Minnesota Natural Resources Department: Environmental Assessment Files Regarding State Parks

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Version 3
August 20, 2018

PERT MEETING MINUTES

April 14, 1986

Members Present:
Karen Loechler, Chair
Rod Sando
Bill Morrissey
Bob Hance
Elwood Rafn
Paul Swenson
Ray Hitchcock
Larry Shannon
Larry Seymour
Fred Hammer
Gail Gendler

Others Present:
Jane Harper
Dorian Grilley
Cliff Carlson
Earl Huber
Wayland Porter
John Hellquist
Joe Kurcinka
Peter Buesseler
Vonny Hagen
Ken Wald, Recorder

Approval of Minutes
It was moved by Hitchcock, seconded by Sando, that the minutes of the March 10, 1986 be approved. The motion carried.

Business
I. Ski Gull Ski Area Expansion
Background information on this item was presented by Dorian Grilley, Forestry, and Cliff Carlson, Area Forest Supervisor in Brainerd.

It was explained that a proposal had been received from Ski Gull Inc. for expansion of its ski area on land in the Pillsbury State Forest. The land involved in the proposed expansion had been donated to the state in 1982 by a man named Brownlee Cote, and he specified that the land be used for conservation purposes. There had been discussions dating back to 1984 regarding expansion of the ski area on this tract, but the original proposal was significantly smaller that the one currently being reviewed. A public meeting was held in 1984 on the Division of Forestry's own proposal for developing the site, at which the original Ski Gull expansion proposal was presented to the DNR and generally supported by the 40 or so people in attendance. In February, 1986 the present proposal was received. It proposes considerable expansion of the existing ski hill and the development of several new ski hills and runs, and related facilities such as chairlifts, lodges, parking, etc. It would involve large amounts of earth moving and grading, and the related land and resource impacts would be significant.

Cliff Carlson has responded initially to the developer by stating DNR's concerns with the proposal. These concerns include shoreland encroachment, impacts resulting from land clearing and earth moving, and the need to involve the public, as well as Mr. Cote. The economic viability of the project was also questioned in Carlson's response.

The floor was then opened for questions and comments.

Swenson questioned the need for the expansion in light of the poor economic condition of many ski areas in the state. In response, it was noted that the primary purpose of this ski area is to support the resorts in the Gull Lake area, which are trying to enhance and diversify their winter business.

Shannon questioned whether it was premature to be bringing this matter to PERT, before we had the information necessary to make a final decision. In reply it was noted that Forestry wanted some guidance on whether they should procede in working with the developer, or drop the project now before more money is spent on design and planning.

Hitchcock commented that his division sees this project as one which will benefit the local resort economy.

Morrissey asked if any public opposition to the proposal was known. It was explained by Carlson that the current proposal has not yet been made public. He added that the support has come from the local resorts, many of which have recently expanded and are heavily into winter use, mostly based on cross-country ski activity but also downhill skiing.

Sando said that if we are to lease this site, we should do it with a market value lease, which might run as high as $75,000 to $100,000 per year. He stated that this is high value land, and that other uses should be looked at also.

Porter noted that our news release in 1982 on the receipt of the tract mentioned preserving the natural environment. He said that other ski areas, notably Afton Alps, have resulted in significant resource impacts, and questioned whether developing a ski area on the Cote tract would meet the above-mentioned preservation criteria. He also noted that there is reference to possible historical significance of the tract, to which it was responded that there are no known historical sites on this area. He then asked whether the developers could be required to put in a public access as part of the project; the response was that it would be too expensive to put in an access, because of road costs, etc. Porter also raised the question of what will happen with the ski facilities if the project fails financially -- would it revert to the state, and if so, what would we do with it?

Sando noted that this property has been discussed as being used for trading stock for school trust land in state parks. The tract would then achieve trust status, which wouldn't preclude ski area development, and the development would provide income to the trust fund. However, ski development would preclude other (potentially higher revenue producing) uses of the site.

Rafn asked to what extent site grading could be reduced if the development were limited to the extension of the existing ski run. The response was that this would result in about one-third less earth moving, but much less land being cleared for new ski runs.

The majority of the earth moving is for the purpose of increasing the height of the Tower (highest)Hill.

