MASTER PLAN VARIANCE – Devil’s Lake State Park

Variance ☐ Amendment ☑

Property Name: Devil’s Lake State Park

Date the Current Master Plan Approved: February 1982

Proposed Change to the Master Plan

The following will be added to the Section 1.d, (2) North Shore Day Use Area, North Shore Buildings of the master plan:

**Boat Rental/Recreational Activity Building**

A small boat rental/recreational activity building will be added directly across from the Chateau for the rental and storage of boats, booking of boat tours, and the booking of other recreational activities (guided interpretive hikes, rock climbing instruction, scuba diving instruction, etc). The building will include bathing suit changing stalls (without plumbing) for visitors and serve as boating/recreation equipment storage in the off season. The building will be aesthetically historically relevant to the area and district and be located a distance from the existing identified burial mounds as to not interfere with the overall historical and cultural resources of the area.

Approved: 

Date: 11/03/17

Administrator, Division of Internal Services

See following pages for additional approvals and supporting information

Variance/Amendment Initiator or Author; Steve Schmelzer, Superintendent

**Supporting Approvals:**

Property Manager

Date: 10/25/17

District Supervisor

Date: 11-01-2017

Property Planning Section Chief, LF

Date: 11/11/17

Program Bureau Director

Date: 11/02/17

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources October 2017
Supporting Information

Devil’s Lake State Park has become one of the most popular silent sport areas in the Midwest. Current visitation exceeds 2.5 million visitors per year. With the increase in visitation, there has been a significant increase in the demand for kayak, paddle board, peddle boat, and canoe rentals at Devil’s Lake. This increase in boat rentals has been coupled with a demand for packaged recreational tours such as electric boat interpretive tours, rock climbing, guided interpretive hikes, and other outdoor recreational pursuits. Currently, boat rentals are done off the loading dock and some temporary counters on the side of the Chateau. The other recreation services would be added as the demand increases.

How the proposed plan change is supported by the property’s vision, goals and objectives or other plan provisions:

The main goal in the Devil’s Lake State Park Master Plan reads:

To develop and manage Devil’s Lake State Park to provide park visitors with quality recreational and interpretative experience, and to preserve and protect the unique geologic and other natural features of the park as a unit of the National Ice Age Scientific Reserve.

The master plan objectives of Resource Management, Visitor Use, and Interpretation would also be directly supported by the construction of this new building. The objectives read:

Resource Management - To develop and maintain recreational and interpretive facilities consistent with the protection and preservation of the park, and to develop them within a design capacity consistent with that objective.

Visitor Use – To encourage and provide for non-consumptive forms of recreation.

Interpretation – To provide creative interpretation for 250,000 participants annually, with particular emphasis on Ice Age interpretation.

Under the North Shore Buildings, Chateau section of the Property Development section of the master plan, it states “the concessionaire will be encouraged to expand his services”. The expansion of these recreational opportunities could be directly supported by this new building.

Anticipated primary benefits of the proposed plan change:

The rental of boats and the availability of visitor recreational opportunities information and_signup of other recreational services will be greatly enhanced by the new building. The current temporary rental desk, equipment storage racks, and umbrellas are unsightly and inefficient.
There are currently no unplumbed changing stalls in the North Shore picnic area. The lack of these changing stalls puts additional pressure on the bathrooms. The new facility would add three unplumbed changing stalls and would be handicapped accessible.

Storage of boating equipment would also take place inside the building. Currently, the equipment is stored outdoors or in racks inside the Chateau which results in premature breakdown of the equipment and lengthens the time it takes to procure the equipment as concession employees must back up and down the loading dock stairs. Offseason storage of the boats and equipment would take place inside the new building rather than being transported offsite or into the basement of the Chateau.

Unavoidable adverse impacts:

At least two trees will need to be removed to build the new building. Both are declining basswood trees that have lost large branches over the past few years. The trees would most likely be removed in the next 5 years as hazard tree.

Summary of any alternatives considered:

There were two other alternates considered.

