Wisconsin State Park System
STRATEGIC PLAN 2008

Wisconsin State Park System
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

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Wisconsin State Park Mission:

To protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of our Wisconsin State Park System properties while providing high quality recreational and educational opportunities and programs.

Wisconsin State Park Vision:

The Wisconsin State Park System is a leader in protecting ecological landscapes and providing nature-based outdoor recreation. We provide opportunities for current and future generations to explore, enjoy, and learn about Wisconsin's natural and cultural resources. Wisconsin State Park System employees and partners deliver to our customers a high standard of recreational services, education and natural resource stewardship. We have a broad, fair, flexible, and adequate base of financial support.

Wisconsin State Park Niche:

The Wisconsin State Park System promotes the E^3 method of sustainability. In this method, the park system uses the three Es of environment, education, and embracement, to provide quality nature-based outdoor recreation and to protect the natural resource base of the state park system.

- *Promotes **environmental** sustainability by being a perpetual steward of Wisconsin's land and waters,*
- *Provides nature-based **education** accessibility to all citizens of the state,*
- ***Embraces** nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities across the state.*

The Wisconsin State Park System blends conservation with preservation, balancing the demands and wishes of our statewide users with our commitment to maintaining our E^3 niche. Following this model, the park system will create sustainable parklands for this generation and those to come.

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Wisconsin State Park System Goals and Strategies	4
Appendix A: State Parks, State Trails, Recreation Areas, and Southern Forests	16
Appendix B: WSPS Strategic Planning Public Input Process	18
Appendix C: Partnerships	20

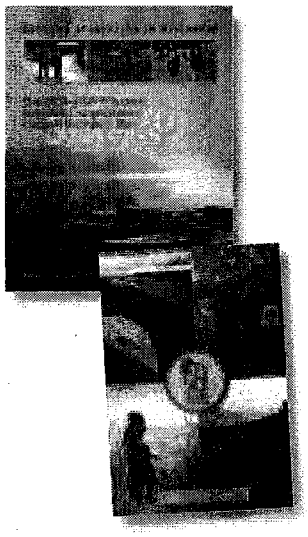
INTRODUCTION

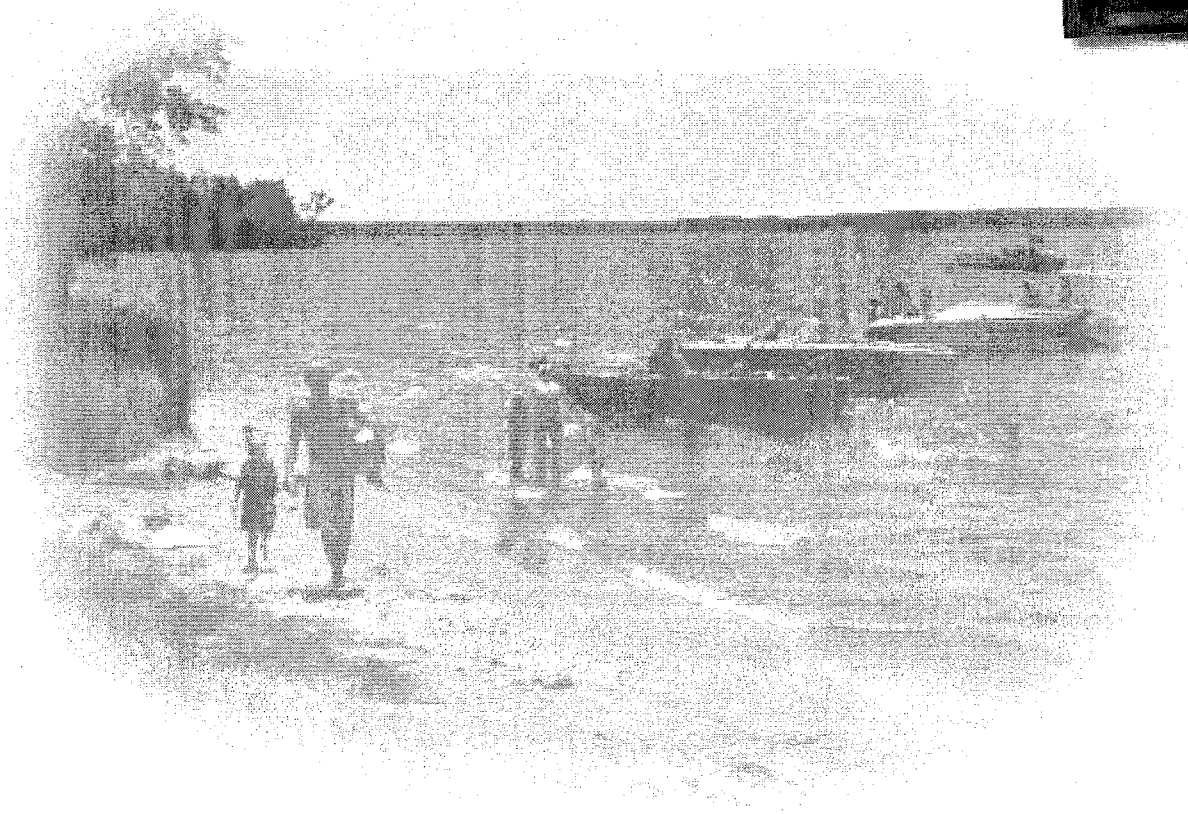
Historically, Wisconsin was the second state in the nation to establish a state park. Since that time, Wisconsin has developed a state park system that today serves about 14 million visits each year with properties including state parks, recreation areas, trails, and southern state forests (see Appendix A). Properties within the Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) provide quality nature-based recreation and education opportunities while protecting some of the state's outstanding natural and cultural resources and generating millions of dollars in revenue for local communities and Wisconsin residents.

Today, the Wisconsin State Park System stands at a critical crossroads. As the population of the state continues to grow and urbanize, the demands on the WSPS have changed. Younger visitors are requesting areas for modern recreational activities such as disc golf and rock climbing, urban residents are requesting recreational lands closer to their homes, and motorized campers are requesting more parks with electrified campsites. In response to these demands, the WSPS will need to continue to add properties, upgrade facilities, and enhance the recreational and natural resources it already provides.

Using an extensive citizen involvement process (see Appendix B), this strategic plan presents a series of eight goals with associated objectives and action strategies intended to guide the Wisconsin State Park System as it expands and enhances its network of properties. These goals, centered around the WSPS mission "to protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of our Wisconsin State Park System....." are based on the three core elements of the WSPS: recreation, resource protection, and education. From these goals, action strategies were created to improve recreational opportunities on WSPS properties, preserve and restore the natural resource base of these properties, and educate visitors on important ecological and cultural issues within the state and state park properties. These goals and actions will serve as the template for all development, restoration, and management activities of the WSPS until the year 2013.

The 2008–2013 strategic plan is not intended to list all activities to be undertaken by the WSPS, but rather to identify the goals and objectives of highest priority to the system. Further, this plan should not supplant other critical planning processes, but is intended to complement and improve the WSPS's ability to participate in these efforts. Several other planning documents, particularly the *2005–2010 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*, and the *2006 Wisconsin State Parks Annual Report*, provide valuable information on recreational and demographic trends and the current status of the WSPS system. These reports should be consulted as part of a unified package of planning documents used to guide the WSPS system in the coming years.





The Wisconsin State Park System has long represented the ecological, cultural, and recreational wealth of the state. With these goals and actions, we present a plan for improving and expanding this already strong network and look positively towards the future of a modern Wisconsin State Park System attentive to the needs and demands of its visitors and state citizens.