Hitchcock stated that he felt that DNR has a problem with "banking" too much land which could be put to some useful purpose or disposed of, and this project offered us an opportunity to do something positive about this problem.

Sando stated that if we are to develop this site, we should put out a request for proposals (RFP) to allow all potential developers an equal opportunity to acquire a lease.

Swenson noted that the problem with ski area development is that it precludes most other potential uses of the site, and questioned whether we should commit valuable lakeshore land to a one-purpose use which doesn't need a lakeshore location.

Gendler asked whether the local resort expansions have been predicated on expansion of the ski area. The response was that they have not.

Shannon stated that this proposal goes against his division's efforts to protect existing fish and wildlife habitat in the state.

Sando questioned whether the proposers can financially handle this relatively expensive undertaking (estimated at roughly $2 million + or -). Carlson replied that while he didn't feel they would eventually go with this large of a project, he felt they were financially capable of supporting whatever project they finally decide on.

Loechler asked how much shoreline would be affected by the scaled-down project. It was indicated that it would involve about 800 feet of shoreline. Grilley noted that by terminating the ski run back 150 to 300 feet from the shoreline, the run would end before reaching the steep bank along the lake shore, and erosion and sedimentation would be minimized.

Seymour asked whether visibility of the ski run from the lake would be a problem. Grilley replied that by putting the ski run behind the first ridge it would not be as visible.

Hagen stated that any development of this site, especially the ski proposal, should be coordinated with the party which donated the land to ensure that it was consistent with his wishes. Carlson replied that the family has been contacted.

Huber asked whether the adjacent borrow area would be needed if the development is limited to extension of the one run. The reply was affirmative.

Loechler asked why a previous DNR proposal to develop a campground here had been dropped. It was stated that the proposal was dropped because of the potential for competition with the local resorts.

Seymour observed that he felt the ski area proposal was out of keeping with what the best use of this land should be, and with the intent of the former owners.

Sando suggested that we need to know more about the financial viability of the proposal. It was noted that the proposers are currently preparing a feasibility study and that it should be available very soon. He also suggested that we could be getting into another situation like we had at Flood Bay, and that we should be looking for alternative sites to accommodate the ski area.

Hitchcock reiterated his concern that we shouldn't be sitting on land that has a potentially beneficial use.

Rafn concurred, noting that there is an impression that we "protect" too much land when we should be considering more development.

Swenson brought up the need for a department plan for the use of publically owned shoreland. He said he doesn't equate not allowing this particular development with sitting on the land -- this just isn't the right development for the site.

Sando mentioned a program that the Bureau of Lands is starting called "Innovative leasing." It will try to identify the best commercial use to which various state lands could be put. In relation to this best-use concept, he noted that ski areas are traditionally not very profitable enterprises. The result in this case could be for the resorts to eventually pressure the legislature to turn the land over to the ski area owners to save the lease cost. He reiterated that we should put out an RFP on this tract.

Seymour restated the idea that we should implement the state park trust interest swap with this land. Then, with trust status, it would be more difficult to lose the land later. He also supported putting out an RFP on the site.

Carlson stated that he felt a point of compromise exists, between the developer's proposal and what can be accommodated given DNR's concerns, which would still support the local resorts and provide a local attraction.

Harper said that the Division of Forestry would like some direction from PERT so that they aren't put in the position of leading the developer on (spending more money on design, etc.) only to have the project be turned down later. She felt we ought to tell them now if we are outright opposed to the proposal.

Rafn felt that there isn't sufficient information on which to base an absolute no vote at this time.

Seymour suggested that input from the Commissioner's Office is needed to clarify our position.

Sando noted that while a ski area would probably help the local area, there may be a better place to put it, and we should look for an alternative location.

Carlson concluded by saying that he felt our position should be to allow the extension of the existing ski run as in the original proposal, but not allow the other proposed development. We will wait for a revised proposal from the developers in response to our previous letter.

