

Stearns County Park Department
ANNUAL REPORT

1979 & 1980

Stearns County Park Commissioners

James Gammell
Ervin Gelle
Ferdinand Peters
Donald Verreux
Alan Dufner
Edward Richardson
Keith Maurer

Staff Members

Paul Wirth
Robert Swenson
Charles Wocken

Prepared by:
Charles B. Wocken,
Superintendent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Planning	
New Park Commissioners.	1
Subdivision Ordinance, Parkland Provision	1
Bridge Accesses	2
St. Wendel Tamarack Bog	2
Meeker/Stearns Joint Powers Agreement	2
Publicity	2
Fairhaven Mill Historic	
Wayside and Dam Joint Powers Board.	3
Acquisition	
Sauk River Recreation Area.	3
Development	
Grant for Spring Hill & Oak Township sites	4
Warner Lake County Park	4
Richmond River Wayside.	5
Canoe Access near Heims Mill.	5
Fairhaven Mill.	5
Park Structure Designs.	5
"Canoe Gate"	6
Maintenance and Operations	
New Park Headquarters	6
Reorganization.	6
Caretakers.	7
Mowing Crew	7
Grounds Crew.	7
Mechanical/Facilities Crew.	7
Employment Programs	7
Maintenance Management System	7
Park Costs.	8
Personnel Time Use and Costs	8
Vandalism Cost.	8
Tree Planting	9
User Rate of Warner Lake County Park.	9

ANNUAL REPORT

1979 and 1980 were typified by much change in the Stearns County Park Department. Two new park commissioners were appointed. A new maintenance/office building was constructed to consolidate operations. A new maintenance management system was developed and implemented. Major reorganization took place, with the maintenance staff joining a collective bargaining unit. These were some of the major changes during the past two years; but many other decisions and actions occupied the time of the Park Commission and Park Department staff. These activities and decisions will be summarized under the following four headings: 1) Planning, 2) Acquisition, 3) Development and 4) Maintenance Operations.

PLANNING

Upon resignation of Mr. Al Ross and Mr. Kayle Becker from the Park Commission two new commissioners were appointed. Mr. Donald Verreux accepted an appointment by Commissioner Keith Maurer to represent district number four; and Mr. Alan Dufner was appointed by Commissioner Henry Dickhaus to represent district number five.

The Stearns County Subdivision Ordinance was revised. The ordinance included a section allowing for the establishment of a required fee for the purpose of acquiring parkland. This fee would have been charged to developers. The Park Commission decided not to recommend implementation of such a charge, at the present time. The Commission felt this would be charging a small segment of county residents a disproportionately high fee for the provision of parkland. The Commission felt that the funding of parkland acquisition should come from general revenue, thus distributing the

acquisition financing over the entire county population.

In the past two years the Highway Department scheduled many bridges for replacement throughout the county. The Park Commission passed a resolution promoting the coordination of the park acquisition program with the bridge replacement program. The resolution recommended that where bridges and their approaches were being realigned or widened public access to the bodies of water also be provided. No accesses, as yet, have been provided through this method.

A staff proposal to establish a county forest in the area of the St. Wendel Tamarack Bog was considered. The plan was to utilize the 600-700 acres of public land in the bog for winter recreation. This would also help prevent drainage of the marsh. At the request of the Park Commission the proposal was presented to the township at two of its meetings. Because of citizen disapproval the project was shelved.

In 1980, Stearns County, upon recommendation of the Park Commission, amended its Joint Powers Agreement with Meeker County regarding the operation of Lake Koronis Regional Park. This was to tighten up the fiscal accountability for the park's funding. Due to the hiring of a full time year-round caretaker the park's operation costs rose to approximately \$12,000 for 1980. Increased communication between Meeker and Stearns Counties about expenditures will be sought in 1981.

