



Minnesota State Parks

Monthly Newsletter

Indepth on the
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Popular Parks**

**How to
Get Involved!**

**Economics of
Your State Parks:**

Where does
the Money Go?

State Park Facts



State Park Facts

Number of parks & acreage

The Minnesota State Park system includes 66 state parks and 6 recreation areas, 8 waysides and 1 state trail that total more than 244,000 acres.

Number of visitors

In 2000, Minnesota State Parks hosted a 8,513,404 visitors. Day use accounts for most of the visits. Camping accounts for about 10 percent of park visits. About 20 percent of visitors come out of state.

Number of campers

Nearly 800,000 people camped at state parks in 2000.

Most visited state parks

(Annual visits for 2000)

- Fort Snelling - 595,125
- Gooseberry Falls - 573,395
- Itasca - 481,508
- Interstate - 372,780
- Sibley - 360,484
- Split Rock Lighthouse - 343,107





State park amenities

- 6,381 picnic sites
- 68 group camps
- 4,378 campsites
- 62 historic districts or landmarks
- 1,600 buildings (595 that are on the National Register of Historic Places)
- 36 beaches
- 1,255 miles of trail
- 33 fishing piers (20 that are accessible to people with disabilities)
- 360 archaeological sites
- 33 visitor centers
- 332 miles of road
- 9 state waysides
- 218 horse camp sites
- 7 scientific and natural areas
- 135 water access sites
- 1 state trail

Park Partners volunteer program

If you are interested in lending a hand to help Minnesota State Parks, you're invited to become a Park Partner. Patterned after the Adopt-a-Park idea, Park Partners is designed to encourage businesses, civic groups and individuals to volunteer their time to improve and maintain state parks, monuments, historic sites and trails.

Citizens may also contribute to state parks by donating to projects they care about. As a Park Partner, groups and individuals may provide dollars, materials or labor for projects. Typically projects vary in cost from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Park Partners program, contact Pat Arndt at (651) 259-5578.

Quick stats:

1,695 acres

179,626 annual visits

6,766 overnight visits



Afton

History

The park was established in 1969 to preserve unique natural features and to provide opportunities for nature-oriented recreation. The park is cut by deep ravines which drop 300 feet to the river. The ravines display spectacular outcrops of sandstone and the rugged terrain affords spectacular views of the St. Croix River Valley.

Grand oaks and delicate prairie flowers grace the rugged, rolling landscape of this park. Trails traverse remnant and restored prairies, wind down deep ravines and rise up to the grassy ridgetops and bluffs overlooking the scenic St. Croix River. The trails are perfect for hikers, horseback riders and cross-country skiers. The park offers visitors a swimming beach, backpack campsites and a visitor center with interpretive displays.

Landscape

The park is set in a rolling glacial moraine and bluffland. It contains a combination of oak openings and woodlands. The forests combine upland hardwoods with some pine plantations. Remnant prairies are being expanded and oak savannas are being restored through an aggressive resource management program that makes extensive use of volunteers. Park wildflowers include prairie pasque flowers and woodland ephemerals in the spring; butterfly weed and puccoons on the summer prairie; and sunflowers and blazing star in the fall.



Fort Snelling

Located in the heart of the Twin Cities, this park offers extensive hiking, bike and ski trails that link to Minnehaha Park and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Canoe on Gun Club Lake, play golf, swim in Snelling Lake, or hike on Pike Island where the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers converge. Trails also allow visitors to hike up to the historic Fort Snelling for a view of military life in the 1820s. This is a day-use only park; no camping is available.

History

For hundreds of years before Europeans arrived, generations of Dakota people lived in villages along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers that meet in Fort Snelling State Park. By the late 1600s, Europeans had visited the area. In the 1820s, historic Fort Snelling was built on the bluff above the two historic rivers to control the exploration, trade, and settlement on these waterways. The area was established as a state park in 1962. The swimming beach, added in 1970, remains a popular recreation attraction in the park. In 1997, a new visitor center opened to the public.

Quick stats:

2,931 acres

411,825 annual visits



Landscape

The park is located in the Mississippi River Sandplains Landscape Region at the confluence of two great rivers, the Minnesota and the Mississippi. The riverine environment hosts large cottonwood, silver maple, ash, and willow trees along the braided channels of the Minnesota River. Numerous picnic sites, a beach, and river and lake fishing invite visitors to enjoy the recreational opportunities offered by this historic and beautiful park nestled in the shadow of city freeways and airport flyways.