Alternative 1: Do not build the new building and continue to rent boat from the loading dock of the Chateau. The alternative would not allow the expansion of recreational services and not provide the quality recreational service that visitors expect.

Alternative 2: Build the new building adjacent to the North Shore boat landing. This location was ruled out because of shoreline zoning requirements and the railroad proximity which limits construction in the area.

Compatibility with statutes, codes, and department policies:

Devil’s Lake State Park was recently added as a State Historic Society historic district. The design of the new building includes design facets that are consistent with the Chateau and the other surrounding historic features. These include, quartzite rock ½ pillars, heavy timber frame design elements, roof pitch and siding that matches the Chateau, and historic looking exterior lights. The new building has been approved by the State Historical Society as a part of the historic district. This variance to the Devil’s Lake State Park 1982 Master Plan meets the requirements of Ch. NR 44.04, Wis. Admin Code.
Federal aid limitations:

Devil's Lake State Park received Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON) funding for purchase of lands.

Public review process used:

This variance was posted online September 21 through October 5, 2017.

Description of the support and/or opposition to the proposal:

Numerous visitors have commented about the unsightliness of the North Shore Boat rental area and the lack of bathing suit changing stalls. Visitors support the adherence to the design characteristics of the historic structures.

Nine comments were received during the public comment period, which was open until October 5, 2017. The comments were split in support and opposition to the boat rental/recreational activity building. Those in support commented on the increased visual appeal of the new facility over the current make-shift rental set-up, improved ease of boat rentals, and reduced congestion that the facility would allow. Those opposed cited concerns about the proximity of the facility to effigy mounds, the need to expand cycling opportunities in addition to boating and other recreational activities, and the reduced historical aesthetic of the North Shore by adding new buildings.
A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Goals:

   "To develop and manage Devil's Lake State Park to provide park visitors with quality recreational and interpretative experiences, and to preserve and protect the unique geologic and other natural features of the park as a unit of the National Ice Age Scientific Reserve."

2. Objectives:

   Resource Management

   - To develop and maintain recreational and interpretive facilities consistent with the protection and preservation of the park, and to develop them within a design capacity consistent with that objective.

   - To classify much of the park as resource protection areas, and wherever feasible to return the flora and fauna of the park to pre-settlement conditions.

   Visitor Use

   - To design the park for a capacity of about 8,000 people at any one time, and about 1.2-1.4 million visitations during the period from May 15 to September 15. This design capacity will accommodate expected off-season use.

   - To encourage and provide for non-consumptive forms of recreation.

   - To provide for safe, orderly automobile access to the major use areas of the park and to discourage automobile access to other areas of the park.

   Interpretation

   - To provide creative interpretation for about 250,000 participants annually, with particular emphasis on Ice Age interpretation.

   Park Operations

   - To acquire all lands within the park boundary.

   - To provide controlled access to the major use areas.
The outdoor group camping area that now surrounds the youth camp will be removed and relocated elsewhere.

**Boat Launching and Parking Area**

South Shore Drive will be relocated several hundred feet to the west, and a new boat launching area will be constructed between the new road and the lake. It should provide for about six boat trailer parking stalls and 35 automobile parking stalls. This area will also serve for trail head parking for the Tumbled Rocks Trail and the South Bluff Trails. A concrete plant launching ramp and a portable pier will be provided. A set of sealed vault pit toilets will be provided near the boat launch area.

The site plan for this area should provide for a vegetative and/or earth and rock screening. The boat launch area is one of the first things a visitor sees upon entering the lake environs from the west. Figure 7A is a schematic plan for the development of the boat launch area.

(2) **North Shore Day Use Area**

Figure 8 shows the proposals for the North Shore. The North Shore day use area will not be changed substantially. The area will be renovated and controlled access and improved parking areas will be provided. The beach will include about 600 linear feet.

The parking capacity will remain at about its present (416) level. The road system will be modified to permit the gating off of the day use areas after 11:00 p.m., while still permitting through traffic and campground areas.

