

Cascade River State Park Management Plan Amendment

Cascade Lodge Parcel



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Recreation

March 2004



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

500 Lafayette Road

St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4037

Department of Natural Resources Approval of Management Plan Amendment for Cascade River State Park

Minnesota Statutes 86A §09, Subdivision 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 1957 (chapter 420, sections 1 & 2) established Cascade River State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (MS 85.013, subd. 20a).

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources worked in partnership with Minnesota citizens and an interdisciplinary resource team to develop a management plan amendment for Cascade River State Park.

The management plan amendment was approved by the Division of Parks and Recreation management team, and has been approved through the DNR's Region Interdisciplinary Review Service / Senior Managers' review process during February 2004.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Merriam", written over a horizontal line.

Gene Merriam, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

5-21-04

Date

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State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation

This management plan amendment has been prepared as required by 2001 Minnesota Laws Chapter 86A.09, Subdivision 1.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this management plan amendment is to amend the Cascade River State Park management plan (adopted February 2003) to include the Cascade Lodge property in the park statutory boundary.

Management plans are required for state park units in Minnesota Statutes (MS) 86A.09. This amendment will bring the management plan into accordance with the current statutory boundary and operations proposals for the park.

DESCRIPTION

This amendment adds the Cascade Lodge property to the park statutory boundary. The property is 13.68 acres, which includes the main lodge (11 guest rooms and 2 public rooms), a restaurant, 11 guest cabins, a motel with 5 guest units, and several administrative and storage buildings. The lodge building dates to the 1920s, while other buildings are newer. The property is bound on three sides by the state park, with the fourth fronting Lake Superior (See Figure 1 – Proposed Addition). The property includes approximately 690 feet of Lake Superior shoreline and 1,480 feet along Cascade Creek. Hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobile trails cross the property and connect to the larger trail network within the adjacent state park and the surrounding area.

At the time the management plan was developed (2000-03), the inclusion of Cascade Lodge in the park statutory boundary was discussed and found desirable. However, the owner was not interested at that time to have the property included, although they chose to include other property they owned in the boundary at that time. (The property owner was involved in the management plan update throughout the planning process.) Since that time, the property owner has reconsidered and has requested that the Cascade Lodge be included in the park statutory boundary. The owner has stated that inclusion in the park boundary would be a positive step in assuring the historic lodge is preserved and continues to be open to the public.

There are several reasons supporting inclusion of the Cascade Lodge in the state park:

- preserve the recreational amenities it offers tourists and park visitors,
- preserve the historic lodge – the lodge is an example of the early tourism and resort development along the North Shore,
- preserve park resources, viewsheds and visitor experiences that would otherwise be impacted by the conversion of the property to a more intensive use.

If the property is included in the park statutory boundary and acquired by the State of Minnesota, the intent of the Division of Parks and Recreation is to preserve the lodge and continue operating it. The Division would seek to preserve the historic lodge and associated property, recognizing its importance as an example early tourism development on the North Shore. The Division would continue the operation of the lodge and restaurant as a recreational opportunity complementary to the camping opportunities offered in the state park and as an amenity for park visitors and other tourists on the North Shore. The Division of Parks and Recreation would prepare a business plan for the operation of the lodge and restaurant. The Division intends for the lodge and restaurant to be operated as a concession under contract with a private organization that would manage the facilities' day-to-day business.

Public acquisition of the lodge property would reduce the property tax revenues received by Cook County. The payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) made by the state to the local governments would be substantially less than the current property taxes collected from the property, since PILT is based on the value of the land only. If the State of Minnesota purchases the lodge property, the Division will discuss options with Cook County to address the property tax loss issue.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Cascade lodge property contains several natural resource areas and the potential - albeit limited to some areas - for restoring native communities. The two most important resource areas are the Lake Superior shoreline and the Cascade Creek corridor.

Portions of the property have been disturbed – used for buildings, roadways, parking and trails; cleared along the power line corridor and State Highway 61; and mowed or landscaped surrounding the buildings and roads. Much these disturbed areas would remain with the continued operation of the lodge under state ownership, as well as the continued presence of the power line and highway. However, opportunities do exist to reintroduce native species to some areas of the property unused by the lodge operations and to reduce mowed and landscaped areas.

Other areas of the property, primarily the north and west portion (although bisected by the power line) and Cascade Creek corridor, have the potential to harbor relatively intact plant and animal communities. Further evaluation of these areas, as well as the Lake Superior shoreline, will be necessary to assess the condition of the natural resource base.