Wisconsin State Parks fall within a spectrum of recreational uses and development levels. Some state parks provide a remote setting and host nature-based recreational activities such as hiking, fishing, and birdwatching. On the other end of the spectrum, some state parks have concerted recreational development and offer a wide range of activities and experiences. Most state park properties, however, fall within the E^3 niche, offering some level of development and a range of recreational experiences and education, while also protecting natural landscapes.

ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK
offers a remote experience on a 912-acre Lake Michigan island.

LAKESHORE STATE PARK
provides access to Lake Michigan for the state's largest urban population.

The Wisconsin State Park System offers a spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities.

HARTMAN CREEK STATE PARK
offers accessible fishing opportunities for all generations.

GOVERNOR DODGE STATE PARK
provides a natural backdrop to enjoy nature-based outdoor recreation such as cross-country skiing.

Wisconsin State Park System **Goals and Strategies**

This section describes eight goals with associated objectives and action strategies. The strategic plan was developed using an extensive citizen involvement process, including a series of town meetings and an online survey (see Appendix B). Using this information, planners crafted goals based on the core elements of the WSPS: recreation, resource protection, and education. Along with these core goals, additional goals were developed that focused upon other elements such as a customer focused workforce, financial stability, and effective planning. Combined, these goals and actions will serve as the template for the WSPS until the year 2013.

"Nature-based outdoor recreation means activities where the primary focus or purpose is the appreciation or enjoyment of nature. These activities may include but are not limited to hiking, bicycling, wildlife or nature observation, camping...with signs, interpretive items, and other features that enhance nature-based outdoor recreation or improved disabled accessibility..."

— *Natural Resources Administrative Code 51.002(19), Administration of Stewardship Grants*

Wisconsin State Park System Goals

- Expand the quality and quantity of sustainable, nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities available to Wisconsin State Park System visitors,
- Actively manage, restore, enhance, and protect the natural, cultural, and scenic heritage of the Wisconsin State Park System,
- Provide innovative interpretive opportunities and programs that foster knowledge, appreciation, and stewardship of the state's natural and cultural resources and promote participation in nature-based outdoor recreation,
- Strengthen the Wisconsin State Park System facilities development program to better provide for customer comfort and safety,
- Motivate and enable a dedicated and customer-focused workforce,
- Achieve financial strength and stability for the Wisconsin State Park System,
- Attract new Wisconsin State Park System customers through innovative marketing strategies, and retain current customers through exceptional service,
- Improve operational effectiveness, planning, and decision-making by managing and using accurate and reliable information.

GOAL

Expand the quality and quantity of sustainable, nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities available to Wisconsin State Park System visitors.

One of the primary missions of the Wisconsin State Park System is to provide landscapes for a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities. In accomplishing this goal, WSPS properties should work to provide spaces for traditional activities such as fishing and hiking, as well as cutting edge activities such as earthcaching. State park landscapes should also offer a broad spectrum of recreational experiences, from wilderness opportunities to those designed for recreational vehicle users.

As the WSPS continues to expand and develop its system of recreational opportunities through sustainable development, it should also work to protect natural and cultural resources, using these valuable resources to instill a stewardship ethic in WSPS visitors. Facilities such as educational kiosks, visitor centers, and guided nature hikes go a long way towards educating visitors on the value of state park resources, and the larger statewide landscape. By providing a balanced system of education, recreation, and resource protection, the WSPS will continue to protect valuable state landscapes, while also providing visitors with spaces in which to recreate and enjoy nature.

Objective I.

Acquire new properties and in-holdings for expanded outdoor recreation opportunities.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Complete a WSPS acquisition plan that will guide acquisitions over a five year period.
- Develop and implement a policy that secures funding for staffing and operations before new properties are opened for public use.
- In conjunction and with the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* and *Land Legacy Plan*, focus upon existing park system properties for increased protection and preservation through property expansions and acquisitions.

Objective II.

Develop sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities that meet visitors' needs and enrich their experiences.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Work to raise the statutory cap on WSPS electrical campsites to meet customer demand.
- Complete a survey of potential WSPS users, assess what users want and where they want it, and identify our ability to meet these expectations.
- Develop a plan to review the viability of a motorized state recreation area.
- Identify existing and future camping needs and opportunities that the WSPS could provide, such as camper cabins, Adirondack shelters, backpack campsites, walk-in campsites, tent campsites, group camps, and RV campsites.
- Fully implement the WSPS camping study.
- Expand and promote outdoor recreation opportunities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, and other nature-based recreation. Create and maintain facilities that are accessible to a diverse population.

Objective III.

Bring the existing WSPS trails and state trails up to best practice levels of planning, design, sustainability, development, and maintenance.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Establish WSPS "best practice" standards for trail planning, design, development, and maintenance.
- Begin to upgrade state trails to best practice standards using a priority system to identify the trails most in need of improvement; work with state trail partners to upgrade county operated state trails.
- Develop and implement policies for acquisition, development, and management of all aspects of WSPS trails, including state and cooperatively managed trails.
- Acquire railroad rights-of-way as they become available to complete the Wisconsin State Trails Network plan.
- Contract for development of a plan that builds on existing plans to recommend uses for future state trails.
- Develop a budget initiative that will provide funding to contract for a plan that includes an accurate and accessible inventory of existing state trails and unit trails using the latest in GIS technology.

Objective IV.

Work towards completing the Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail (IAT) and the North Country National Scenic and State Trail (NCT).

ACTION STRATEGIES:

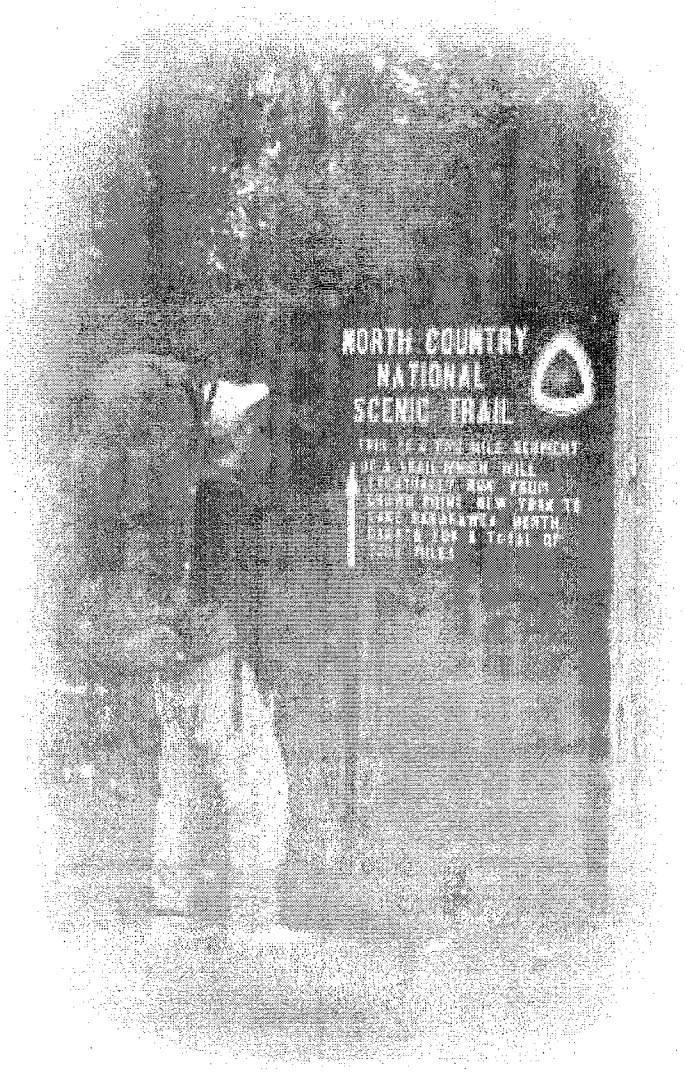
- Create a National Scenic Trails Property Manager position within the Bureau of Parks and Recreation with responsibility for coordinating land management and land acquisition on the IAT and NCT.
- Establish a State Ice Age Trail Area dedication process (under authority of s.23.293, Wis. Stats.).
- Secure state and federal funding for State Ice Age Trail Area management.
- Develop a program to facilitate dispersed camping for long-distance foot travel on the IAT and NCT.
- Include duties related to IAT and NCT in all appropriate field staff work plans.
- On an ongoing basis, work with the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation and the North Country Trail Association to facilitate construction of IAT and NCT segments to standards outlined in *A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance* for IAT and NCT.

