

Forestville-Mystery Cave State Park Management Plan Amendment

Resource Management Timber Harvesting



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails**

November 2009

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



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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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MNDNR Division of Parks and Trails Approval of Management Plan Amendment for Forestville-Mystery Cave 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 1963 established Forestville-Mystery Cave State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (MS 85.012, Subd. 19).

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Courtland Nelson", written over a horizontal line.

Courtland Nelson, Director
MNDNR Division of Parks and Trails

A handwritten date in blue ink, "20 Nov 09", written over a horizontal line.

Date

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BACKGROUND

Minnesota Statute 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

The purpose of this plan amendment is to amend the Forestville-Mystery Cave State Park Management Plan (July 1995) 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 86A.09, Subdivision 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 usage and reduce fuel loads following a storm event.

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

- Stands of trees or other woody species not native to the park may be removed in order to “preserve, perpetuate and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to [European] settlement” (MS 86A.05 subd. 2c).
- 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 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. The division does not have the necessary equipment or staff to efficiently conduct timber harvests, especially larger-scale projects often utilized for natural community restoration projects.

DESCRIPTION

At Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park, timber harvest will be utilized in areas of non-native vegetation (including pine plantations), fire-dependent and mesic hardwood forests to restore or manage native plant communities. It may also be employed to remove encroached trees from over-grown savannas or prairies.

NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES IMPACT

The intent of conducting a timber harvest is to aid in the restoration and preservation of natural communities within the state park. 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.

Prior to the timber harvest, the division will conduct a resource assessment identify any potential impacts to other natural or cultural resources in the timber harvest project area.

INTERPRETIVE SERVICES IMPACT

The 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. Interpretive signs, naturalist-led programs, or other methods will be used to describe the project's purpose and intended benefits for the state park or state recreation area's natural resources.

RECREATIONAL USE AND VISITOR SERVICES IMPACT

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

Long term impacts for visitors of the timber harvest will be positive – timber removed following blowdowns will improve access and safety for visitors along trails and other facilities, and restored native communities 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: *Natural Communities* (p. 34-39) and the actions described under *Resource Objectives and Integrated Management Topic 2. Biological Diversity* (p. 48) and *Topic 4. Natural Community Management and Restoration* (p. 49).

PUBLIC REVIEW

In accordance with Minnesota Statutes 86A.09 Subd. 3., the plan amendment was released for a 30 day public review period beginning on August 10, 2009 with an open house held at Forestville-Mystery Cave State Park on August 20, 2009.