

**ANNUAL REPORT
2000**

STEARNS COUNTY PARKS

STEARNS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Larry Haws - District 1
Mark Sakry - District 2
Rose Arnold - District 3
Leigh Lenzmeier - District 4
Don Otto - District 5

STEARNS COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

Don Bauer - District 1
Prentiss Foster - District 2
Joseph Chovan - vice chair; District 3
Ed Bouffard - chair; District 4
Joan Bredeck - District 5
Richard Hall; Planning Commission Member
Mark Sakry; County Commissioner

STEARNS COUNTY PARKS STAFF

James Burke, Park Maintenance II
LeRoy Gapinski, Park Maintenance I
Paul Wirth, Park Maintenance II - Lead
Roxanne Gerads, Technical Assistant II
Peter Theismann, Park Technician
Charles Wocken, Park Director & Secretary to the Park Commission

**Report submitted by:
Charles B. Wocken**

2000 ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT OF STEARNS COUNTY:

The mission of the County of Stearns is to provide quality public services as determined by law and citizen needs, through innovative leadership and the teamwork of its people, officials, and employees. Services shall be provided in a fair, respectful, and professional manner consistent with available human, natural, and economic resources.

MISSION STATEMENT OF PARK DEPARTMENT:

To secure sufficient outdoor recreation area and open space, and conserve the natural resources of the County (features which make Stearns County a pleasant place to live); to maintain parks to be safe, scenic and functional for the public; and to maintain all support facilities and equipment.

PARK DEPARTMENT OBJECTIVES FOR 2000:

- 1) *Lake Wobegon Trail: Phase 2 – Albany to Holdingford: prepare plans for pedestrian, bicycling and snowmobile trail construction;*
- 2) *Former Soo Line Railroad Corridor: create management plan and coordinate requests of adjoining landowners, cities and interest groups;*
- 3) *Park Ordinance: improve enforcement in all recreational units through coordination with the Stearns County Sheriff.*

Table of Contents

Planning	Page 1
Officers	Page 1
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve.....	Page 1
Soo Line Rail Corridor.....	Page 1
Lake Wobegon Trail.....	Page 2
Budget 2001.....	Page 2
Fees and Charges.....	Page 3
Park Ordinance Update	Page 3
Richmond River Wayside	Page 3
Internet Web Page	Page 4
T-Shirt Sales	Page 4
Park System Brochure	Page 4
Beaver Island Trail	Page 4
Disc Golf	Page 4
Parkland Dedication Fee	Page 4
Lake Koronis Regional Park	Page 4
Potential Park Site	Page 5
Natural Community Preservation	Page 5
Canoe and Boating Route Designation.....	Page 5
Acquisition	Page 6
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve	Page 6
Development	Page 7
Maintenance & Operations	Page 7
Fairhaven Mill	Page 7
Lake Koronis Regional Park	Page 7
Funding	Page 8
Donations.....	Page 9
Usership	Page 13
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve	Page 13
Volunteers	Page 13
Volunteer Activity - 2000	Page 13
Lake Koronis Regional Park Camper Origin	Page 14
Lake Koronis Regional Park MN registrants.....	Page 15
Lake Koronis Regional Park shelter reservations	Page 16
Warner Nature Center	Page 17
Warner Shelter	Page 18
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve	Page 19
Mississippi Shelter	Page 20
Visitor Survey Comments	Page 23

List of Figures

Stearns County Park Acreage Distribution.....	Figure 1
Commissioner District.....	Figure 2
2000 Property Tax Levy.....	Figure 3
2000 Non-Tax Revenue.....	Figure 4
Open-Air Shelter Revenue.....	Figure 5
Nature Center Revenue	Figure 6
Nature Center Revenue/Cost.....	Figure 7
Nature Center Usership	Figure 8
Warner Shelter/Camping Usership.....	Figure 9
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve Usership.....	Figure 10
Mississippi Shelter Usership.....	Figure 11
Number of reservation days.....	Figure 12
Number of reservation groups.....	Figure 13
Nature Center permits.....	Figure 14

The annual report is divided into the following sections:

- I. PLANNING**
- II. ACQUISITION**
- III. DEVELOPMENT**
- IV. MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS**
- V. FUNDING**
- VI. USERSHIP**

I. PLANNING

OFFICERS:

- Chair of Park Commission was Edward Bouffard. Vice-chair was Joseph Chovan
- Joan Bredeck was newly appointed to represent Commissioner District #5.

QUARRY PARK & NATURE PRESERVE

The City of Waite Park issued a conditional use permit to the County allowing public park use of the Cold Spring Granite Company 60-acre site. This permit is required for all expansions at this park.

SOO LINE RAIL CORRIDOR

1. The County Board approved a grant application for Federal TEA-21 funds to help blacktop Phase 2 (Albany/Holdingford segment) of the Lake Wobegon Trail.
2. The Park Commission recommended to the County Board the composition of a citizen advisory committee to develop uses for the corridor from Albany to Brooten. Representation included: a bicycle advocate, hiker (Volkssport Association), equestrian, snowmobiler, senior citizen, 3 adjacent landowners (2 farmers, 1 rural resident), law enforcement (County Sheriff), DNR conservation officer, County Attorney (ex officio), consulting firm (ex officio), park commissioner, Park Director (ex officio), city representative, business representative, and a recording secretary. The Commission elected Donald Bauer as its representative.
3. Morrison County notified the County that it had adopted a trail plan, which identifies coming from Bowlus to the Stearns County line, toward Holdingford, with a paved trail.
4. The Park Commission recommended, and the County Board approved of opening portions of the Soo Line (except bridges) from Albany to Brooten for snowmobiling when it can be worked out with the Park Department, adjoining landowners and the snowmobile clubs (Oct.11).
5. The County began its transfer of excess station land to cities along the corridor. Transfers have been completed to the City of New Munich (11.4 acres) and Elrosa (6 acres). No transfer will take place at Albany because excess station land and joins County highway right-of-way.