Objective V.

Identify health and wellness connections to outdoor recreation and promote these benefits through program and facility design and marketing efforts.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Work with Friends groups and concessionaires (see Appendix C) during contract negotiations to provide more healthy food and beverage choices in the properties' concessions.
- Identify five parks and five trails within the WSPS and begin a pilot program implementing partnerships with local health care organizations to promote the use of facilities for health and wellness.
- Forge partnerships with major health organizations (see Appendix C) to develop funding for marketing and for development and maintenance of trails within the WSPS.



GOAL

Actively manage, restore, enhance, and protect the natural, cultural, and scenic heritage of the Wisconsin State Park System.

Heritage Resources: The natural, cultural, and scenic resources of our Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) properties, including natural communities and landscapes, wildlife, water resources, geological features, archaeological features, and historic sites.

Each property within the Wisconsin State Park System represents a unique facet of the state's cultural heritage and ecological wealth. Within state park properties, visitors find diverse landscapes from prairies and savannas to northern pine forests. Abundant water resources in inland lakes, Great Lakes shoreline, rivers, and streams lure boaters and anglers. Many WSPS lands, including units in the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve, protect valuable geological features, and most harbor cultural resources that illustrate Wisconsin's rich human history. These properties comprise the Heritage Resources *of the Wisconsin State Park System.*

Although they contain significant ecological and cultural resources, WSPS properties are being threatened on a number of fronts. Native plant and wildlife communities face competition from aggressive invasive species like garlic mustard, buckthorn, and wild parsnip. Overabundant white-tailed deer populations are disrupting a delicate ecological balance across much of the state, while other management issues such as forest regeneration, prairie and savanna restoration, and protection of endangered and threatened species also continue to require attention on WSPS properties.

Cultural resources are also in need of protection. Artifacts and historic sites located on WSPS properties must be thoroughly inventoried, interpreted, and conserved for WSPS visitors. Through effective collaboration and consultation, the WSPS can work to restore the valuable natural and cultural resources of State Park properties.

Objective I.

Organize a formal Heritage Management Program within the Bureau of Parks and Recreation.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

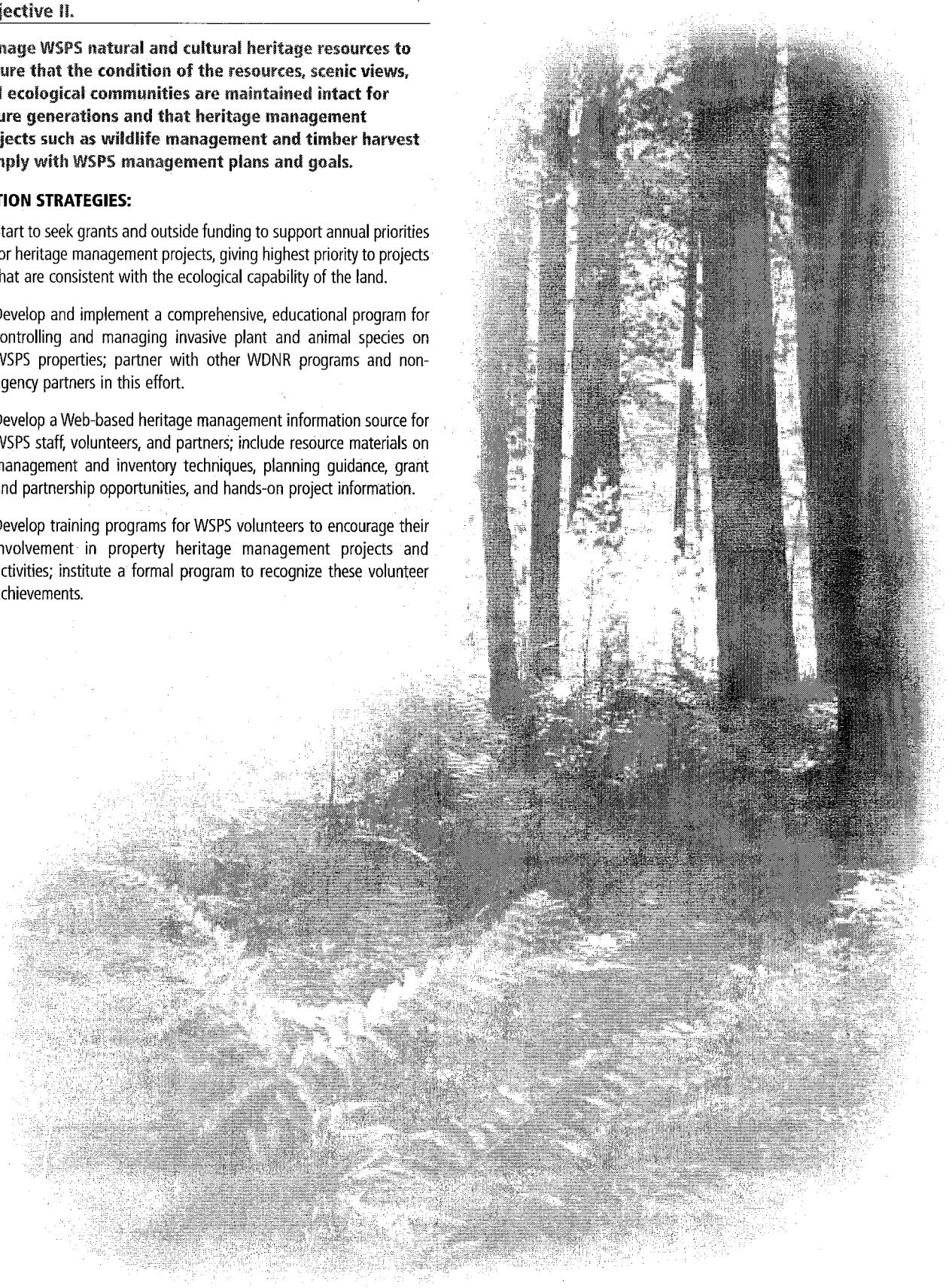
- Define as the WSPS's guiding heritage management goal, the restoration and management of park and forest resources consistent with the ecological capability of the land.
- Complete heritage management inventories and plans for at least two WSPS properties in each region per year.
- Develop a system that will incorporate heritage management goals into the statewide parks program through master planning, heritage resource planning, policy development, and support.
- Conduct regional surveys to review the status of current WSPS property resource inventories and master plans; consult with other WDNR programs and property managers to assist in gathering this information.
- Develop and adopt a heritage management plan template; provide ongoing training to WSPS staff in the development of heritage management plans and inventories. Within the template, a system for evaluating completed heritage management plans (HMPs) will be created to ensure that the plans reflect changing property issues, trends, and heritage management tools, and are appropriate for the natural and cultural resources present on each property.
- Seek funding to implement heritage resource inventories.
- Implement an electronic database/GPS/GIS layers for compiling and accessing heritage resources inventory and project information, including management actions completed, location of sensitive resources, and invasive species present.
- Develop WSPS heritage management policies, including "desired conditions," for inclusion in the *Recreation Operations Handbook.*

Objective II.