Although state ownership would not result in a substantial restoration of native communities to the property, the purchase of the property by another private entity and its likely conversion to another more intensive use (subdivision or condominium development) could result in greater impact on the natural resources of the property and potentially on the adjacent park's native communities.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Several structures on the Cascade Lodge property, including the lodge itself, are historic buildings dating to the 1920s and 1930s. These structures represent the early tourism and resort development era along the North Shore. The lodge is noted in the State Historic Preservation Office's inventory for Cook County, however no formal examination or evaluation of the property has been conducted. If it is reviewed, the lodge would likely be found eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

If the property is purchased by the State of Minnesota, the Division would seek to preserve the historic appearance of the lodge and other structures and maintain their historic use. The Division would conduct a cultural resource survey of the property, and based on the findings consider forwarding the property to the State Historic Preservation Office for inclusion on the National Register.

The Division will also conduct cultural resource surveys for archaeological sites, focusing on beach ridges along the Lake Superior shoreline and as well as Cascade Creek. Archaeological sites have been found on similar areas within the adjacent state park.

RECREATIONAL USE AND VISITOR SERVICES POTENTIAL

The continued operation of the lodge and restaurant is an asset to park visitors and enhances the park's recreational offerings. Future state acquisition and contracted operation of the lodge and restaurant would preserve these amenities for tourist and park visitors that would otherwise be lost if the property was converted to another use. The lodge experience is complementary to the existing park amenities, offering a different overnight experience than the campground in the park.

Operation of the lodge and restaurant would be a unique situation within the State Park system, differing from the state-run Douglas Lodge in Itasca State Park in that it would be operated by a private entity under contract with the Division of Parks and Recreation.

Other opportunities at the site would also be preserved through state ownership – the current trail

connections at the lodge to the state park trails and grant-in-aid trail system would be maintained. The Gitchi Gami State Trail will further connect the lodge to the other visitor facilities and use areas in the park, bringing a new user group to the state park as well as the lodge. The proposed trail alignment crosses through the Cascade Lodge property parallel to State Highway 61.

An additional opportunity is the potential to develop a residential interpretive program at the lodge. This type of program is structured around a weeklong or weekend stay where guests attend interpretive workshops and explore the nearby park. These programs are often designed for adults and families. The lodge's mix of rooms and cabins and its location surrounded by the park make it an ideal setting for this type of program. Successful residential interpretive program models exist in several national parks. Establishing a residential interpretive program would be a partnership opportunity for the Division to work with local interpretive centers or other nonprofit groups.

MANAGEMENT PLAN TEXT REVISIONS

The text of this amendment revises the references in the Cascade River State Park Management Plan (2003) as identified below:

Page 28. Natural Resource Management Recommendations – add the following recommendation:

Evaluate the Cascade Lodge property for potential sites for restoring native communities and reducing mowed or landscaped areas without impeding operation of the lodge.

Page 33. Cultural Resource Management Recommendations – add the following recommendations:

Investigate the Lake Superior shoreline of the Cascade Lodge property for possible archaeological sites.

Evaluate the Cascade Lodge and other structures for their historic quality and consider forwarding the site for consideration for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Page 46. Proposed Boundary Modification and Page 47 Figure 10: Proposed Boundary Modification – Recommended Expansion – add the following the statement to the discussion and amend Figure 10 to include the Cascade Lodge property:

Inclusion of the Cascade Lodge in the state park is compatible with the proposed boundary modification rationale stated above in that it will help preserve a historic resource and recreational amenity that supports the experiences sought by park visitors and hikers along the Superior Hiking Trail.

Page 60. Park Operations – Future Needs – add the following statement to the discussion:

Additional staff time will also be required to oversee the contract and work with the concessionaire managing the Cascade Lodge operations. These responsibilities will likely be shared among staff at the park, region, and central office.

PUBLIC REVIEW

The proposal for including the Cascade Lodge in the statutory boundary of Cascade River State Park was presented to the Cook County Board of Commissioners on November 6, 2003. The amendment was released for public review on February 9, 2004. Copies of the amendment were available for review at the park, at the DNR Regional Headquarters in Grand Rapids, and at the DNR Central Office in St. Paul. The amendment was also posted on the DNR website. An open house for the plan amendment was held on February 24, 2004 at the Cascade Lodge.

FIGURE 1 – PROPOSED ADDITION