The amphitheater will be replaced with a new one closer to the campgrounds. Amphitheater users are almost entirely campers.

A boat mooring area will be provided along the northeast shore.

**North Shore Buildings**

**Chateau**

The Chateau will continue to operate. The building has historical interest, and is unique to Wisconsin's state park system. The scope of operations presently offered at the chateau will be expanded. The concessionaire will be encouraged to expand his services. The building will be used for various recreational/educational/interpretive programs. A small, permanent interpretive exhibit relating to the lake will be installed.

The day to day interpretive mission of the park will be carried out in the existing nature center for as long as is practical. When the building has outlived its usefulness, that aspect of the park's interpretive mission will be moved to the chateau.

**Bathhouse**

No change is recommended.

**Office**

The office will eventually be replaced by a new office/interpretive center. If the Chateau is removed, the existing office building will be considered for the concession. For the short term, the office and trailer will continue to serve as the North Shore contact point.

**Family Camping**

All family camping will be at the north end of the park. Eventually all campers would be registered from the north contact station. Presently the park has about 451 campsites. Approximately that number of sites will be retained.

The existing South Shore campground will be replaced with a new 200 (approximate) unit campground north of CTH DL and north of the existing east campground. The two could eventually be linked by an underpass under CTH DL. (See Figures 4A & 5)
New North Campground

Figure 9 shows the new north campground which will be designed to accommodate a variety of camping units. All the camping spurs will be universal, as prescribed in MC 2542.1. Toilet facilities will be sealed vault pit toilets. Shower buildings will be provided. There will be no electrical hookups. The campground may be used for winter camping.

A shuttle pickup area, childrens' play area, and an open shelter building for campers' use will be provided in the center of the campground.

In conjunction with the north campground, as a future option, 10-15 walk-in campspites will be located along the old ski hill area. They could be clustered in small groupings with a small set of pit toilets serving each grouping. There would be no wells at the walk-in sites. Parking would be in the campground.

The north campground will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will consist of about 150 drive-in sites. This phase is designated for land now state owned. The second phase will be implemented when the necessary land is acquired and will consist of about 50 units.

The campground will be designed in a series of small loops, each accommodating about 25 campsites. This arrangement will give the manager flexibility in closing off portions of the campground for rehabilitation, or in accommodating large groups.

West Campground

The existing west campground consists of 99 sites. If future board policy allows, it will be designated as primarily a trailer and R.V. campground. The campground is currently equipped with flush toilet buildings which will remain. The campground has 53 electrified sites, which will remain.

When the north shore contact is moved out of the basin to the northeast corner of the park, the entrance to the west campground can then be changed to the nature center road only. The entrance on RTH 8 will be changed to an exit-only (except in the winter). This will ensure that entrance into the campground is only through a controlled entrance point. A childrens' play area and a shuttle pick-up area will be incorporated into the campground.

East Campground

The existing East Campground has 120 sites, / of which are electrified. It has flush toilet buildings and a shelter house. It accommodates a variety of camping units, and will remain for the most part unchanged.

Because the East Campground is close to the ski trails and has a shelter house, it will be the primary winter campground. A set of pit toilets will be installed. Because of the relatively high cost of installing a winterized water source, campers will get their water at the office or service area. A small childrens' play area and a shuttle pick-up will also be incorporated into the campground.

Extensive Use Areas

The extensive use areas shown on Figure 10 will encompass 3,170 acres and will include all lands not included in the intensive, specialized or administrative areas.

Outdoor Group Camping

A new group camping area will be established north of RTH 113 and west of 113. The present group camp is too crowded and is in conflict with the youth camp which is immediately adjacent. It is also on the edge of the Red Oak Scientific Area.

The new group camping area will be designed with six clusters--each to accommodate 20-30 campers. The clusters will be about 500' apart, so groups can be isolated from each other. (see Figures 4a & 5)

Trailside Shelters

As the Ice Age Trail through the park nears completion and begins to get more use, the establishment of trailside shelters will be considered. Like the Kettle Moraine Forests, the shelters would be rustic and would be reservable.