Adjournment

Loechler announced that the other agenda item, the operational order development process, would be postponed until the next meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

ken 10/KEN1

RECEIVED
APR 17 1986
Dept. of Natural Resources
Div. of Parks & Recreation

RECEIVED
APR 17 1986
Dept. of Natural Resources
Div. of Parks & Recreation

SF-00006-04

STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources

TO : PERT Members

DATE: April 7, 1986

FROM : Karen Loechler, Assistant Commissioner
Planning and Special Programs

PHONE: 296-9556

SUBJECT : April 14 PERT Meeting

A PERT meeting has been scheduled for Monday, April 14, following the Commissioner's staff meeting, in the sixth floor conference room.

The agenda will consist of the following items:

1. Ski-Gull ski area expansion -- An informational presentation by the Division of Forestry on the application of Ski Gull, Inc. to lease land in the Pillsbury State Forest for expansion of its adjacent ski area (located on Gull Lake, north of Brainerd). See attached background materials.

2. Operational Order development and approval process -- An informational presentation by the Office of Planning on its proposal to standardize the format, development and approval process for DNR Operational Orders.

Attached also please find a copy of the minutes of the March 10, 1986 meeting.

attachment
KL/KW:pmc
ken1/14

RECEIVED

APR 09 1986

Dept. of Natural Resources
Div. of Parks & Recreation

A motion was then made by Shannon, seconded by Sando, to adopt the Operational Order. Brief discussion followed.

Morrissey asked about the availability of documents to the field offices. Mlecoch replied that a list of documents available in the library will be circulated to the field offices.

The questions was called for, and upon a vote of the members the motion carried unanimously.

2. Field Dog Trial Site Locations

Steve Thorne gave an introduction, emphasizing the necessity of coming to a timely resolution of this matter. He stated that we need to find a site somewhere on state lands to accommodate what he considers to be a valid request from this segment of the recreation community. We need to respond to the Minnesota Federation of Field Trial Organizations by June on the availability of DNR lands.

Paul Swenson then presented some background on the type and size of sites which are being requested. Two kinds of sites are needed -- a large site (800-1000 acres) for state and national pointer dog trials, and a much smaller site with water for retrievers. Holmes noted that the pointer site would be used each year from April to mid-summer, and in the fall.

Davison noted that the Division of Parks is planning to make a site available this year at Helmer Myre State Park for retriever trials. Whitewater State Park has been used previously, and grouse trialing areas are available in the Nemadji State Forest. The Minnesota Valley could be used for trialing, but is subject to flooding and therefore its availability is not predictable.

Swenson noted that a draft report prepared by a DNR task force was completed in August of 1985, but has not been finalized. A screening of state lands was done to identify lands that could be used for trialing. Few appropriate areas could be found to accommodate a large site for pointer trials, particularly in the metro area. Areas may be available in northwestern Minnesota. We could find sites in existing units for the smaller areas needed for retriever trials.

Holmes stated that he had talked to representatives of the Association and had proposed two possibilities: acquisition of a new area (private land), using user fees; or assistance in locating a suitable tract of federal conservation reserve land (land that would be taken out of ag production for ten years). The dog trialers felt it would be too expensive, however, to own their own land.

Sando noted that there is need for an area for incidental use -- i.e., an area near the Twin Cities just to take dogs out for a run.

PERT MEETING MINUTES
March 10, 1986

Members Present:

Karen Loechler, Chair
Elwood Rafn
Paul Swenson
Bob Hance
Larry Shannon
Don Davison
Fred Hammer
Bill Morrissey
Rod Sando
Gail Gendler

Others Present:

Steve Thorne
Vonny Hagen
Bill Lynott
Blair Joselyn
Collene Mlecoch
Peter Buesseler
Jane Harper
Joe Kurcinka
Jim Brooks
Ken Wald, recorder

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Rafn, seconded by Davison, to approve the minutes of the February 10, 1986 meeting. The motion carried.

1. Library Operational Order

Karen Loechler gave a brief introduction on the development of the operational order. She then opened the floor for comments and questions, to which Mlecoch and Joselyn responded.

Several questions were raised regarding how the acquisition policy (p. 4) would work. It was explained that the Library staff would compile a list of all subscriptions currently being received in the department. With the assistance of the Library Advisory Board, it would be determined which publications would be housed in the library. The divisions wouldn't be precluded from having their own subscriptions which could be retained in the division.

Shannon asked how subscriptions which come with organizational memberships would be handled. It was suggested that the mailing address could simply be changed to the library.