Indicated in the 1978 recreation survey of Stearns County, as performed by the St. Cloud State University Recreation Class, public awareness of the county park system was low - publicity was needed. In response to this finding the Park Commission received the cooperation of the Stearns County Highway Engineer in the production of a county highway map. On the map locations of the Stearns County parks are indicated. The maps include some color photos showing summer and winter scenes of the parks.

Additional publicity was obtained through the cooperation of the Stearns County Historical Society. The Society produced an "Historic Sites" map. Included on the map are the developed park sites of Stearns County.

A third map was also developed; this one by the Park Department. It is a "Winter Trails" map including grant-in-aid snowmobile trails, ski touring areas and county parks. The map was printed by the inmates of the State Correctional Facility of St. Cloud.

The "Fairhaven Mill Historic Wayside and Dam Joint Powers Board" was established by Stearns and Wright Counties in 1979. The Fairhaven Flour Mill was included on the National Register of Historic Places. One of the goals relating to the Fairhaven Mill is its restoration to an operable condition. In support of this goal the joint power board was established. Its responsibility is the maintenance of the Mill's surrounding 10 acres. The joint powers board includes one-half of its budget as part of the Stearns County park budget, with the other one-half supplied by Wright County.

ACQUISITION

The Sauk River Recreation Area continued to be the major project for park acquisition. Seven sites were reviewed for possible acquisition along the Sauk River. Two purchases occurred. 17 acres were acquired to expand the Spring Hill site and provide better building locations. This site now contains 82 acres. The other site of acquisition was the Canoe Access at the confluence of the Sauk River with the Mississippi River. This site contains 0.7 acres. Both of these sites were acquired with the assistance of the State Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR), which provided 75% of the cost through a state grant. The balance remaining in this grant is \$17,770. The grant expires December 31, 1981.

DEVELOPMENT

A development grant was obtained in 1980 from the LOMR. It was for \$35,107.50 (34% of the estimated park development cost for the Spring Hill and Oak Township sites). A requirement in the awarding of a development grant is an archaeological study of the sites proposed for development. Richard Lane, Curator of the Hatcher Museum at St. Cloud State University performed the studies. His survies indicated historic and pre-historic sites within the boundaries marked for development. To preserve these resources the park sites were redesigned.

Development occurred at four park sites in 1979 and 1980. With the cooperation of the Stearns County Highway Maintenance Department the parking lot of Warner Lake County Park was resurfaced with 200 tons of granite material. Dry windy weather had created a dust problem in the park. The improvement eliminated this problem. The labor and equipment was donated by the Highway Department. Materials cost \$870.09.

Traffic control has been a perennial problem at the park. Last summer the park maintenance crews installed a post and rail barrier around the parking lots. This has stopped vehicle traffic in activity areas throughout the park. This improvement gave the caretaker about 40% more time to do maintenance, rather than the traffic policing he had been doing. Materials for this project cost \$323.65.

Other general improvements made at Warner Lake County Park included the opening up of two dorms along the activity field. Walls were removed to make the buildings into open shelters. The groups reserving the park last summer made extensive use of these buildings for program purposes. Two large 500 pound steel bar-b-que grills were installed next to the shelters for group picnics. The cost per grill was \$500.00.

Because many park visitors find a need for wood ground fires, 8 steel fire rings were installed, 6 in the camp sites and 2 in the picnic areas. All grills have received use.

The Richmond River Wayside was opened up in the Fall of 1980. The boundaries were fenced, picnic areas cleared, with tables and a fire ring installed. The site has already received family picnic use during the Fall, and has been visited by hunters and snowmobilers travelling the river. The site is accessible only from the Sauk River.

The Canoe Access near Heims Mill was opened and signed during 1980. Landscaping of the Sauk River side of the park was performed. Material costs for the project were \$375.00. This site has seen a variety of uses through its first summer of availability; such as fishing, kayak launching, bird watching, canoe landing and picnicking. With a daily traffic flow of 5200 vehicles past the site there is little doubt the site will receive plenty of use.