LAKE WOBEGON TRAIL

1. The County hired SRF CONSULTING FIRM, INC. to design and engineer the Albany/Holdingford segment of the trail (Phase 2).
2. The County conducted two Public Open Houses for input on the Phase 2 design. A meeting was held in Holdingford on April 17 with the second meeting being at Albany on April 18.
3. An Advisory Committee was established by the County Board to deal with conflicts and issues between adjoining landowners and the proposed public trail uses projected for the former Soo Line corridor between Albany and Holdingford.
4. BIG RIVER CONSULTING was hired by the Board to facilitate the four Advisory Committee meetings. Members of the committee were appointed after the County advertised for members. Appointments included: Bruce Miles (facilitator); Joan Bredeck (farmer), Rose Fuchs (farmer), Rich Rothstein (rural resident), Jim Rehkamp (rural resident), Rosemary Scepaniak (mayor), Wayne Schiffler (business owner), Joseph Schlick (bicyclist), Greg Murray (hiker), Bill Scepaniak (snowmobiler), Tom Clapp (senior), Mark Gretsch (service club), Steve Jacobson (DNR conservation officer), Don Bauer (county park commissioner), Jim Kostreba (County Sheriff), and Chuck Wocken (Park Director). A final report was issued to the County Board in April, making recommendations on 34 different issues. The County Board finalized its decisions by the end of July. A synopsis of the management issues, with dates of approval by the County Board, is on file at the Park Department.
5. Providing seasonal incident summaries for the trail was one of the recommendations the Board adopted.
6. A FENCING COMMITTEE was established as part of the management plan adoption. The committee is made up of Joan Bredeck (Park Commissioner), Don Bauer (Park Commissioner), Don Otte (County Commissioner) and Chuck Wocken (Park Director).
7. The County sponsored a LIABILITY SEMINAR for landowners adjoining the Albany/Holdingford segment. An independent insurance expert and an attorney familiar with liability were hired by Stearns County to conduct the seminar.
8. The County Board authorized a grant application of \$115,400 to the Minnesota DNR Regional Trail Initiative Grant program for Phase 2. The State awarded the grant.
9. An application for Fiscal Year TEA-21 funds was submitted for construction of a bituminous surface trail from Avon to St. Joseph (Phase 3A). A grant of \$760,000 was earmarked in the State Transportation Improvement Plan for the project.

BUDGET 2001

1. Capital improvement projects in the year 2001 would be put under the Park Bond.
2. Create 2 new maintenance positions, each of 8-month duration. One, as Quarry Park Caretaker, the other, as Trail Caretaker. Upgrading of the Lead Maintenance Position to a Park Supervisor position was also recommended. The County Board approved only the Quarry Park caretaker position.
3. An internship for Park Patrolling was also recommended with a \$5,000 allocation. The Board approved this.

4. An increased allocation of \$20,000 for Sheriff Park Patrol was recommended. The approved amount by the Board was \$10,000, making the park patrolman position 2/3 full-time equivalent.
5. Recommended projects included Lake Koronis shower house replacement, Lake Sylvia vault toilet, footbridge at Mississippi River Park, temporary parking lot at Two Rivers Lake park site, Waite Park stormwater drainage assessment of \$100,000, 2 picnic shelters at Quarry Park, various improvements at Quarry Park which were included in the original, Park Bond program, contract snowmobile trail grooming for 19 miles of the Lake Wobegon Trail (2nd year for contract grooming).
6. Park Commissioners expressed concern for a need of a Park Operation & Maintenance Building at Quarry Park and indicated the Building Fund should be considered to fund that facility.

FEES AND CHARGES

The County Board reviews Park shelter rental fees and parking permit fees each year. The County Board adopted the Park Commission recommendations below:

- 1) increasing the daily parking permit fee at Quarry Park from \$2 to \$3;
- 2) increasing the annual parking permit from \$10 to \$12;
- 3) increasing open-air shelter rental from \$30 per day to \$35 per day; and
- 4) increasing the rental rate of the Warner Lake Nature Center from \$70 for the first four hours, to \$75 for the first four hours (continue 50% discount for non-profit groups, and county departments free.)

In addition to the recommendations of the Park Commission, the County Board began charging groups for shelter use when no caretaker is available. Previously, the Park Department did not charge when caretakers were not on duty because it would be difficult to guarantee the facility would be clean at the time of the reservation.

PARK ORDINANCE UPDATE

The Park Commission reviewed all park related Ordinances. All ordinances were consolidated under #215. The significant changes were:

- 1) Glass containers were restricted from all county parks.
- 2) Pet owners must clean up after pets;
- 3) At Quarry Park, alcohol consumption was restricted to areas designated for such consumption and to permitted groups. This essentially eliminated alcohol from the park except under very rare occasions, or until a designated area is identified. The County Board adopted a policy to be used in determining when permits could be issued.
- 4) Quarry Park hours were changed to 8 a.m. to ½ hour after sunset; except during the ski season when the park will close at 11:00 p.m.

RICHMOND RIVER WAYSIDE

This site was annexed into the City of Richmond. The Park Commission offered to give the 8-acre site to the City providing a canoe access with parking lot and maintenance of the property in public ownership occurred.