Rafn noted that many people probably won't go to the library to read a publication that they might otherwise read if it were more accessible. He added that some publications are of a timely nature and are needed in the divisions when they're fresh, if they are to be of the most benefit. He also asked whether there would be access to the library during evenings and weekends. The response to this was that arrangements could possibly be made to accommodate special access needs.

Brooks asked if it would be possible to have all department publications come in through one place, where a list would be developed and circulated as to what was available; the publications could then be kept in the divisions. The response was that this is what is currently done in many cases, but the publications aren't readily accessible to other potential users that way.

Thorne summarized the discussion by saying that he saw the following outline for a solution developing:

1. While DNR has no large sites available near the metro area, there is a good possibility a large site could be found in northwestern Minnesota.

2. We should look at existing DNR units nearer to the metro area for a small site for retriever trials (Whitewater S.P., Chengwatana S.F.).

3. Federal conservation reserve lands offer a good possibility for a large site in central Minnesota. DNR could assist in locating such a site.

4. DNR could possibly help the Association with acquisition of its own site.

Holmes said he would have the area wildlife managers check with the local ASCS offices on the availability of suitable tracts of federal conservation reserve lands. The Regional Administrators are to coordinate this effort, which would be concentrated in the central and southeast regions. The Office of Planning will look into the possibilities for a large site in northwestern Minnesota.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

ken1/3

PERT BRIEFING FORM

Meeting Date April 14, 1986

Agenda Item: Proposed lease of state forest land on west side of Gull Lake to expand the adjacent downhill ski area.

Contact Person: Dorian Grilley, Forest Planning, 297-2445
Cliff Carlson, Brainerd Area Forest Supervisor (218) 828-2565

Action Needed: Information session - identification of major issues and concerns
- approval of general concept

Project Initiated By: Ski Gull Inc., operator of the adjacent downhill ski area.

Content Summary: The packet contains the following attachments: a proposal for the expansion of Ski Gull sent to the Division of Forestry in early February; a brief history of the proposal; and a summary of the major environmental, economic and logistical concerns and issues raised during the PERT Tech Rep review.

Department Implications: The proposal would permanently change the natural conditions on the site, create visual impacts of the scars on the land, alter the topography and vegetation, and impose facilities such as chair lifts, lights and other equipment on the landscape. It would also mean administering and committing to a lease with longterm environmental and economic implications.

However, it provides an opportunity to be involved in a partnership with the private sector in developing a recreation facility with popular support in the region.

Divisions and Units Which Have Provided Previous Input or Review:

X Forestry	X Parks	X Lands	X RA, Region(s): 3
___ Minerals	X T & W	X Waters	X F & W ___ Planning

Other groups/Agencies:
Various citizens, property owners, associates and business in the Brainerd, area; Fairview Township

Description of Preparation and Review to Date:

1984 - Forestry met with Ski Gull representatives and agreed to consider a lease of 15-20 acres. Forestry asked for written proposal.

1986 - Feb. 10 consultant contracted by Ski Gull sends Forestry a conceptual proposal to lease 133 acres.

1986 - Feb. 18 Forestry sent conceptual proposal to Pert Tech.

1986 - March 21 letter sent to consultant stating DNR's concerns with proposal.

Next Steps/Implementation:

April 9th - DNR meeting in Brainerd with concerned region and area personnel.

? April ? - Consultant will send revised concept to Brainerd area forest supervisor.
- DNR input and possible meeting with consultant.

SF-00006-03

STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources

File: 3510

TO: DNR PERT Representatives

DATE: 4-7-86

FROM: Jane Harper, Division of Forestry Jane

PHONE: 297-2145

SUBJECT: Ski Gull Downhill Ski Area Expansion

In early February the Division of Forestry received a conceptual plan for the expansion of Ski Gull, a downhill ski area located partially on leased state forest land and partially on private land. The expansion would require leasing additional state forest land which had been donated to the state. The following briefly summarizes the proposal and the Department's concerns.