Quick stats:

298 acres

372,780 annual visits



Interstate

Landscape

The park's landscape is diverse and includes floodplains and forests of hard maple, oak, and pine. Many rare and endangered species are found in the park. For a small, highly visited area, Interstate is a haven to these unique species. The geology that formed this park intrigues visitors, and brings geologists from all over the world. At least 10 different lava flows are exposed in the park, along with two distinct glacial deposits, and traces of old streams valleys and faults.

There is so much to do at Interstate State Park, located on the beautiful St. Croix River. Visitors can climb the cliffs of the St. Croix River Dalles, canoe the flat-water, watch kayakers rush through the rapids, or relax on an excursion boat. Spring brings a great diversity of wildflowers and in fall, the St. Croix River Valley forest is ablaze in the autumn colors of red, gold, and orange. During the summer, hike the trails and explore the glacial potholes that make this park unique.

History

In the 1800s, the threat of mining the St. Croix Dalles prompted leaders from Minnesota and Wisconsin to preserve the Dalles of the St. Croix River. Working together, the first interstate (Minnesota and Wisconsin) park in the nation was established. The Minnesota Legislature established the park in 1895; the Wisconsin Legislature followed in 1900. Today, visitors can hike both sides of the St. Croix River at Interstate Park in Minnesota and Wisconsin.



Lake Maria

Visitors who come to Lake Maria State Park will enjoy one of the few remaining stands of the “Big Woods,” a maple, oak and basswood forest that once covered part of southern Minnesota. The park is perfect for hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, and cross-country skiers who enjoy the challenge of the rolling terrain. Lake Maria State Park is home to the Blandings turtle, easily identified by bright yellow spots on its shell. It is one of Minnesota’s threatened species.

History

The Big Woods was a forest that once occupied 3,030 square miles in south-central Minnesota. The forest was comprised of maple, basswood, white and red elm, red oak, tamarack, and red cedar on the banks of numerous lakes. The trees were so thick that sunlight couldn’t penetrate to the forest floor in some spots. French explorers called the forest “Bois Grand” or “Bois Fort.” Later, settlers altered the name to the “Big Woods.” Today, farms, towns, suburbs, and industry have replaced much of the Big Woods. Fortunately, Lake Maria State Park retains a remnant of the grandness of the original Big Woods.

Quick stats:

1,590 acres

73,202 annual visits



Landscape

Lake Maria State Park is located at the northern edge of the Big Woods. This region is characterized by rough, wooded terrain and terminal moraine. The moraine consists of an accumulation of boulders, stone, and other debris left by a glacier that melted 10,000 years ago.

Quick stats:

5,490 acres

173,363 annual visits



Minnesota Valley

History

You are surrounded by history as you travel through the Minnesota River Valley. The Dakota people gave the river its name: Mini Sota and fished, hunted, and harvested wild rice from floodplain lakes. In the early 1600s,

European explorers traveled the Minnesota River and by the 1860s settlers built homesteads and farmed along the river's fertile banks.

As railroads replaced steamboats, many river towns became ghost towns. In the Minnesota Valley you can enjoy the landscape and wildlife that has attracted people here for centuries.

Just minutes from the Twin Cities, this state recreation area preserves part of the Minnesota River Valley. The Minnesota Valley Trail links Fort Snelling State Park and units of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to waysides and other public lands. The area is ideal for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, and snowmobiling. The landscapes are just as diverse as the trail system, and include wetlands, floodplain forest, and blufftop oak savanna. Wildlife observation and birdwatching are popular activities year-round.

Landscape

The Minnesota River Valley is a rich mosaic of plant and animal communities. The valley holds floodplain marshes, wet meadows, fens, and lakes. These wetlands are maintained by the river and by the spring-fed streams draining from the base of the bluffs. The hillsides and bluffs support oak forest and oak savanna remnants. They offer outstanding scenic overlooks. As the seasons unfold, you will find spring wildflowers, fall colors, abundant wildlife, and the every-changing river landscape.



Quick stats:

6,803 acres

182,545 annual visits



Wild River

Wild River is located along 18 miles of the beautiful St. Croix River. The park attracts people who enjoy camping, hiking, horseback riding, canoeing, interpretive programs, self-guided trails, and cross-country skiing. Day visitors can enjoy a leisurely paddle down the St. Croix River from the Sunrise river access to the southern park river access. The park provides opportunities for semi-modern camping, group camping, backpack camping, canoe camping, and walk-in camping.