Manage WSPS natural and cultural heritage resources to ensure that the condition of the resources, scenic views, and ecological communities are maintained intact for future generations and that heritage management projects such as wildlife management and timber harvest comply with WSPS management plans and goals.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Start to seek grants and outside funding to support annual priorities for heritage management projects, giving highest priority to projects that are consistent with the ecological capability of the land.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive, educational program for controlling and managing invasive plant and animal species on WSPS properties; partner with other WDNR programs and non-agency partners in this effort.
- Develop a Web-based heritage management information source for WSPS staff, volunteers, and partners; include resource materials on management and inventory techniques, planning guidance, grant and partnership opportunities, and hands-on project information.
- Develop training programs for WSPS volunteers to encourage their involvement in property heritage management projects and activities; institute a formal program to recognize these volunteer achievements.



GOAL

Provide innovative interpretive opportunities and programs that foster knowledge, appreciation, and stewardship of the state's natural and cultural resources and promote participation in nature-based outdoor recreation.

The Wisconsin State Parks interpretive program has been a leader in the Department's educational efforts since the program was formalized in the mid-1960s. Wisconsin State Park System properties function as "outdoor classrooms," encouraging visitors to connect with the properties' natural and cultural resources. Interpretive services today include a variety of educational approaches, including guided hikes, self-guided trails, evening programs, exhibits, and publications.

In 2000, the WSPS participated in an assessment of interpretive services, determining core needs of the program. To move ahead, the program should build a firm foundation of funding and staff from which to launch new programs and maintain existing programs. In both of these initiatives, the WSPS should strive to meet the demands of all property visitors, including campers, day users, school and youth groups, and local communities.

Objective I.

Review and update the *Statewide Interpretive Plan* and develop and update property interpretive plans (PIPs) that clearly define the interpretive niche of each WSPS property.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Each State Park property will complete a PIP.
- Review and update the Statewide Interpretive Plan.

Objective II.

Secure sufficient funding and staffing to ensure quality personal and non-personal interpretive services.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Implement property interpretive plans; use system-wide standards to support appropriate personal and non-personal services for each property type.
- Create system-wide standards and criteria (based on property size and visitation) for use in proposing interpretive centers at appropriate WSPS properties.

Objective III.

Develop performance standards and a system of training for WSPS staff and volunteers to ensure that every visitor contact is a positive educational contact.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Implement a program that will provide training, program materials, service opportunities, evaluation, and recognition for interpretive volunteers.
- Develop performance standards for personal and non-personal services and incorporate them into the *WSPS Interpretive Handbook.*
- Update and implement a professional development plan for FTE and LTE interpreters based on performance standards, to include Association for Interpretation certification for appropriate WSPS staff.

GOAL

Strengthen the Wisconsin State Park System facilities development program to better provide for customer comfort and safety.

Although natural resources are generally regarded as core elements of WSPS properties, property facilities are also invaluable components of the system. Visitor and education centers, picnic areas, offices, shelter buildings, campgrounds, and trails all enhance a property's natural resources and contribute to visitor enjoyment.

Customer demand for facilities and recreation opportunities has increased over the years, and the WSPS development program has not kept pace with these demands. To best accommodate WSPS visitors, the system should work to design and complete new development projects while also maintaining a regular program of maintenance and development. Financing for these projects may come from public funding sources such as the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program. Facilities like education and visitor centers are essential components of the WSPS and, as such, should be accounted for in the planning and budgeting processes for system properties.

Objective I.

Standardize designs for WSPS facilities.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Field managers shall conduct a functional evaluation of all development projects exceeding $40,000 within one year of completion. Internal and external feedback will be incorporated into design standards for future use.
- Provide building design to improve security at WSPS properties.
- Update design standards for WSPS facilities to capture WSPS identity and the local character in the region of the property.
- Develop standardized building designs so that facility design is driven by "green construction," life-cycle costs, emerging technologies, and accessibility.

Objective II.

Develop and implement a system for establishing capital development priorities.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop and implement a priority system that is compatible with Department standards.
- Develop an electronic database of the project priority system.

Objective III.

Reduce the backlog of operations, maintenance, and development projects in the WSPS.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Conduct annual tours of WSPS properties with department staff and other appropriate individuals to identify operations, development, and maintenance needs.
- Submit request for approval of an accelerated funding program that eliminates the existing backlog of capital improvement projects within ten years.

GOAL

Motivate and enable a dedicated and customer-focused workforce.

To successfully provide opportunities for recreation and education, and to protect heritage resources, the WSPS uses a highly skilled workforce. Maintaining this stable and inspired staff will be critical for accomplishing the core functions of the WSPS.

Beginning with effective recruitment and quality training opportunities, the WSPS should work to develop employees with balanced backgrounds and skill sets that include resource management, interpretation, customer service, and administration. Once hired and trained, staff members should be retained through career development and recognition programs.

The WSPS is a dynamic organization, and dealing with change calls for effective communication. Staff at the field, regional, and central office levels should be able to share information quickly and effectively through a variety of media. By developing communication methods and hiring and retaining a diverse, effective workforce, the WSPS will strengthen all aspects of its operation, enabling the system to serve all needs of its citizen users.

Objective I.

Implement new hiring criteria to ensure that WSPS employees are both qualified within their area of expertise and well-grounded in a variety of other areas, including resource management.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop a standardized (although regionally implemented) interview and selection process for FTE positions.
- Implement an improved background investigation process and expand the process for all WSPS employees and volunteers; incorporate psychological testing into the hiring process for credentialed, full-time employee (FTE) positions.
- Develop a recruitment program for WSPS that includes presentations and publications for use at job fairs, technical colleges, professional meetings, and other venues.
- Evaluate, review, and update compensation structure, entrance exams, applications, and recruitment processes to meet new FTE performance standards; implement a competency-based system that ensures the hiring of candidates that are both experts in their field and well-rounded in their knowledge and experience.

Objective II.

Implement a comprehensive training and professional development program that provides opportunities for continuing education, training, and recognition for all WSPS employees.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop and implement a training program that includes educational programming on a variety of WSPS and career-related topics and is targeted to the needs of all employees.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive WSPS orientation course that may include field training and interaction with staff at a variety of properties, central office staff, and representatives from other WDNR programs and partner organizations and require that all employees attend WSPS orientation within one year of employment.

Objective III.

Promote better communications among WSPS staff (field, regional, and central office).

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Implement an effective DNR Intranet site to effectively communicate issues; include topics related to a variety of functions, including PMT, administration, customer service, law enforcement, interpretive services, maintenance, and resource management.
- Develop a system for streamlining the Parks Management Team (PMT) meeting and issue resolution process; ensure that all pre- and post-PMT meeting materials are shared with field staff in a timely and efficient manner.

Objective IV.