The Fairhaven Mill has received extensive attention since the establishment of the joint powers board which operates the site. A trailer house was purchased and moved onto the site for a live-in caretaker. A well and sewer system were installed. A storage shed was constructed and installed near the trailer. Major erosion control of the hillside to the north of the mill was done. The approximate cost of constructing the retaining wall and landscaping the slope was \$10,500. Because of a Soil Conservation Service grant, \$5,315.24 was reimbursed to the joint powers board.

Additional shelter and privy designs were commissioned in 1980 to expedite future development in county parks by the Park Commission. The designs of these structures will be similar to those present in Mississippi River County Park, and will create a uniform appearance throughout the park system.

The Park Department has experimented with a device called a "canoe gate." If this gate works according to its theory it could assist in smoothing out relations between canoeists and landowners along the Sauk River. The Park Department installed a canoe gate on the Sauk River, near St. Martin. Mr. Fred Thelen allowed the gate to be installed on his property line as it crossed the river. The gate, which is made of fiberglass wands, swings open when hit by a canoe, yet discourages cattle from passing through. The unit is floated on 4 scrap car tires. Mr. Thelen liked the device enough to make his own version out of wood. He installed it just upstream from the county gate. The feasibility of making this gate available to other river landowners will be studied by the department.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

Much has been done in the past two years to increase the efficiency of the park maintenance operation. The most important action taken toward this goal was the construction of an office/maintenance facility. This facility is attached to the new highway storage garage, west of Waite Park. The maintenance area provides separate heated shops for woodworking and mechanical repairs, allowing signmaking and engine overhauling to be performed simultaneously. The total size of the Park Department Headquarters is 3,200 square feet. Another 1200 square feet of outside space is used for storage, in addition to the 1150 square feet made available by the Highway Department in its cold storage building.

Reorganization of the department took place in the Fall of 1980 when William McConnell, the first superintendent of the Stearns County Park Department, resigned. The positions of superintendent and assistant were combined.

The present staffing consists of the superintendent and two maintenance employees. Revised job descriptions were developed for the two maintenance positions because of their entry into AFSCME, the bargaining unit which represents the County Highway Maintenance Department.

In the other areas of park operations the same division of tasks that existed in 1978 were used. Full-time seasonal caretakers were hired for Mississippi River County Park and Warner Lake County Park. The caretaker of Mississippi River County Park also was given cleanup duties at the Heims Mill Canoe Access. The caretakers were a tremendous asset to the park system. They worked Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

A full-time mowing crew was employed in the Summer of 1980. This crew was busy throughout the summer with its weekly rotation schedule for park maintenance. Typically, each park was mowed once a week. When turf growing rates decreased mowing of trails was performed. Because of the weather this last summer the turf areas needed frequent attention even as late as October. Along with the mowing crew, a grounds crew and a mechanical/facilities crew were established for the season. The year-round park employees were the leaders of these crews.

The remainder of the crews were staffed through state and federal employment programs, the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (C.E.T.A.), the Summer Youth Program (S.Y.P.) and the East-Asian Refugee Program. Seasonal employees for 1980 totalled 11. During the 6 month summer maintenance season \$28,615.12 was expended for wages of maintenance staff. 28% of this total was from county revenues. 72% came from state and federal work programs.

The newly implemented maintenance management system is designed to indicate where staff time and budget money are being used. Part of the system is the issuing of work orders for specific projects within individual parks.

On those work orders is listed personnel time, equipment use, equipment rental, and materials needed to perform the work assigned. From the records of the 464 work orders issued in 1980 we can give estimates as to individual park costs for 1980 (see figure 1).

<u>Individual Park Costs</u>	
<u>Park</u>	<u>1980 Cost</u>
Mississippi River County Park	\$13,108.40
Warner Lake County Park	8,958.37
Upper Spunk Lake County Park	918.70
St. Martin Canoe Access	513.75
Oak Township park site (undeveloped)	798.16
Lake Sylvia Wayside and Access	3,181.09
Richmond River Wayside	4,594.12
Heims Mill Canoe Access	1,964.27
Fairhaven Mill	2,042.20
	<u>\$ 37,879.06</u>

-Figure 1-

At the end of each work day the crew leaders submit time sheets which indicate how much of their crew time was spent performing particular types of work (work functions) such as mowing, equipment repair, tree removal, travel, etc. Figure 2 indicates the work functions performed most frequently during 1980. The least performed task was "electrical work" with only one-half hour spent in this area.

