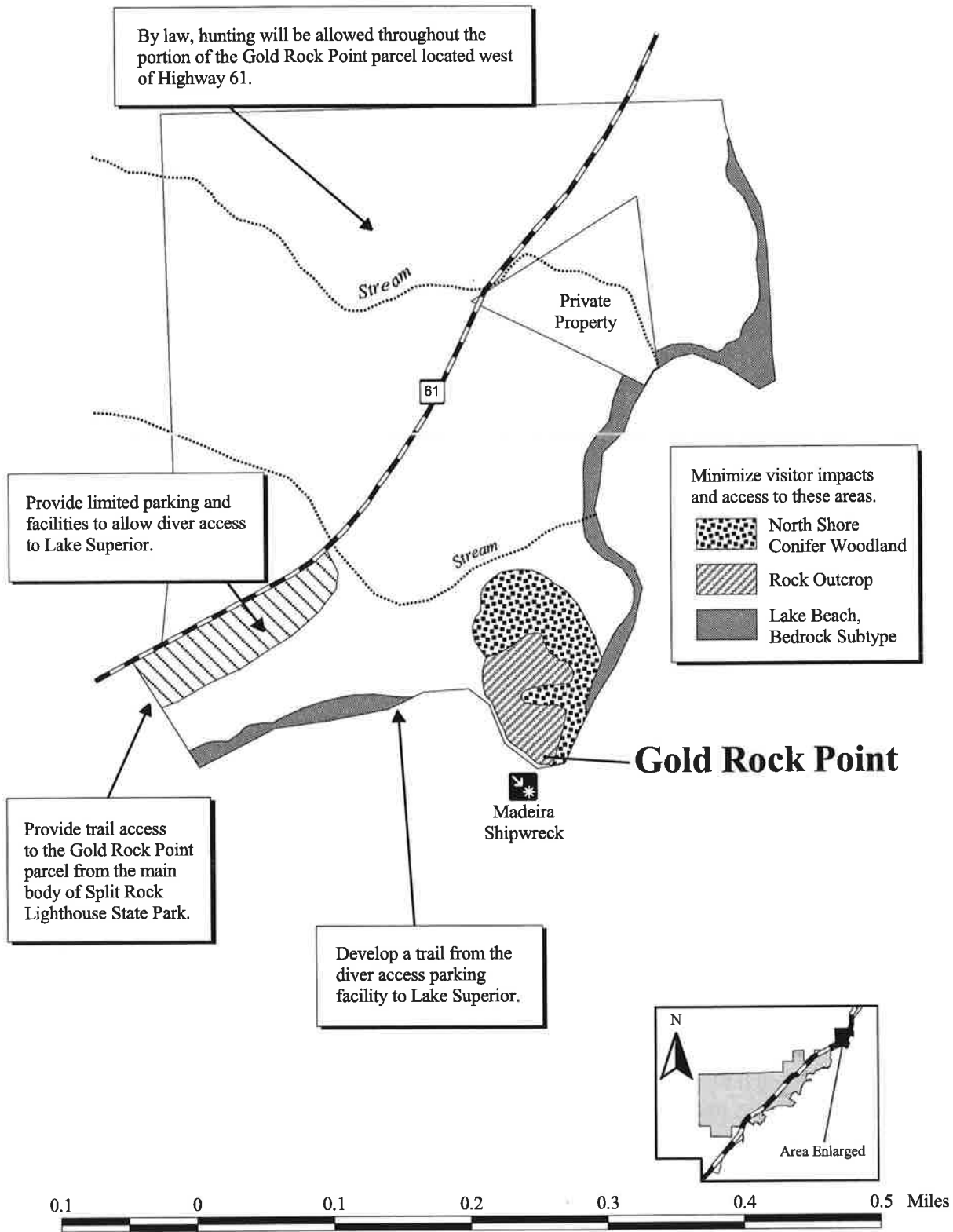
The overall management goals for the Gold Rock Point parcel led to the following list of recommendations for physical development and recreation resource management:

- Continue to provide recreational diver access to Lake Superior for viewing of the Madeira shipwreck, recognizing the Madeira is an important cultural and historical resource that is protected by a number of Federal and State laws¹.

¹Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-298). National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974. Minnesota Historic Sites Act (MN Stat. 138.661 - 138.6691). Minnesota Historic District Act (MN Stat. 138.71 - 138.75). Minnesota Field Archaeology Act (138.31 - 138.42).