INTERNET WEB PAGE

The Park Department established a web page with the assistance of the Stearns County Information Systems Department. The web address will be included on all publications.

T-SHIRT SALES

The Park Department experimented with retail sales by designing and purchasing the first-ever garments for sale. Quarry Park & Nature Preserve was highlighted on the shirt. Sales were handled through the Park Office. The first purchase included 120 shirts.

PARK SYSTEM BROCHURE

The Department worked with graphic artist Don Bruno to update the brochure with current maps and photos. The county published 5000 copies. The St. Cloud Area Convention and Visitors Bureau paid for 50% of the printing costs.

BEAVER ISLAND TRAIL

The City of St. Cloud invited Stearns County to participate in the conceptual planning of this trail. The City desires to have a plan which reflects the extension of the trail southward to Warner Lake County Park. The City of St. Cloud initiated the feasibility study which included 2 public open houses. The proposed alignment includes Franklin Road and County State Aid Highway #75.

DISC GOLF

The Park Commission discussed disc golf as an activity in county parks and recommended promoters review some of the closer county park sites with the park director to determine compatibility.

PARKLAND DEDICATION FEE

The Park Commission recommended to the County Board that a per-lot fee of \$1,000 be adopted as part of the county subdivision ordinance (July 12). The County Board tabled the discussion.

LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL PARK

The Park Commission held one of its meetings at the park and reviewed needed improvements. Upon recommendation by the Park Commission, the County Board authorized \$8,000 for maintenance in 2001. The Board also authorized cooperating with Meeker County in a grant application to remodel the shower building in campground. The Stearns County share identified was \$14,000.

POTENTIAL PARK SITES

Property at the confluence of the Clearwater River and Mississippi River was reviewed. It was recommended that the City of Clearwater, which owns land adjacent to this site, purchase the property. The Park Department had suggested to the City that Stearns County may be willing to help fund one-quarter of the cost, and apply for a DNR grant, if the City would take on ownership and maintenance. The City of Clearwater was not interested in purchasing the property.

The Allen Eisenshenk property, northwest of Avon, in Avon Township, Section 17 was reviewed. The Park Commission declined to pursue the purchase of the site (May 10).

NATURAL COMMUNITY PRESERVATION:

The Park Commission recommended that the County Board “pass a resolution and actively pursue preservation of the critical habitat and Scientific and Natural Areas in existing identified natural areas, working with available State Programs (January 12).” This would have supported the recommendation by the Minnesota County Biological Survey to the State Scientific and Natural Area program for acquisition. Four sites were identified:

- 1) Wendel Swamp (contains a calcareous fen),
- 2) Avon Hills;
- 3) Spring Hill Fen; and
- 4) Quarry Park and Nature Preserve

CANOE AND BOATING ROUTE DESIGNATION

The Park Commission explored what the benefits would be of having the Sauk River designated a State Canoe and Boating Route. Designation would have to be through the legislative process. Designation does not include any land use controls. Benefits would be:

- 1) Stream management;
- 2) User surveying;
- 3) Water gauge coordination;
- 4) Mapping; and
- 5) Facility establishment along the river.

II. ACQUISITION

QUARRY PARK & NATURE PRESERVE

60 Acres (Cold Spring Granite Company) purchased in April. This site was purchased with a 50% grant from the Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area program. Purchase of this site was coordinated through the Trust for Public Land.

STEARNS COUNTY PARK ACREAGE DISTRIBUTION DECEMBER 31, 2000

COMMISSIONER DISTRICT					
PARK NAME	1	2	3	4	5
Mississippi River County Park		230			
Warner Lake County Park				241	
Upper Spunk Lake County Park		5	2		
St. Martin Canoe Access					1
Oak Township Park Site					32
Two Rivers Lake Park Site					56
Lake Sylvia Wayside and Access					3
Spring Hill County Park					82
Richmond River Wayside			8		
Lake Koronis Regional Park (partial)					42
Quarry Park & Nature Preserve				552	
Heims Mill Canoe Access		1			
Fairhaven Mill (not owned by Stearns)				5	
Miller Landing			6		
Lake Wobegon Trail (Leased)		36			303
Soo Line Rail Corridor				84	401
Acreege		272	16	882	920
TOTAL ACREAGE		2090			

Figure 1

COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS

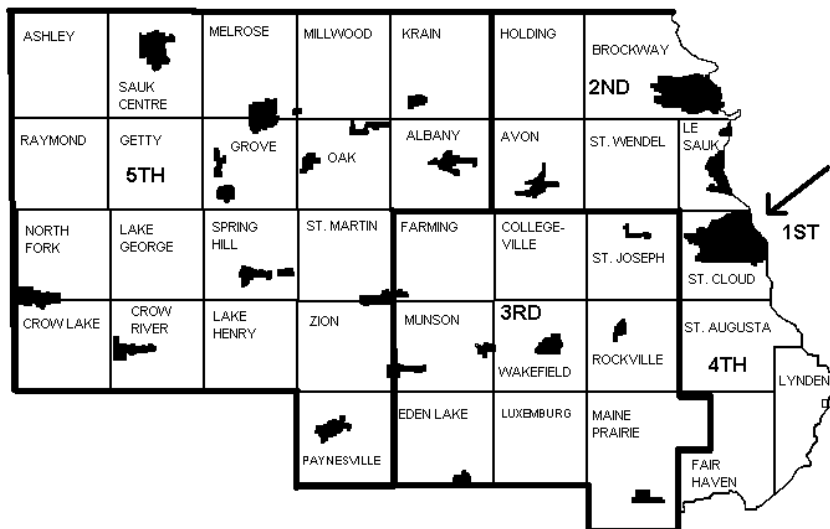


Figure 2

III. DEVELOPMENT

Construction of 4.3 miles of ski trail lighting occurred at Quarry Park and Nature Preserve. The total cost was \$190,000. A \$63,000 grant from the DNR National Recreation Trails program and a \$25,000 donation from the Nordic Ski Club of Central Minnesota helped finance the project.