Landscape

Wild River State Park lies within the Anoka Sand Plain and Mille Lacs Uplands subsections. This region is on the southern edge of the transition zone of pine forest, hardwood forest, and oak savanna. Once covered by Glacial Lake Grantsburg, this area today is a smooth and sandy plain. The few ridges may represent islands that stood above the lake level. Prescribed burns are conducted annually to better manage and restore oak savanna and prairie areas.

History

The St. Croix River Valley was first occupied by nomadic people 6,000 years ago. For thousands of years, the valley was home for the Dakota and Ojibwe Indians. The park was established to protect the natural and cultural resources and to provide recreational opportunities along the St. Croix River. The park's name "Wild River" is derived from the fact that the St. Croix River was one of the original eight rivers protected by the U.S. Congress through the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.

Quick stats:

1,520 acres

238,410 annual visits



William O'Brien

Landscape

The variety of vegetation types, the St. Croix River floodplain, oak-hickory forests, scattered white pine areas, marshes, oak savanna, upland prairie and rolling meadows, provides habitat for diverse wildlife populations. Wildflowers give color to the spring woods and the summer fields. One of the best canoeing rivers in the nation, the St. Croix offers pristine scenery just minutes from a major metropolitan area.

A great “get away” park only one hour from the Twin Cities, William O'Brien provides a beautiful setting for quality recreation along the banks of the St. Croix River. Hiking trails offer quiet exploration of the park's rolling, wooded hills. For anglers, the channels of the St. Croix have northerners, walleye, bass and trout. Ideal for canoeing, the river is also a migratory pathway that offers visitors an exciting diversity of sights and sounds. In the winter, snowshoeing, skiing and camping attract enthusiasts.

History

In the 1600s, European trappers arrived to engage in the Dakota and Ojibwe Indians lucrative fur-trading. Later, lumberjacks began to harvest the stands of white pine. Sawmills began to dot the St. Croix riverway and the industry flourished in the mid-1800s until the valley was cleared of white pine. William O'Brien, a lumber baron, bought much of the land once owned by the lumber companies. In 1947, his daughter donated 180 acres to be developed as a state park in memory of her father. Over the years, other privately owned pieces of land were added to the park which now totals 1,520 acres.



Economics

Basic park fees include the annual sticker, special annual permit (for people with disabilities), day use sticker, and camping fees.

Budget

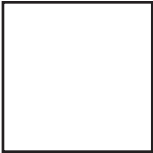
State parks' annual operating budget is about \$23.6 million. About 1/3 of this annual budget comes from park user fees. The other 2/3, and more, is returned to the state in the form of state taxes and revenue generated through purchases made in local communities by state park visitors.

Benefits

Minnesota state parks benefit visitors, communities, the economy and the environment. Benefits to visitors include opportunities for recreation plus places to go to experience solitude, enjoy the natural environment, learn about nature and relax. Communities gain a sense of community pride, while the economy benefits from visitor spending in local communities and employment opportunities. The environment benefits from the species diversity and ecosystem health associated with protection of the myriad natural resources found within state parks.

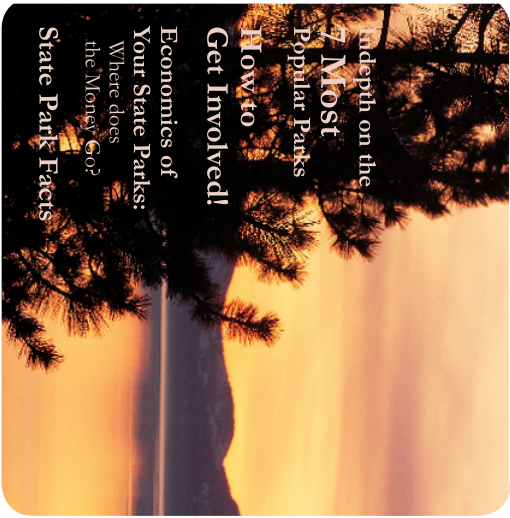
Return to the economy

Day visitors to state parks spend an average of \$22 a day in communities surrounding the parks. Those who stay overnight spend about \$28.50 per day. This accounts for more than \$196 million in visitor spending.



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