- Develop a plan to monitor and document the number of divers that access Lake Superior via the Gold Rock Point parcel. Also, develop educational and interpretive materials/signs aimed at protecting the Madeira. Such an education and interpretive effort should focus on increasing the public's understanding of the significance of the site, increasing public awareness about pertinent laws that protect the Madeira, and building a sense of stewardship concerning protection of this unique resource. The development of these materials/signs should be coordinated with the Minnesota Historical Society—State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Split Rock Lighthouse Historic Site, the diving community, and the general public.
- Provide minimal access facilities to the Gold Rock Point parcel from the main body of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park and from Highway 61:
 - Consider limiting recreational access to the parcel via trails (divers would be the exception—see the next paragraph below). A section of the Gitchi Gami Trail (a surfaced bicycle trail) has been completed along the western edge of the parcel. This trail provides access through, and therefore access to the Gold Rock Point parcel (e.g. on the lake side of Highway 61) from the main body of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. However, trail users should be discouraged from using the parcel itself as a destination.
 - Develop a small automobile parking lot (gated and controlled access, day-use only, with vault toilet facility) and a short trail from this parking facility to Lake Superior in an effort to facilitate diver access. (Figure 4).
- Minimize visitor access to the Northern Conifer Scrubland/North Shore Conifer Woodland, Rock Outcrop, and Lake Beach natural communities. Avoid developing recreational facilities in these areas. These communities are easily impacted by human activity, somewhat rare in the region and are important park natural resources.
- Minimize opportunities for conflicts between different types of park visitors (e.g. bicyclists versus hikers, divers and non-divers, etc.).
- If recreational facilities (e.g., summer or winter trails, the proposed day-use parking facility for divers, informational and educational signs, etc.) are deemed appropriate in selected areas, ensure their design minimizes impacts to natural and cultural resources as well as Gold Rock Point's scenic and aesthetic qualities. Monitor visitor use of and impacts to the parcel to verify the need for a facility. (Even fairly light use levels in and around the Gold Rock Point parcel are expected to negatively impact natural resources. Therefore, it may be necessary to minimize these impacts by restricting use of the area to a designated facility. However, developing a facility may encourage more park visitors to use the area, resulting in adverse impacts to the natural resources and to the social experience).
- Restrict bicycling to the Gitchi Gami Trail only. Prohibit bicycling elsewhere on the parcel.

Figure 4. Recommendations for physical development, recreation resource management, and natural resource management at the Gold Rock Point parcel, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park.



- Prohibit overnight use. Camping opportunities are already provided at other locations in the park.
- Use interpretation and information as tools to help reduce visitor impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- Prohibit rock climbing on Gold Rock Point. Gold Rock Point has not been used by climbers in the past, likely because it is not a particularly challenging climbing feature. There are other regional rock climbing opportunities nearby.
- By law, hunting will be allowed throughout the portion of the Gold Rock Point parcel located west of Highway 61 (figure 4). State of Minnesota hunting rules and regulations apply.
- Prohibit off highway vehicles (OHVs) and snowmobiles.
- Monitor visitor use within the Gold Rock Point parcel.
- Similarly, periodically monitor and assess visitor impacts to natural and cultural resources.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall management goals for the Gold Rock Point parcel led to the following list of resource management recommendations:

- Assess and monitor trail conditions to detect changes in user impacts(e.g., increase in trail erosion, vegetation mortality).
- Focus natural feature inventory efforts on rare species as identified in Scrubland, Rock Outcrop and Lake Beach communities.
- The recommended resource management action for the Paper Birch Forest community type is to allow natural recovery to continue, even in the case of a mortality event (e.g., a blowdown or insect infestation). Little change requiring resource management action is expected in this community type, which covers much of the parcel.
- Protect and monitor cultural resources as they are identified.
- Restore reclaimed areas using appropriate native vegetation (e.g. existing parking lot, trail).
- Assess development impacts to natural and cultural resources as a part of planning, prior to development.

LITERATURE CITED

Chapman, K. A. 1998. *Biological Inventory of the Gold Rock Point Parcel: An Addition to Split Rock Lighthouse State Park*. Technical Report to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Division, Region II. St. Paul, MN: Kim Alan Chapman.

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Agranat, B. J.; S. R. James, Jr.; and K. J. Foster. 1991. *Submerged Cultural Resources Investigation: Shipwrecks Madeira and Thomas Wilson, Lake Superior, Minnesota*. Final report prepared for the Minnesota Historical Society by Panamerican Consultants, Inc.. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, Fort Snelling History Center.