IV. MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

- 1) Maintenance staff assisted DNR FISHERIES Division in stocking the quarries with rainbow trout.
- 2) Continued development of signage systems occurred within Quarry Park & Nature Preserve.
- 3) Installed pipe gates on bridge approaches on the Soo Line.
- 4) Summer maintenance activities included mowing, rodent control, noxious weed control, forest management, prairie management, building maintenance and repair, grounds maintenance and improvements, public safety inspections, and a host of other activities related to the hospitality mission of county parks were accomplished.
- 5) Staffing:
 - 3 permanent park maintenance staff;
 - 3 seasonal park maintenance aides;
 - 2 seasonal caretakers, 1 at Mississippi River Park and 1 at Spring Hill Park;
 - 5 Green View, Inc. contract caretakers/attendants at Warner Lake;
 - 2 Gatekeepers were assigned to Quarry Park;
 - 7 different staff shared Quarry Park caretaker duties (roughly 13 hours per day were needed to manage this park, requiring creative scheduling to cover all hours).

QUARRY PARK & NATURE PRESERVE:

Some Maintenance staff shifted to 10-hour days to assist in installation of fixtures for the lighted ski trail. Excavation and filling of fixture canisters was completed in coordination with Brandt Electric; project contractor.

FAIRHAVEN MILL:

This park continued to be operated by Wright County Parks through a joint agreement. Stearns County pays one-half the cost of managing the site. The property is owned by Wright County, but in Stearns County.

LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL PARK

The park continued to be managed by Meeker County pursuant to a Joint Powers Agreement. Stearns County pays one-half the costs of the park.

V. FUNDING

Park Budget 2000 (Fund 18)	\$529,784	
Debt Service on Park Bond (Fund 35)	<u>\$251,600</u>	
	\$781,384	
Park property tax levy 2000		\$361,442
Debt Service on Park Bond; Yr. 2 (Fund 35)		<u>\$251,600</u>
		\$613,042

Estimated county population for 2000: 133,977

The 2000 cost of the Parks program was **\$4.60 per capita** (\$2.58 in 1999; \$2.35 in 1998).

2000 PROPERTY TAX LEVY

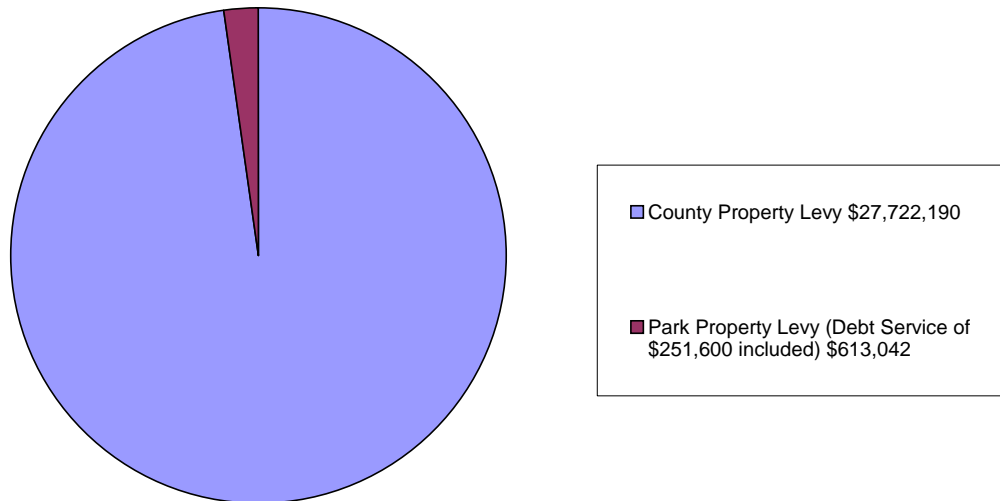


Figure 3

DONATIONS

- The NORDIC SKI CLUB OF CENTRAL MINNESOTA donated \$25,000 toward funding of the Lighted Ski Trail project at Quarry Park & Nature Preserve. This matched a \$62,500 DNR/NATIONAL RECREATION TRAILS FUNDING ACT grant. The total project cost was \$190,000.
- The INITIATIVE FOUNDATION donated \$5,000 for planning on Phase 2 of the Lake Wobegon Trail.
- Faye and Larry Haws designed and sold greeting cards to raise \$2,500 for Quarry Park and Nature Preserve.

