

Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan Amendment

Resource Management Timber Harvesting



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

May 2013

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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**Department of Natural Resources Approval
of Management Plan Amendment for Fort Ridgely 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. The Laws of Minnesota for 1911 established Fort Ridgely State Park as part of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 85.012, subd. 17).

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Courtland Nelson".

Courtland Nelson, Director
MNDNR, Division of Parks and Trails

A handwritten date in blue ink that reads "14 May '13".

Date

Introduction

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 *Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan* (August 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 86A.09, Subdivision 1. The *Fort Ridgely State Park Management Plan* has been amended twice previously – in 2000 concerning management of the park golf course, and in 2006 to expand the park boundary and add a horse campground and trails.

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, 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 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 for this purpose.

Description

At Fort Ridgely State Park, initial timber harvest activities will be conducted in areas of non-native vegetation such as black locust and hybrid poplar, and to restore or manage native plant communities like fire-dependent and mesic hardwood forests. Older planted stands of native species may be thinned to promote better growth and a more natural appearance. Timber harvest may also be employed to remove encroaching trees from over-grown savannas or prairies.

Timber harvest may also be conducted to address other resource management situations that arise in the future, including removal of trees impacted by emerald ash borer or other insect or plant disease.

Natural and 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.

Fort Ridgely State Park contains several areas of native prairie classified as southern dry prairie (UPs13). Timber harvest activities are not anticipated as part of near-term management of native plant communities within the park. The park does not contain any known forested native plant communities.

Several species of forest birds utilize the wooded portions of the park that will be the site of timber harvest activities. Most of these bird species are relatively common in Minnesota forests, but a few such as ovenbirds (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) and eastern wood-pewee (*Contopus virens*) have been identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Forest birds may be impacted by the restoration of oak savanna communities within the park. However, the park also contains many grassland birds that are also considered SGCN such as field sparrows (*Spizella pusilla*), bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), sedge wrens (*Cistothorus platensis*), and red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) that will benefit from the oak savanna restoration effort.

Cultural resources with the park include multiple known pre-historic and historic archaeological sites, including historic Fort Ridgely. Fort Ridgely is identified as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. The park was also the site of Civilian Conservation Corps and Veterans Conservation Corps camps, members of which participated in the development of the park's recreational facilities as well as archaeological excavations and restoration of fort buildings. There is a high probability of other yet-unidentified archaeological resources within the park.

Timber harvest, as part of the restoration of oak savanna and prairie plant communities, will result in a more open, prairie-dominated landscape that is closer to its appearance at the time of the historic fort's occupation.

Prior to a timber harvest, the division will conduct a resource assessment to identify any potential impacts to 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 *Park Resources* section in the current management plan: *Vegetation and Wildlife* (p. 17-18) and the actions described under *Resource Management Objectives* and *Resource Management* (p. 22-24).

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 February 11, 2013 with an open house held at Fort Ridgely State Park on February 25, 2013.

Bibliography

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