Protect WSPS visitors and resources by utilizing proactive education and enforcement techniques.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

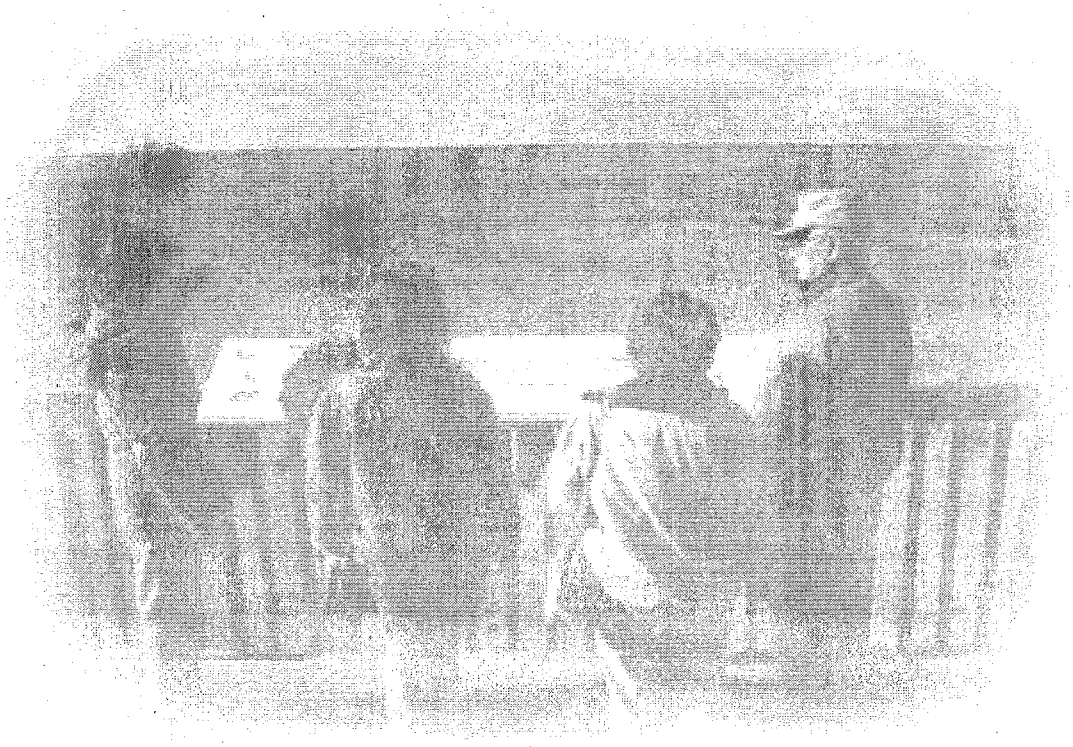
- On an ongoing basis, educate all property staff on property-specific ecological, geological, and cultural features.
- Use the *2007 Law Enforcement Study* and law enforcement workload analysis to determine the appropriate level of WSPS law enforcement.
- Based upon the determination of appropriate levels of park law enforcement, pursue protective retirement status for staff required by that position description to maintain credentials.

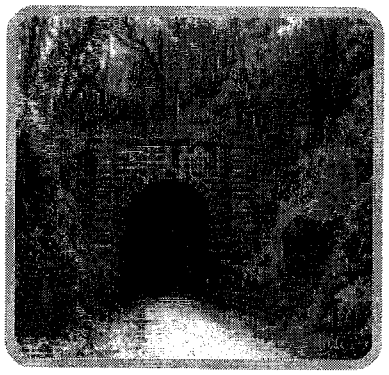
Objective V.

Use WSPS operating standards to improve staffing levels within the WSPS and review all classifications for consistency and appropriateness.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Evaluate WSPS positions to establish state park operating standards.
- Evaluate all WSPS position classifications for appropriateness and consistency statewide.





GOAL

Achieve financial strength and stability for the Wisconsin State Park System.

To consistently meet operational needs, the WSPS should have an adequate and stable funding source. The existing formula, a combination of allocations from the Segregated and General Funds, places the park system in a position of financial jeopardy with every new biennium. Securing stable alternative funding sources would allow the WSPS to provide high quality recreation and education experiences on a consistent, long-term basis.

Objective I.

Study and develop funding sources that will reduce dependency on General Purpose Revenue.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Evaluate funding options to seek long term support for the WSPS. If viable operations are found, work with Department staff to craft funding strategies.

Objective II.

Develop a system of allotment standards to determine property budget needs and resulting annual allocations.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop standards that objectively quantify workload, resource, and staffing needs, while considering revenue and cost/benefit implications at each property; use the standards to develop budget initiatives and track operational cost increases.
- Implement new standards in allocating property budgets and developing budget initiatives for all functional areas:
  - Heritage Resource Management & Maintenance
  - Administration
  - Visitor and Resource Protection
  - Interpretation and Education
  - Visitor Services
  - Development
  - Human Resources
  - Financial Stability
  - Trails
  - Marketing and Partnerships
  - Planning

Objective III.

Develop a simplified fee structure and collection system to optimize efficiency, customer service, and revenue.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Review the current assortment of admission and camping fees to implement a simplified fee schedule.
- Investigate and evaluate current and emerging technologies and implement an expanded automated fee collection system.

Objective IV.

Appropriately finance, staff, and plan for a successful State Trails Program.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop staffing and operating standards for state trails based on best practices and acquire state trail management positions according to the standards.
- Develop a comprehensive state trail guide for state and national distribution.
- Seek opportunities to appropriately finance the State Trail System and guarantee consistent management statewide.
- Create and maintain one dedicated Regional Trails Manager position in each WDNR region.

GOAL

Attract new Wisconsin State Park System customers through innovative marketing strategies and retain current customers through exceptional service.

The WSPS has been providing park services for more than a century, with strong marketing and partnership programs contributing to this success (see Appendix C). Today, WSPS properties are extremely popular. Because of this popularity, a number of marketing partnerships have been forged that have become increasingly important in the operation of the WSPS (see Appendix C). The system benefits greatly from strong relationships with partners such the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, state and local Friends groups, health and wellness providers, and other agencies. These partnerships must be recognized and strengthened for both the financial and labor assistance they provide to the park system

Using innovative marketing strategies that provide outstanding customer service will be essential to retaining property visitors. Every contact with a visitor should be positive and should help promote the image of the WSPS. These marketing strategies should be used to promote new properties, facilities, and services as they become available, while planning processes should determine recreation trends and customer needs, developing action plans to accommodate demand.

Objective I.

Develop a targeted marketing plan for the WSPS.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Define and improve the image and brand of the WSPS and implement standards of use.
- Better define niches and markets for underused WSPS properties.
- Enhance the WSPS merchandise program in support of the marketing plan.

Objective II.

Educate customers on WSPS offerings and improve customer feedback mechanisms.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

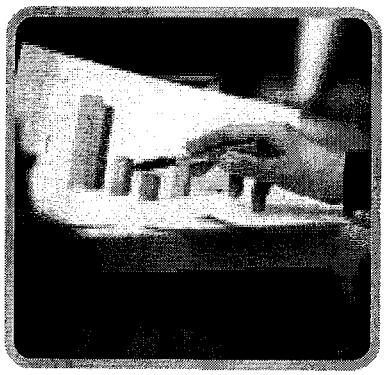
- Work to coordinate the WSPS marketing program with the interpretive program through joint efforts such as special events, display development, and interactions with the Department of Tourism and other tourism providers.
- Develop image standards for brochures, maps, and other publications.
- Establish greater links between individual state park properties and recreational activity groups to assist in promoting the WSPS brand.
- Create a media plan that explores non-traditional media options for advertising.
- Develop an accurate, uniform, and consistent Web page for every WSPS property.

Objective III.