2000 Non-Tax Revenue

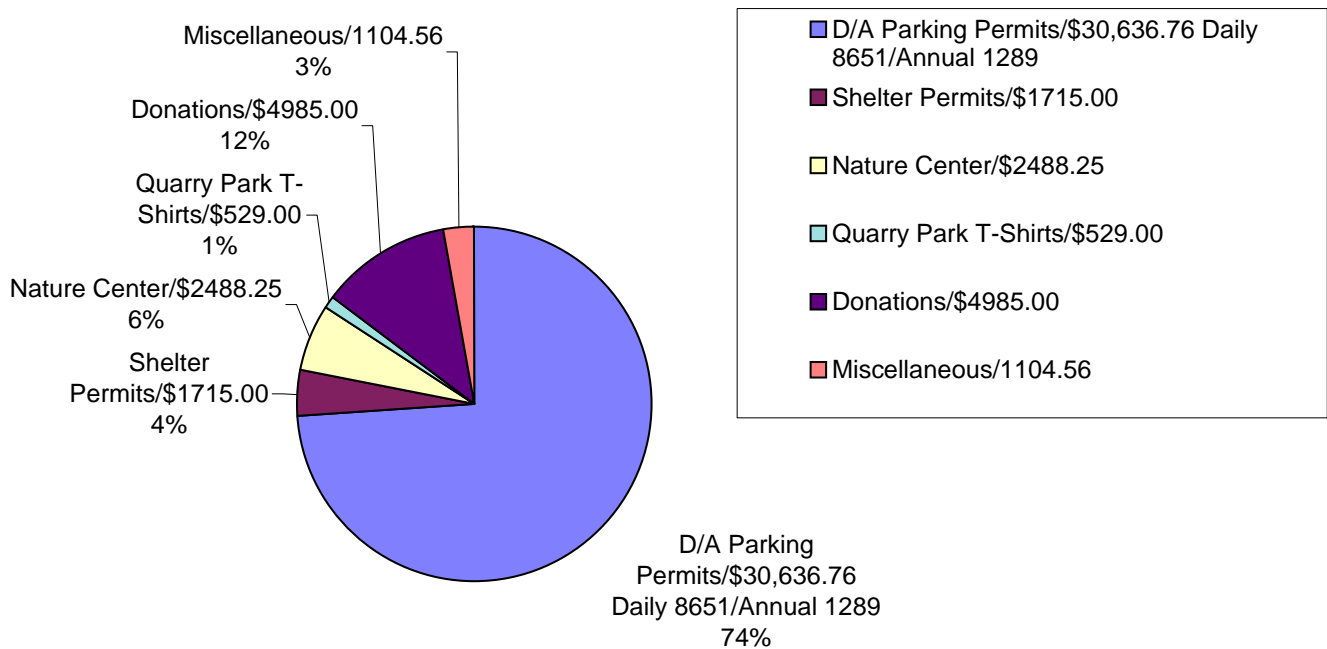


Figure 4

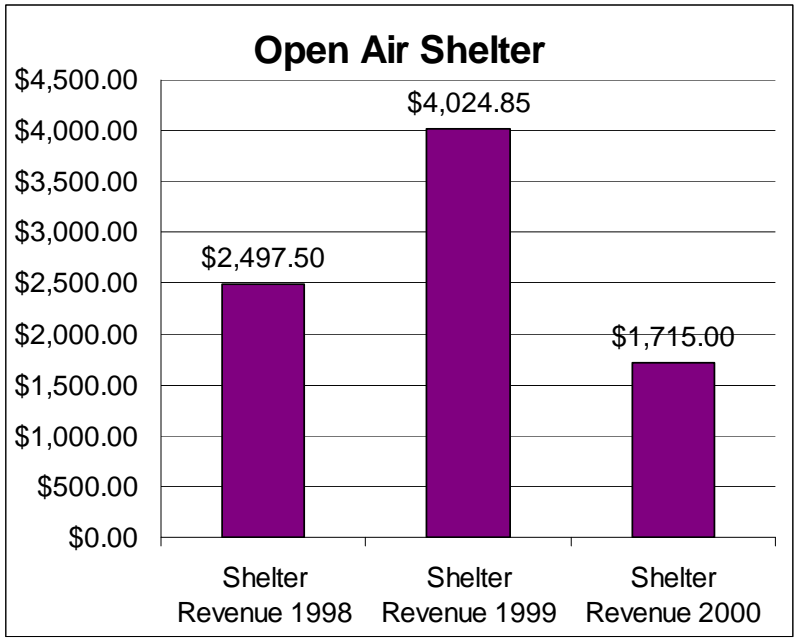


Figure 5

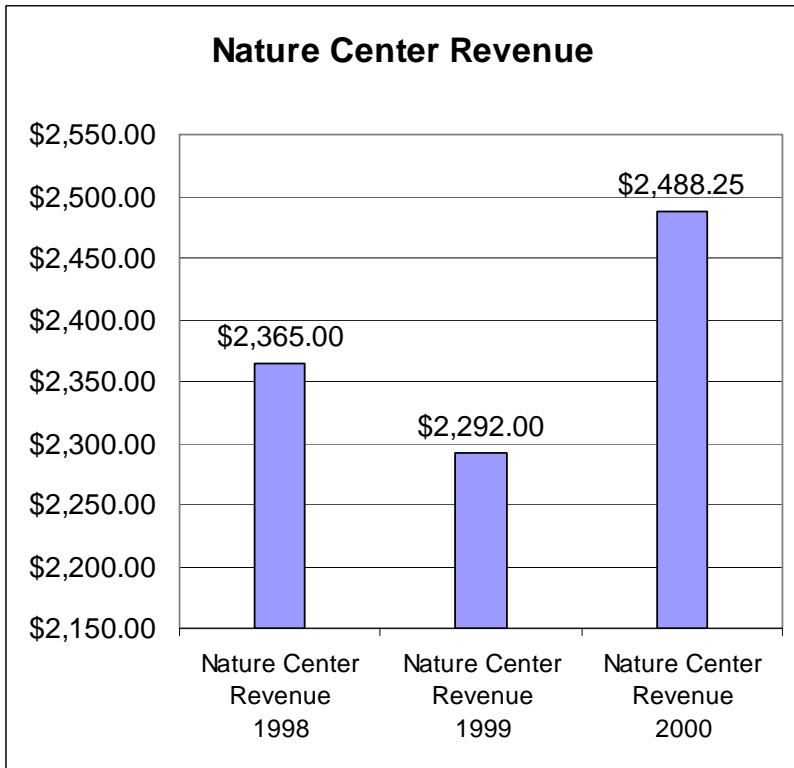


Figure 6

Nature Center Revenue/Cost

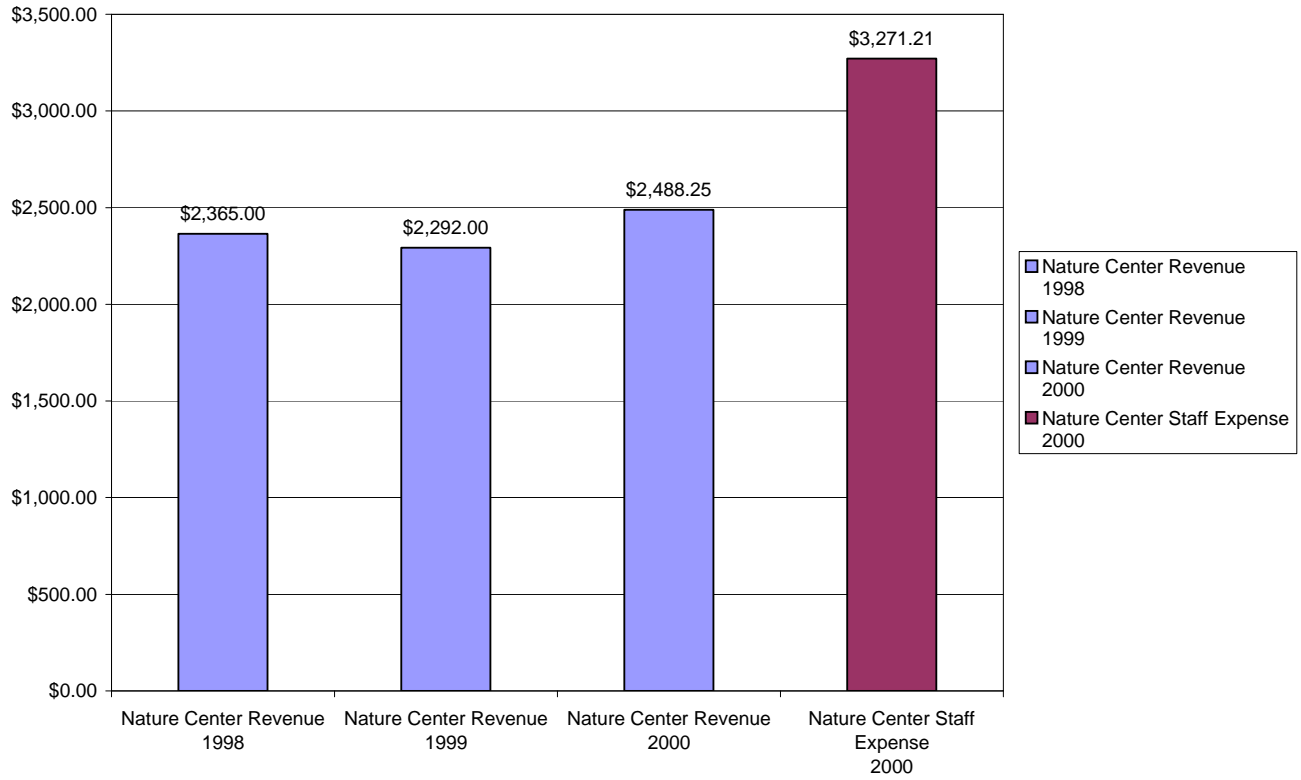


Figure 7

V. USERSHIP

QUARRY PARK & NATURE PRESERVE WINTER USE:

With substantial snowfall in the winter of 200-2001, and the installation of the ski trail lights the park received approximately 10,000 visitors. (vehicle traffic count times two persons per car)

VOLUNTEERS

The Park Department increased its efforts to recruit volunteers to help on park development projects, such as trails, as well as providing surveillance with its park units. Pete Theismann has coordinated over 160 volunteers to “be a presence” at Quarry Park & Nature Preserve and the Lake Wobegon Trail. The following table details the volunteer activities.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY –2000

• Ski Patrol at Quarry Park & Nature Preserve 27 volunteers	78 hours
• Snowmobile Patrol on Lake Wobegon Regional Trail 2 volunteers	7 hours
• Trail clearing at Quarry Park & Nature Preserve 36 volunteers	380 hours
• Counting trail users on the Lake Wobegon Trail 6 volunteers	46 hours
• Trail cleanup Lake Wobegon Trail 42 volunteers	181 hours
• Moonlight ski 12 volunteers	36 hours
• Lit Trail fundraising 8 volunteers	120 hours
• Lit Trail dedication 8 volunteers	40 hours
• Scuba diving - recovery in quarries 2 volunteers	6 hours
• Lit Trail trench filling 15 volunteers	211 hours
• GIS work for Lit Trail 2 volunteers	20 hours

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS 160

TOTAL HOURS 1125 hours

LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL PARK

The campground attracted 1,868 visitors for 1,423 campsite days in 2000. The fees for the campground are \$14.00 per day for electrical and \$12.00 per day for non-electrical which produced \$17,909, of which \$4,030 went to the Counties. Three Dollars of each site rental goes to the counties.

LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL PARK CAMPER ORIGIN SUMMARY 2000

<u>STATE/COUNTRY</u>	<u>NUMBER OF REGISTRANTS</u>	<u>% OF TOTAL REGISTRANTS</u>
Alaska	1	0.2
Arizona	2	0.3
Florida	2	0.3
Iowa	9	1.5
Illinois	1	0.2
Kansas	2	0.3
Michigan	1	0.2
Minnesota	516	91.0
Missouri	1	0.2
Montana	1	0.2
North Dakota	3	0.6
Nebraska	2	0.3
New York	1	0.2
Ohio	1	0.2
Oklahoma	1	0.2
Oregon	1	0.2
South Dakota	6	1.0
Tennessee	1	0.1
Texas	3	0.6
Virginia	1	0.2
Washington	2	0.3
Wisconsin	6	1.0
Canada	<u>3</u>	<u>0.6</u>
	567	100.0

Of the 516 campsite registrants from Minnesota, the city of St. Cloud had the greatest representation with 5.6% of the total Minnesota registrants.

<u>MINNESOTA CITIES</u>	<u>NUMBER OF REGISTRANTS</u>	<u>% OF REGISTRANTS</u>
Bloomington	7	1.4
Brooklyn Park	6	1.2
Cokato	7	1.4
Crystal	7	1.4
Eden Valley	7	1.4
Elk River	6	1.2
Gibbon	9	1.7
Henderson	6	1.2
Litchfield	26	5.0
Maple Grove	6	1.2
Minneapolis	7	1.4
New London	8	1.6
New Ulm	12	2.2
Paynesville	11	2.1
St Cloud	29	5.6
St Paul	8	1.6
Sauk Rapids	13	2.5
Sauk Centre	6	1.2
Sleepy Eye	11	2.1
Watkins	9	1.7
Willmar	12	2.2
Other (cities with less than 1%)	<u>303</u>	<u>58.7</u>
Total	516	100.00

The 3 shelters at the park may be reserved by groups at \$10/day for small shelters and \$20/day for the large shelter. For 2000 about 3,410 people participated in shelter reservations. This produced \$790 revenue for the park.

LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL
PARK SHELTER RESERVATION
BY CITY OF ORIGIN

<u>CITY</u>	<u>DAYS OF RESERVATION</u>
Anoka	1
Atwater	1
Balaton	1
Belgrade	1
Brooklyn Center	1
Butterfield	1
Circle Pines	1
Eden Prairie	1
Eden Valley	2
Grove City	3
Hutchinson	2
Lake Elmo	1
Minneapolis	1
Paynesville	20
Spicer	1
Unknown Address	<u>2</u>
	40

