

St. Croix State Park

Citizen Advisory Committee – third meeting 9/15/16



Agenda

Welcome & Introductions: *(5 minutes)*

Second meeting recap: *(10 minutes)*

- Horse camp improvements

Recreational Use and Visitor Services – day use facilities: *(20 minutes)*

- Existing facilities
- Recommendations

Recreational Use and Visitor Services – trail use: *(40 minutes)*

- Existing trails & trail uses
- Recommendations

Break *(TBD – sometime during trail use discussion)*

Park Boundary *(10 minutes)*

- Existing boundary & inholdings
- Recommendations

Scheduling our next meeting if necessary: *(5 minutes)*

- Pick a date – week of October 10th (Thursday October 13th) or week of October 24th (Thursday October 27th)
- Topics – Review all recommendations and discuss any other remaining issues from the CAC

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Recreational Use and Visitor Services – Day Use Facilities:

Existing day use facilities:

- All Season Trail Center – bathrooms, showers, and gathering space; serves horse camp and group camp users
- Lake Clayton area - swimming beach, picnic shelter, bathrooms, playground, volleyball and horseshoe courts, bike trail access
- Fire tower – fire tower access, parking
- Kettle River trail system accesses – Kettle River Overlook & Kettle River Highbanks, limited parking, river views
- Campground boat access – main boat launch in the park, concrete ramp, parking area, launch area/racks for concessionaire canoes
- Water access sites - Little Yellowbanks, Maple Island, Head of the Rapids, Kettle River Overlook, Sand Creek

Day Use Facilities – Recommendations

- Develop additional day use amenities at Fire Tower area. Improvements to this area will include interpretive and orientation signage, picnic tables, a vault toilet and hiking trail loops (see Trails & Trail Uses).
- Create additional trailhead parking for the trails along the Kettle River. The available parking areas at Kettle River Highbanks and Kettle River Overlook are relatively small. A new trailhead parking area will be developed in conjunction with construction of the new trail segment that connects with the park road between the two existing trailhead areas. Additional parking can be created east of the park road just north of the existing Kettle River Highbanks trailhead.
- Improve access for fishing along Hay and Bear Creeks. Both creeks support populations of trout and other fish species. Hay Creek is accessible from the Matthew Lourey State Trail north of Lake Clayton and the main park road – formalizing paths from the trail to the river edge and benches at those locations will improve fishing access and protect other areas along the trail and riverbank. Fishing sites along Bear Creek can be accessed from the Bear Creek Trail – creating a path along Bear Creek that links to the existing trail will improve access for fishing.
- Develop an archery range. The facility should be designed to host skills-building interpretive programs (including Archery in the Parks) as well as for individual use by park visitors. The proposed site for the archery range is north of the All Season Trail Center to take advantage of the existing parking area and amenities of the trail center (restrooms, shelter and gathering space).

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Recreational Use and Visitor Services – Trail Use

Existing trail uses:

- Hiking – 127 miles, not much use on some segments, few loops, some on-road segments
- Biking – 5.5 miles, out-and-back between the campground and Lake Clayton, repaving scheduled for 2017
- Horseback riding – 75 miles, heaviest use in spring and fall, requests for narrower trails
- Snowmobiling – 80 miles, connection to guesthouses increased use, Matthew Lourey State Trail
- Cross-country skiing – 11 miles, classic ski only, lower level of use, connection to guesthouses