Strengthen partnerships with tourism organizations, Friends groups, and other external partners to increase promotion, visitation, and revenue to WSPS.
See Appendix C.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Assist property Friends groups with generating exposure, including collaboration with Department of Tourism and Travel Green on projects or events by region or topic of interest.
- Strengthen communication between the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks, Inc. and WSPS staff, while working together to develop tools for increased promotion and advocacy on a statewide level.
- Enhance the recognition program for volunteers and partners.



GOAL

Improve operational effectiveness, planning, and decision-making by managing and using accurate and reliable information.

Property plans provide guidelines for a quality park experience and ensure statewide consistency in park operations. Although the WSPS has historically worked with many partners to develop plans, the planning process will be more expeditiously accomplished by streamlining some aspects.

To meet customer and stakeholder demands while also achieving planning goals, the WSPS should update and expand its electronic data sets to include a wider variety of property, user, and infrastructure data. Many of these data sets should be readily available to staff, researchers, students, and park and trail users to make informed decisions.

To reduce confusion among potential visitors, the WSPS should also work to clarify its system of property naming. Currently, some state properties labeled as state park or state forest would be more appropriately described by another name. The classification of units within the WSPS should be developed to ensure uniformity and clarity of public expectations.

Objective I.

Update property master plans on a timely basis.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Develop property master plans that are driven by statewide WSPS objectives and that contain property-specific needs assessments.
- Assist in the creation of the Department master planning handbook.
- Develop a WSPS property master plan classification system that classifies and names properties according to their key characteristics and most logical use.

Objective II.

Improve data collection, management, and reporting systems for all levels of the WSPS.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Leading by example, engage a third-party certification program for the WSPS that will provide a benchmark for continuous quality improvements.
- Determine the appropriate databases necessary for effective management, development, and planning tools. Work with the Bureau of Facilities and Lands on implementation.

Objective III.

Utilize skilled team management to effectively implement all phases of the 2008 WSPS Strategic Plan.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

- Delegate critical elements of the strategic plan to specialist teams with specific and achievable deadlines.
- On a biennial basis, PMT will develop strategic plan implementation objectives to be incorporated into budget allotments, team assignments, and individual work plans.
- On a biennial basis, prepare a WSPS Biennial Report to document system achievements and implementation progress.

APPENDIX A

State Parks, State Trails, Recreation Areas, and Southern Forests

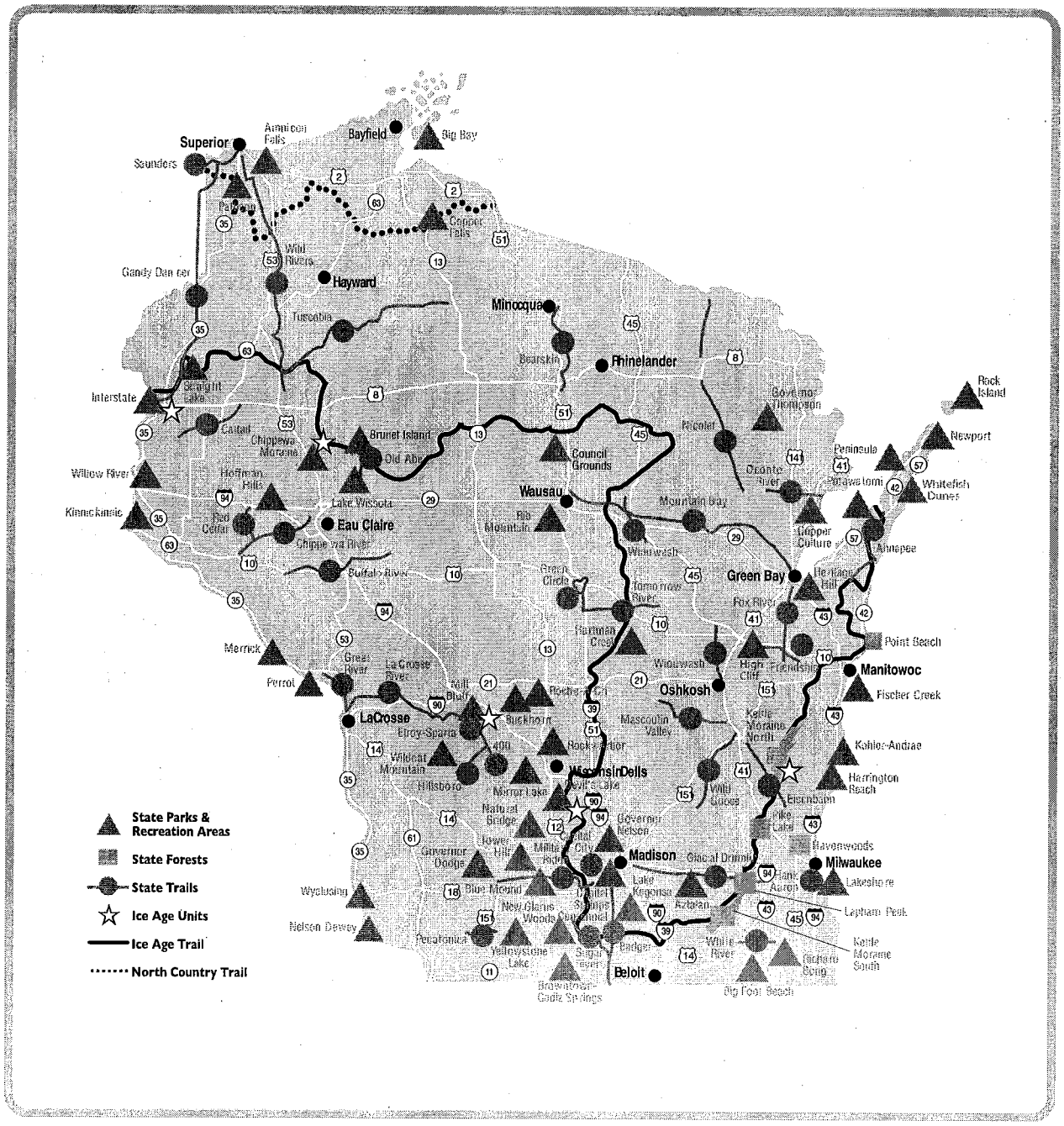
State Parks, Recreation Areas, and Southern Forests

Amnicon Falls State Park
Aztalan State Park
Belmont Mound State Park
Big Bay State Park
Big Foot Beach State Park
Blue Mound State Park
Browntown-Cadiz Springs State Recreation Area
Brunet Island State Park
Buckhorn State Park
Capital Springs State Park and Recreation Area
Chippewa Moraine State Recreation Area
Copper Culture State Park
Copper Falls State Park
Council Grounds State Park
Devil's Lake State Park
Fischer Creek State Recreation Area
Governor Dodge State Park
Governor Nelson State Park
Governor Thompson State Park
Harrington Beach State Park
Hartman Creek State Park
Havenwoods State Forest
Heritage Hill State Park
High Cliff State Park
Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area
Interstate State Park
Kettle Moraine State Forest-Lapham Peak Unit
Kettle Moraine State Forest-Loew Lake Unit
Kettle Moraine State Forest-Northern Unit
Kettle Moraine State Forest-Pike Lake Unit
Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit
Kinnickinnic State Park
Kohler-Andrae State Park
Lake Kegonsa State Park
Lake Wissota State Park
Lakeshore State Park
Merrick State Park
Mill Bluff State Park
Mirror Lake State Park
Natural Bridge State Park
Nelson Dewey State Park
New Glarus Woods State Park
Newport State Park
Pattison State Park
Peninsula State Park
Perrot State Park
Point Beach State Forest
Potawatomi State Park
Rib Mountain State Park
Richard Bong State Recreation Area
Roche-a-Cri State Park
Rock Island State Park
Rocky Arbor State Park
Straight Lake State Park
Tower Hill State Park
Whitefish Dunes State Park
Wildcat Mountain State Park
Willow River State Park
Wyalusing State Park
Yellowstone Lake State Park

