

MINNESOTA STATE PARK SYSTEM

The Minnesota State Park system includes 66 state parks and 6 recreation areas, 8 waysides, 1 state trail, and 54 state forest campgrounds and day use areas. The Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for planning, developing, operating, and maintaining Minnesota's state park system.¹

AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

Minn. Stat. Chap. 86A (The Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975) identifies state parks and recreation areas as part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system and designates DNR as the managing agency for these units. According to the act:

A state park shall be established to protect and perpetuate extensive areas of the state possessing those resources which illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's natural phenomena and to provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations. (Minn. Stat. 86A.05, subd. 2 (a))

State parks shall be administered... to preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features that are present. Management shall seek to maintain a balance among the plant and animal life of the park and to re-establish desirable plants and animals that were formerly indigenous to the park area but are now missing. Programs to interpret the natural features of the park shall be provided. Outdoor recreation activities to utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality into the natural scene may be permitted. Park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved. (Minn. Stat. 86A.05, subd. 2 (c))

Criteria for establishing new state parks include:

(1) Exemplifies the natural characteristics of the major landscape regions of the state, as shown by accepted classifications, in an essentially unspoiled or restored condition or in a condition that will permit restoration in the foreseeable future; or contains essentially unspoiled natural resources of sufficient extent and importance to meaningfully contribute to the broad illustration of the state's natural phenomena; and

(2) Contains natural resources, sufficiently diverse and interesting to attract people from throughout the state; and

(3) Is sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources which give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for human enjoyment of these qualities. (Minn. Stat. 86A.05, subd. 2 (b))

¹ Source: The information in this overview was developed in cooperation with Patricia Arndt, Parks Division, DNR.

State recreation areas are also part of the outdoor recreation system and are designed to "provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people." (*Minn. Stat.* 86A.05, subd. 3.)

DESCRIPTION

Minnesota's state park system covers over 260,000 acres. About 93 percent of the land is in state park ownership. The state parks range in size from 118 acres at Franz Jevne to nearly 33,900 acres at St. Croix, with an average size of 3,658 acres. (An attachment contains a list of state parks and recreation areas with visitation data and size in acres.)

Recent additions to the state park system include Big Bog State Recreation Area in Beltrami County and Red River State Recreation Area in East Grant Forks (both added in 2000). The 2003 Legislature authorized creation of Greenleaf Lake State Park in Meeker County.

State park amenities include:

- 5,496 campsites
- 68 group camps
- 86 camper cabins, cabins, guest houses and lodges
- 218 horse camp sites
- 6,526 picnic sites
- 33 visitor centers
- 40 beaches
- 62 historic districts or landmarks
- 1,600 buildings (620 that are on the National Register of Historic Places)
- 360 archaeological sites
- 1,255 miles of trail
- 332 miles of road and 72 bridges
- 7 scientific and natural areas
- 33 fishing piers (20 that are accessible to people with disabilities)
- 135 water access sites

Many of Minnesota's state parks contain significant natural resources including prairies, rivers, waterfalls, stands of old growth pine, blufflands, habitat for rare and endangered flora and fauna, critical endangered and threatened landscapes, and countless lakes.

VISITATION²

8.1 million people visited state parks each year in 2000, 2001, 2002, based on DNR three-year average data for these years. Overnight visitors staying in campgrounds, camper cabins, or other lodging accounted for 11 percent (or 901,236) of these visits. State Forest campground overnight visitors for 2002 totaled 133,281.

The ten state parks with the most visitors were:

Gooseberry Falls	579,989
Itasca	516,673
Fort Snelling	479,728
Interstate	352,463
Split Rock Lighthouse	335,519
Sibley	335,113
Whitewater	310,851
Temperance River	282,088
Tettegouche	264,335
Flandrau	259,938
Three-year average data for 2000, 2001, 2002.	

During this same time period, over one million people participated in some type of outdoor education in state parks.

² Source: DNR Three-year average data for 2000, 2001, 2002.

FINANCING AND FEES

The state park operating budget for the 2004-05 biennium is \$56.594 million, not including the working capital account of approximately \$4.3 million .

Effective July 1, 2003, the entrance and camping fees for the state park system increased to the "new rate" listed below.³ The Legislature estimates that the new fees will generate an additional \$1.29 million in revenues, increasing to nearly 40 percent the share of the annual operating budget generated from fees and other revenue sources.

These are the rate increases - effective July 1, 2003:

	Old Rate	New Rate
Semi-Modern Camping	\$12	\$15
Rustic Camping	\$ 8	\$11
Horse Camping	\$8 or \$11	\$11 or \$15
(The higher rate is for horse campgrounds with sanitation & shower facilities)		
Handicapped Camping (Sunday-Thursday)		
Semi-Modern	\$ 6	\$ 7.50
Rustic	\$ 4	\$ 5.50
State Forest Campground Sites	\$ 9	\$10

The Senior Citizen mid-week, half-price discount has been eliminated.
The \$3.00 rate for electricity remains the same.

Annual Permit	\$20	\$25
(Permits purchased on or before June 30th are valid at \$20 for 12 months)		
Second Vehicle Permit	\$15	\$18
Daily Permit	\$ 4	\$ 7
Daily Permit for Groups	\$ 2	\$ 5

Handicapped Vehicle Permit rate remains at \$12.

Capital Funding: State park and recreation capital improvement projects (development, rehabilitation and betterment, land acquisition, asset preservation) are financed with state bonds and Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources appropriations. Between 1991 and 2003, the Legislature invested over \$90 million in state parks for capital purposes.

³ Minn. Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Art. 1, Sec. 45, subd. 1. State law authorizes the Commissioner of DNR to set reasonable fees and charges for using the state parks, including camping fees, rentals, and other services.