On each work order issued a "reason for work" is indicated. This allows the retrieval of information on vandalism- related work. In 1980, vandalism in county parks cost \$1,687.10 in time, equipment use, equipment rental and materials. In general, vandalism seemed to be down compared to previous years, although 1980 is the first year detailed information could be gathered systematically.

<u>Work Function</u>	<u>Time Use</u>		<u>Personnel Cost</u>
	<u>Hours</u>	<u>% of Total Hrs.</u>	
Travel	1788.0	15.4	\$6,173.89
Tree Care & Shrub Care	1497.5	12.9	5,787.28
Mowing	1082.0	9.3	3,535.25
Upkeep of Buildings & Upkeep of Facilities	841.5	7.2	3,355.90
Equipment Maintenance & Equipment Repair	716.5	6.1	2,859.07
Carpentry	648.0	5.6	2,554.87
Construction	566.5	4.9	2,225.11
Trash Collection	509.5	4.4	2,646.58

-Figure 2-

A traditional task for the Park Department since its creation in 1974 has been tree planting. The 1980 season saw the planting of 4200 seedlings including Buckeye, Red Oak, Pin Oak, Wild Plum, Norway Pine, Ponderosa Pine, Norway Spruce, Soft Maple and hybrid Poplar. 30 larger trees, which had been cared for in the park department tree and shrub nursery, were transplanted in five of the parks for picnic grounds improvement.

For the first time, information is available on the user rate of Warner Lake County Park. This data is presented in figure 3.

Warner Lake User Rate

<u>Dates</u>	<u>No. of Visitors</u>
May 30 through September 3	*13,282
**May 30 through September 3	2,000
September 4 through November 24	<u>2,238</u>
TOTAL	17,520

* 2 visitors per vehicle.

** Visitors transported to park by bus as part of youth program.

-Figure 3-

Further analysis of the traffic survey showed that there were 602 visitors during an average week (Monday through Friday). The average weekend use was 478 visitors. Three weekends received exceptionally heavy use: May 23rd with 934 visitors; July 4th with 1270 visitors; and July 11th with 828 visitors. Weekday evening use of the park, between the hours of 4:30 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. averaged out to be 80 persons. In 1978 a similar traffic survey was performed at Mississippi River County Park. During that summer, an estimated 18,394 visits were made to the park. The traffic surveys indicate both spontaneous and reserved uses of the parks.

In 1980 there were 81 days of reservations made in county parks; 21 at Mississippi River County Park and 60 at Warner Lake County Park. The groups reserving the parks during the 1980 season can be divided into five categories; youth groups, educational groups, family groups, employee groups and political groups. Among the youth groups were the Girl Scouts, St. Cloud Area Boys Club, Campfire Girls, and the YMCA. Businesses using the park for employee picnics were: the Red Carpet, Versa Vend, American Legion, Westwind Realty, and Midwest Vision Center. Educational groups reserving the parks included the Westwood Special Education Class, St. Cloud State University Camping Classes, the Area Vocational Technical Institute and St. Joseph's Grade School of Waite Park. 12 families reserved use of the parks in 1980 for family reunions. Two of those families had used the parks in previous years. The only political group to make a reservation was the DFL District Volunteers. In general, most of the organized group use came from the St. Cloud Area.

With the above figures in mind there is little doubt that the Stearns County Parks are used. There are still signs of abuse, but gradual improvement has been made over the last 6 years. Despite abuses, this is how one park user evaluated the park his group reserved in 1980:

"A very nice and clean park that offers everything one needs to have an enjoyable day."