State Trails

"400" State Trail
Ahnapee State Trail
Amery to Dresser State Trail
Badger State Trail
Bearskin State Trail
Buffalo River State Trail
Capital City State Trail
Cattail State Trail
Chippewa River State Trail
Devil's River State Trail
Eisenbahn State Trail
Elroy-Sparta State Trail
Fox River State Trail
Friendship State Trail
Gandy Dancer State Trail
Glacial Drumlin State Trail
Great River State Trail
Green Circle State Trail
Hank Aaron State Trail
Hillsboro State Trail
Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail
La Crosse River State Trail
Mascoutin Valley State Trail
Military Ridge State Trail
Mountain-Bay State Trail
New London to Seymour State Trail
Nicolet State Trail
North Country National Scenic and State Trail
Oconto River State Trail
Old Abe State Trail
Pecatonica State Trail
Red Cedar State Trail
Saunders State Trail
Sugar River State Trail
Tomorrow River State Trail
Tuscobia State Trail
White River State Trail
Wild Goose State Trail
Wild Rivers State Trail
Wiouwash State Trail

The Wisconsin State Park System



APPENDIX B

WSPS Strategic Planning Public Input Process

In developing this strategic plan, the Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) invited input from Wisconsin citizens and visitors through several venues. To allow for public input in a "face-to-face" setting, staff held several "town meetings" to gather information. These meetings were held at the following locations:

In addition to the meetings held with members of the general public, the Bureau of Parks and Recreation also held two internal meetings with the Bureaus of Endangered Resources and Facilities and Lands. An online survey system invited concerned stakeholders to provide comments on the WSPS website.

Schedule of Town Meetings

CITY	LOCATION	DATE (2005)	TIME
Wausau	Stoney Creek Inn 1100 Imperial Ave. Mosinee, WI 54455 (715) 355-6858	June 1	6-9 pm
Rhinelander	Holiday Inn Express 668 W. Kemp St. Rhinelander, WI 54501 (715) 369-3600	June 8	6-9 pm
Superior	Superior Public Library 1530 Tower Ave. Superior, WI 54880 (715) 394-8860	June 9	6-9 pm
Madison	Lussier Heritage Center 3101 Lake Farm Rd. Madison, WI 53711 (608) 224-3604	June 21	6-9 pm
Eau Claire	West Central Region Office 1300 W. Clairemont Ave. Eau Claire, WI 54702 (715) 839-1607	June 27	6-9 pm
La Crosse	University of WI-La Crosse Cartwright Center RM #259 1740 State St. La Crosse, WI 54601 (608) 785-8892	June 28	6-9 pm
Milwaukee	Havenwoods State Forest Office 6141 N. Hopkins St. Milwaukee, WI 53209 (414) 527-0232	July 12	6-9 pm
Oshkosh	Coughlin Center - Room B 625 E. County Rd. Y. Oshkosh, WI 54901 (920) 232-1972	July 13	6-9 pm
Sturgeon Bay	Whitefish Dunes State Park 3275 Clark Lake Rd. Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235 (920) 823-2400	July 16	afternoon

At the meetings and in the online survey, participants were invited to give comments on the draft mission and vision statements of the State Park System and answer the following questions:

- *What three outdoor recreation issues do you see as growing in significance during the next five years?*
- *What is your preferred recreational setting?*
- *What three barriers are keeping you from recreating outdoors as often as you would like?*
- *When you go to a state park, what improvements would you like to see?*
- *What services and educational programs should our staff provide to you during your visit to the state parks and trails?*
- *What type and quality of natural resources or scenic features do you value and expect to experience when you visit a state park or trail?*
- *How should we pay for the operation of the State Park System?*
- *What are your expectations and hopes for the State Park System over the next five years?*

In response to these questions, online survey respondents suggested the following:

Mission

In response to the draft mission statement, respondents were generally positive. They indicated that state parks deserve a high level of protection and care and that the mission statement worked to preserve the natural and cultural resources of the state.

Some respondents indicated that because the Ice Age Trail is such a large component of recreation within Wisconsin, it should be incorporated into the mission statement as well. Other respondents wanted the mission to focus more exclusively on providing recreational and educational opportunities that preserve and enhance the ecological features of state parks. These respondents felt that quiet, passive recreation should be emphasized over motorized vehicle usage (e.g. ATVs and snowmobiles).

Vision

In response to the draft vision statement, online survey respondents were generally supportive. Some respondents indicated that they would like to see a greater emphasis placed on natural resource stewardship and the protection of wild places from development. Many respondents indicated that nature-based, non-motorized outdoor recreation should be a priority for the management of state parks and trails.

Improvements

Respondents to the online survey indicated that they would like to see the following improvements to Wisconsin State Park System properties:

- Better bathroom and shower facilities
- Campgrounds with RV/electric sites separated from tent sites
- Cleaner restrooms
- Flush toilets
- More biking trails
- More campsites
- More campsites with electric hookups
- More groomed ski trails
- More hiking trails
- More horse trails
- More trail signs
- Quieter camping areas
- Trail markers

Services

Online survey respondents indicated that the following services would improve the experience of Wisconsin State Park System for visitors:

- Better signage
- Educational programs emphasizing the history and natural resources of parks and surrounding areas, as well as information on native plants and ecosystems
- Increased enforcement at Wisconsin State Parks
- More programs directed toward children
- Naturalist-led hikes and educational programs
- Self-guided tours
- Trail maps

Scenic Values

Survey respondents generally indicated that they value the natural, scenic resources of the Wisconsin State Park System. These included clean water, scenic overlooks, natural areas and features, undeveloped wilderness areas, forest areas, lakes and rivers, wildlife, and the sense of peace and quiet Wisconsin State Parks afford all visitors.

Funding

Among online survey respondents, the following were suggested as ways to help fund the WSPS system:

- Charging more for out-of-state users
- Combination of user fees and taxes
- Entrance fees
- Increased fines
- Raising fees
- State taxes
- User fees

Hopes

Respondents to the online survey indicated that they would like to see the WSPS continue to grow and expand to meet visitor demands while still maintaining parks' integrity and beauty. This will likely require an increased budget, including specific allocations for educational and interpretive services.

Many respondents also wanted to see an expansion of outdoor activities and facilities, including more horse trails, paved bike trails, and electric campsites. Motorized sports, however, were for the most part not wanted in WSPS properties—respondents hoped to see parks remain rustic, quiet, and nature-based.

Other respondents would like to see an increased emphasis on ecological preservation and restoration. These people would like the WSPS to acquire more lands to preserve biodiversity, especially Wisconsin's dwindling prairie ecosystem and oak woodlands. Some respondents also suggested that the WSPS work with other land management agencies and private landowners to provide habitat linkages for wildlife.

APPENDIX C

Partnerships

Friends of Wisconsin State Parks

The lead partner to the Wisconsin State Park System is the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks, Inc. (FWSP). This nonprofit organization was established in 1989 by the late Dave Hammer, Bureau of Parks and Recreation Section Chief for External Relations and Planning. The organization is defined in Administrative Code NR 1.71 and was incorporated in 1996. The FWSP was created with the mission of bringing concerned community members together to participate in the preservation and promotion of the WSPS. As one of its primary goals, the FWSP provides ongoing support and capacity-building for local Friends groups.