Trail Use – Recommendations

- Develop additional segments of hiking trail to create shorter loops and improve hiking experiences for park visitors. New trail segments in the west side of the park near the Kettle River will connect existing trails to create shorter loops. Trail segments in the area currently on park roads will be relocated away from the road edge to improve the hiking experience. At the fire tower, two new trail loops will be created (utilizing an existing segment of the Matthew Lourey State Trail) as part of the day use area improvements. Former hiking trails that connected the St. John’s Landing Group Center with the Little Yellowbanks water access site will be reestablished as part of the improvements with the planned increased public use of the group center. The total distance of these additional hiking trails is 6.3 miles.
- Extend the existing paved bike trail to form a loop around Lake Clayton. The loop would increase the overall miles of paved trail and create a new experience for park visitors. The trail will be sited to parallel the lake shore and provide scenic views of the lake. Construction of the trail will also be an opportunity to make ADA improvements with connections to buildings, parking area, and other facilities in the Lake Clayton Beach Area. The loop would be approximately 1.7 miles. Final layout of the loop would be determined during design.
- Add a bike lane to the shoulder of the park road between the Park Headquarters Area and the Campground Area. A significant number of park visitors bike along this section of park road. A paved and striped bike lane would improve safety for bicyclists. It would also create a loop from the campground with a connection to the existing bicycle trail near the Park Headquarters. The distance of the bike shoulder would be approximately 2 miles.
- Promote the use of park roads as additional bicycling opportunities. Other than the main park entrance road to the campground, the roads within the state park have low traffic volume and are suitable for bicycle riding - especially west of Lake Clayton Beach Area. The division may install “share the road” or similar signage to raise awareness of vehicle drivers to expect bicyclists on the roads.
- Open selected trail segments to winter fat biking. On trail segments currently used for cross-country skiing, a treadway for biking would be packed alongside the groomed ski track. The trail segments west of Norway Point currently used for snowmobiling would be converted to winter fat biking, with snowmobiles still being able to use the larger loop formed by the Bear Creek Trail and Matthew Lourey State Trail. The changed proposed will open 17 miles for winter fat biking in the park. Access points for fat biking would be at the Visitor Center, the All Season Trail Center, and the guesthouses at Norway Point.

- Develop additional horseback riding opportunities. The majority of horse trails within the state park are shared use trails – serving as snowmobile trails in the winter. These trails tend to be wider than needed for horseback riding to accommodate snowmobile grooming equipment in the winter. Horse trail users have expressed an interest in narrower trails and loops to create more variety and to improve the riding experience. The changes proposed would add 4.2 miles of horse trail not shared with winter snowmobile use. These new trail segments are primarily existing firebreaks already kept open for resource management activities.
- Investigate the possibility of winter ATV use on existing snowmobile trails within the state park if the trend of inconsistent snow cover continues. The lack of consistent snow cover has resulted in shortened seasons for snowmobiling and reduction in winter use in the park. If the trend continues, the division may investigate the possibility of allowing winter ATV use of snowmobile trails when the ground is frozen but there is inadequate snow for grooming trails. The division will need to evaluate the potential for impacts to natural resources and damage to trails that are used for other trail activities in the summer and shoulder seasons. Allowing this activity within a state park would require a rule change or rule exemption.

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Park Boundary

State Park statutory boundaries:

- Statutory boundaries are established and revised by the Minnesota State Legislature.
- DNR will request lands be added to a statutory boundary only with the approval of the landowner.
- DNR Division of Parks and Trails only purchases land for state parks from willing sellers within statutory boundaries.

Current statutory boundary & ownership:

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| • Statutory boundary of the state park – | 33,886.14 acres |
| • Lands owned/administered by DNR Parks and Trails – | 31,726.97 |
| • Lands owned/administered by other government units – | 750.33 |
| • Privately owned land within the park statutory boundary – | 1,408.84 |

Park Boundary - Recommendations

Acquisitions & Boundary Modifications

- Continue to pursue acquisition of private lands within the park statutory boundary. DNR purchases land for state parks from willing sellers within established statutory boundaries. The division will work with the owners of the private lands within the park statutory boundary to purchase inholdings as owners are ready to sell their property.
- Propose modification of the park statutory boundary to include an additional 64.41 acres. The division was approached by a landowner to include their property within the state park. The parcel includes frontage on County Road 48 and is surrounded by state-owned park property on 3 sides. State ownership of the parcel would help create a clearly definable park boundary (CR 48) in this area and provide opportunities for natural resource restoration and management.
- Propose modification of the park statutory boundary to delete 20.16 acres. These two privately owned parcels are north of Country Road 48 and are largely open water and road right-of-way. The parcels do not have any important natural or cultural resource value for the state park or potential for recreational development.

Monitoring

- Monitor private gravel mining operation near northeastern edge of the state park. If gravel operations cease, the division should consider discussion with landowners about their future plans for the property and the possibility of including some of the land within the park statutory boundary.
- Work with Pine County concerning tax forfeit lands adjacent to the state park boundary. Two tax forfeit parcels abut state-owned park land in the northeastern corner of the state park. Pine County is currently utilizing a portion of the land for gravel mining. The division will work with Pine County to evaluate possible state trail

routing options through these parcels, cooperative resource management activities, and the possible future inclusion of the parcels within the park statutory boundary.