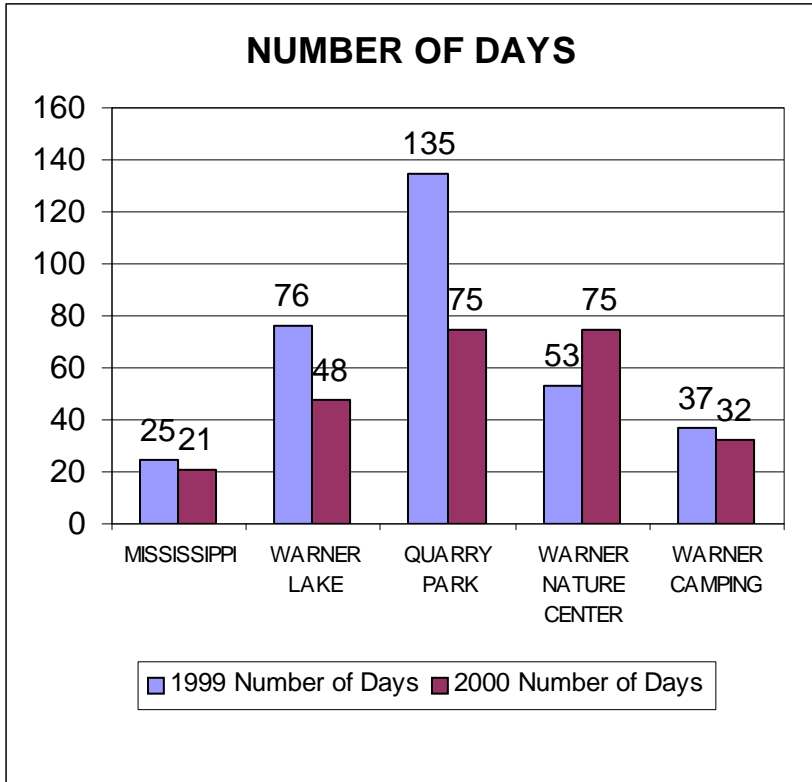


Figure 12

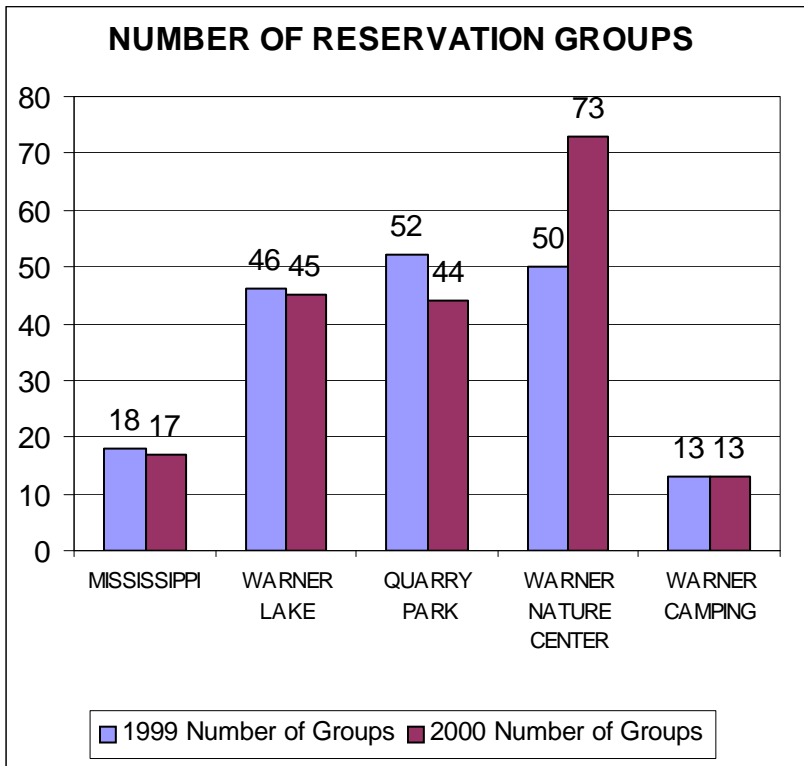


Figure 13

Nature Center Permits

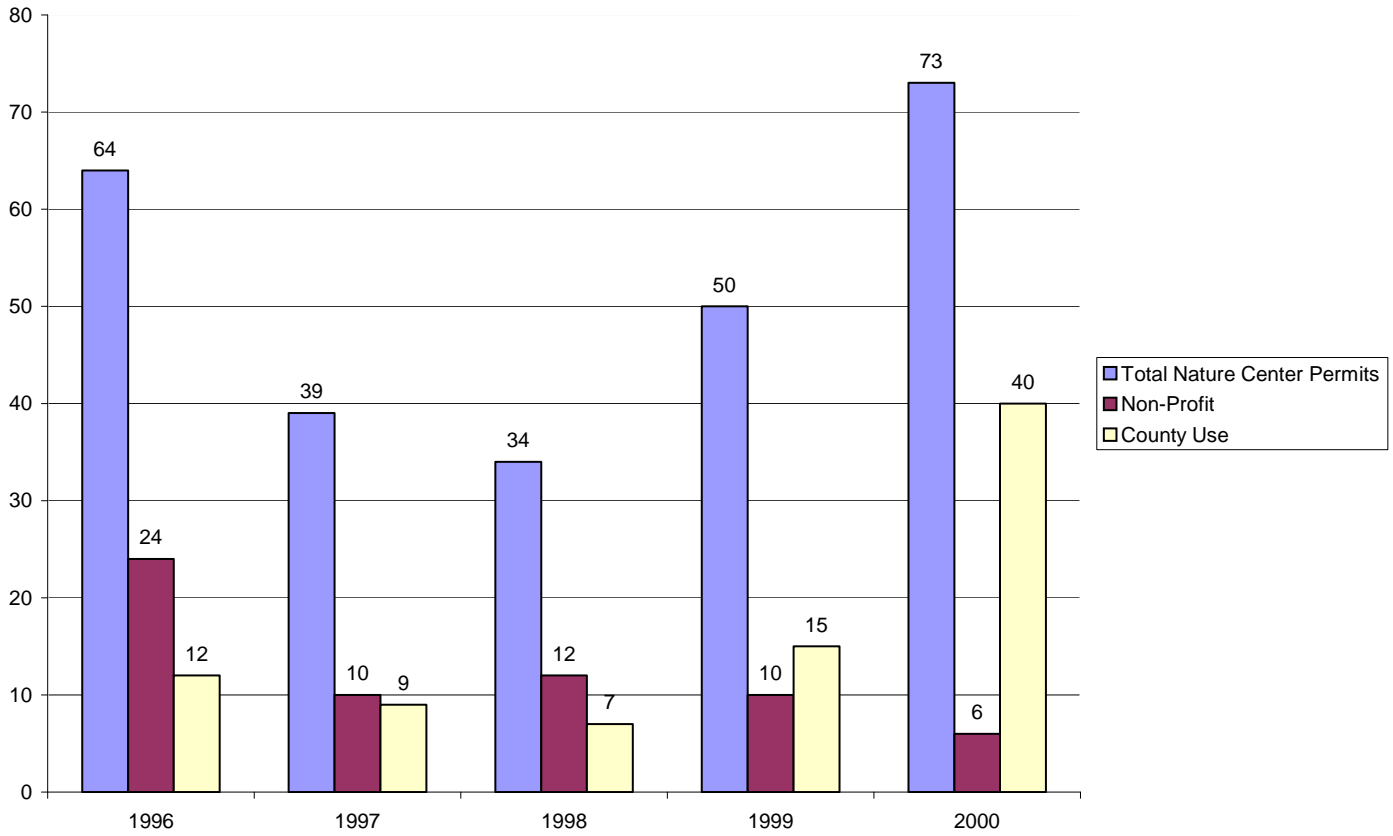


Figure 14

VISITOR SURVEY COMMENTS

Each group making a reservation of a park facility receives a PARK EVALUATION survey. This instrument is used to provide feedback from customers on the quality of services provided by STEARNS COUNTY PARKS. Following are excerpts from one of the 11 evaluations returned to the Park Department.

Question 2: How would you rate the cleanliness of this park?

Answer: Spotless.

Question 3: What recreational activities did members of your group participate in at the Park?

Answer: We had our wedding out there. Very best place to have it.

Question 4: Why did your group select this park?

Answer: We love to go and walk, swim, picnic at the park. It is beautiful and we love to go every weekend.

Question 6: What other comments would you like to make about this park?

Answer: It is very well kept up and the park keeper is very friendly when we see him.

Question 7: What kind of parks would you like to see the county provide?

Answer: More secluded ones like Warner Lake Park