The FWSP also supports the State Park System and the WDNR by providing input on decisions and planning, and gives monetarily to efforts such as the WSPS interpretive services and volunteer recognition programs. Finally, the FWSP works to spread messages that support the State Park System to members, conservationists, and citizens, and advocates for protection of the WSPS on a legislative level. The FWSP envisions a Wisconsin where state parks and trails are recognized, enjoyed, and restored as a legacy for future generations and a natural and cultural heritage worth fighting to protect.

Across the state, individual property Friends groups have formed to enhance the quality of experiences enjoyed by property visitors, and to actively participate in the management and protection of natural and cultural resources. Wisconsin leads the nation in numbers of property Friends groups, growing from just 10 groups in 1989 to 82 today. Of these groups, 21 are affiliated with state trails, 52 are affiliated with state parks, 7 are affiliated with state forests, and 2 are affiliated with environmental education centers. In 2005, Friends groups statewide logged over $250,000 in donations to the WSPS and more than 26,000 volunteer hours. As the program continues to grow, so too does its capacity to help the park system.

Cooperative Trail Program

The Cooperative Trail Program started in 1985 when the WDNR entered into cooperative agreements with Dodge and Fond du Lac counties regarding the Wild Goose State Trail. Since then, 23 additional designated state trails have become cooperatively operated and maintained. These trails are cooperatively run by counties throughout Wisconsin under cooperative agreements or Memorandums of Agreement. Contracts are negotiated with each county, giving the county the authority and responsibility to manage and operate the trail under consideration. The WDNR enters into these agreements under the authority of State Statute 23.175.

Participation in the state trail fee program is determined by each county, as established in State Statute 27.01 (8). If a trail does charge a trail fee, the WDNR retains a portion of the fees while the county retains a commission on the fees (up to 70 percent). All counties must use the retained trail fees for trail operations. In cooperation with the WDNR, counties also designate appropriate trail uses in trail master plans.

In 2007, the WDNR will undertake a planning process that will combine and update the *State Trail Strategic Plan* and the *State Trail Network Plan.* The resulting new plan will prescribe trail uses for rail corridors identified in the *State Trail Network Plan,* which was approved by the Natural Resources Board in 2001. Throughout this planning process, counties and citizens will provide input into trail use decisions. Additional planning for those trails turned over to a county will be completed by the county with assistance from the WDNR. A programmatic environmental assessment for the corridors identified in the State Trail Network Plan will also be developed.

Several Wisconsin State Trails, including the Gandy Dancer, Old Abe, Capital City, and Fox River state trails have received federal funding through the Transportation Enhancements (TE) program. Nearly one-third of Wisconsin's state trails have received or will receive Transportation Enhancement funding. This funding source prohibits the use of motorized vehicles, with the exception of snowmobiles, on funded projects (as established in 23 USC 217 (h), and 23 CFR 652.7 (3) (ii)).

The National Park Service

An important partner for the WSPS is the National Park Service (NPS). Two Wisconsin trails are designated and administered at both the national and state levels: the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and State Scenic Trail, and the North Country National Scenic and State Scenic Trail. Because these trails are designated as both national and state trails, the National Park Service shares responsibility in administration with the WDNR. Working together under the guidance of the NPS, the agencies provide planning, acquisition, design, financing, development, and operating services for these national and state trails.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism serves as a vital partner for the Wisconsin State Park System. Tourism provides information on state parks and the state park system to in-state and out-of-state visitors alike. The department's website, travelwisconsin.com, advertises individual state park properties and provides information on camping and recreation within state parks. The Department of Tourism is brought together with the WSPS through a memorandum of understanding indicating a responsibility to collaborate on cross-promotions of events and programs. Tourism provides assistance in the design of the state parks annual visitor guide and other materials.

The Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation

Assisting the NPS and WDNR in trail operations is the nonprofit, citizen-based volunteer organization the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation (IAPTF). Established in 1958, the foundation now has over 5,000 members who support the Ice Age Trail and work cooperatively with the NPS, WDNR, local governments, businesses, and private landowners. IAPTF staff and volunteers work to protect, promote, build, and maintain the Ice Age Trail, which tells the story of the Ice Age and continental glaciation along a scenic footpath.

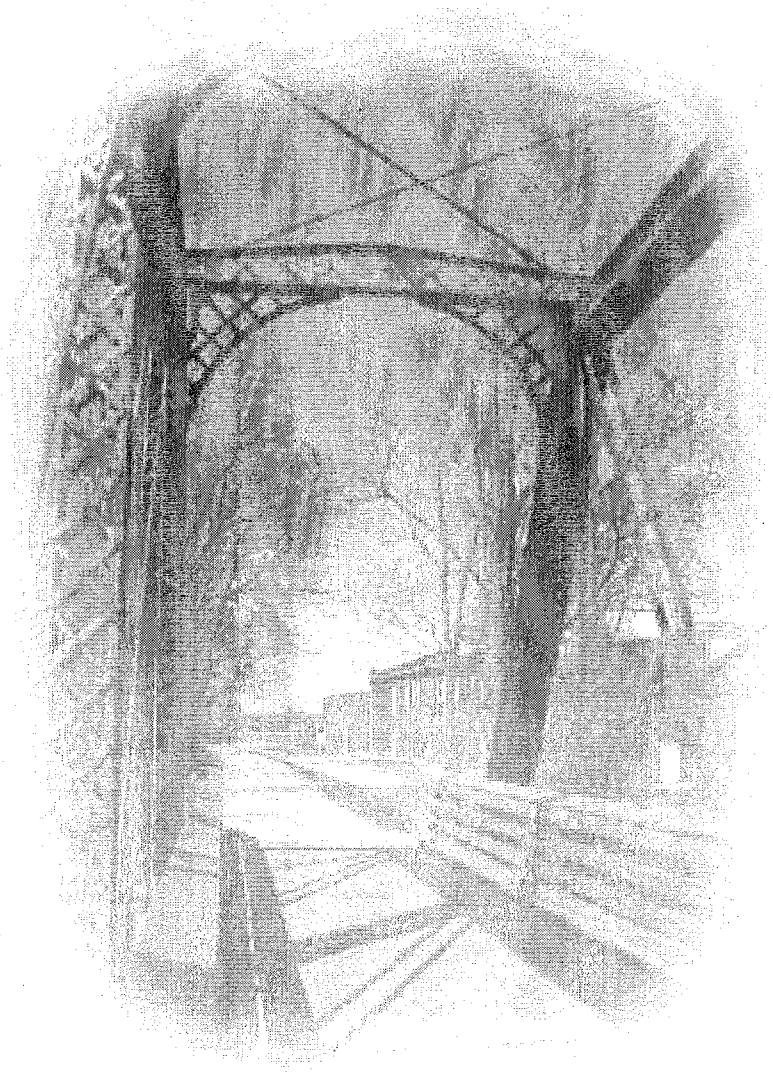
North Country Trail Association

Another partner to both the NPS and WDNR is the North Country Trail Association, which has three chapters in Wisconsin that advocate for the establishment and operation of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Other Partners

There are a number of other partners affiliated with the WSPS through agreements and projects. One of these is the Wisconsin State Historical Society, which works with the WSPS to ensure the preservation and protection of the state's historic resources.

Given the many contributions of the WSPS to the economy and culture of Wisconsin, there are many opportunities for other partners to promote, support, and advocate for the organization. These future partners may include nonprofit organizations, other governmental agencies, and the private sector.



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Wisconsin State Park System
STRATEGIC PLAN 2008

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