SUMMARY OF THE CONCEPT PLAN FOR SKI GULL EXPANSION

The following is a summary of the proposal sent to the Division of Forestry in February:

To improve the skiing experience and growth at Ski Gull, several major improvements are needed. The area must have a reliable snow making system to both extend the season and improve the snow surface. Additional and more challenging terrain with a vertical drop approaching the upper midwest norm of about 300 feet is needed to satisfy the local skier and to attract the more distant skier. Finally, the area needs to upgrade its existing lifts with one or more modern chair lifts to become more competitive with other Minnesota ski areas.

The narrative sent with the conceptual plan briefly analyzes the existing ski area, the adjacent 190 acre tract of donated state forest land, the design concept, phasing, estimated capacity, development impacts and the area required for the development.

It is emphasized that this is a preliminary proposal subject to change after DNR review and the completion of the marketing study being conducted.

Attached are two maps showing the existing facility and the proposed expansion.

SITE PLANNING HISTORY

The following is a summary of history of Forestry's planning for recreational development on the site:

- Dec. 1981 & Jan. '82: Mr. & Mrs. Brownlee Cote gifts of land to the DNR totaling 190 acres and 4,754 feet of lakeshore on the western side of Gull Lake near Brainerd.
- Fall 1982: Forestry submitted a budget proposal to the legislature which included a $60,000 request for capital improvement bonding to develop a primitive campground and access on the site. The request was approved.
- Jan. 1984: The Division of Forestry Held an informal public planning workshop to discuss development proposals for the site. The workshop identified a strong demand for the access but strong opposition to the proposed campground. The other major discussion topic was the expansion of the ski area which was presented to Forestry at the meeting. Nearly every one of the 40 people attending was in support of improvements to the ski area. Dozens of letters and a petition in support of improvements to the ski area were presented to the DNR at the meeting.
- Shortly after the public meeting Forestry met with representatives from Ski Gull and discussed the proposal. Forestry agreed to consider a proposal to lease of 15-20 acres for development of a longer run and asked for a written proposal.
- Spring 1984: Trails and Waterways analyzed the site and determined that construction of a public access would be too costly because of the extreme slopes to the lake.
- Summer 1984: Plans to develop the site were postponed to wait for the bond sale and/or a written proposal from Ski Gull.
- Summer 1985: Bonds were sold. Shortly thereafter, because the proposal for a campground and access had been dropped and the remaining development was on hold Forestry asked LCMR permission to spend 50 of the 60 thousand dollars on the Wooden Frog Campground rehabilitation. The request was approved.
- Summer 1985: Planning process continued to determine day use and trail needs of the site.
- Feb. 10, 1986, Forestry recieved the conceptual proposal from a consultant in Colorado contracted by Ski Gull. The ultimate development would affect about half of the site. The total lease including the existing lease of about 34 acres would be 133 acres.
- Feb. 18, 1986: Proposal sent out for PERT Tech review with a memo stating Forestry's support for the concept but not the proposal as drawn.
- March 21, 1986: After meeting with several PERT Tech Representatives Forestry sent a letter to the consultant stating the department's major concerns.

- March 25, 1986: Concerns were discussed at the PERT Tech Rep meeting.
- April 9, 1986, Meeting with interested Brainerd region and area personnel to discuss major concerns and implications of the proposal.

Questions and concerns identified to date are as follows:

1. Environmental Concerns

- The development must comply with shoreland regulations. Erosion must be mitigated and sedimentation of the lake will not be tolerated.
- Impacts on the environment have not been documented. The DNR and the USDA Soil Conservation Service will play a major role in documenting these impacts. The Corps of Engineers will also be needed to assess the impacts on the Gull Lake Reservoir.
- Visual impact has not been documented. Impacts of raising the hills, clearing slopes, installing lights and other ski area equipment have not been studied.

2. Economic Concerns

- The economic viability of the project has not been documented. The Department is concerned with the possibility of the project failing.
- Phases for development and the conditions that will dictate expansion past the first phase have not been documented.
- Lease has always been used in all communications however the rate has not been discussed. The impact on the development of current lease rates is not known.

3. Administrative Concerns

- The proposed ski runs cross a public thoroughfare (access across state land to a private cabin), no provisions have been made to mitigate this impact.
- Should we allow the development of the last remaining parcel of undeveloped land on Gull Lake? If so, how much?
- Currently leases are limited to ten years. Will this have an impact? Do we want to commit to a longer lease?
- What will the DNR and the public get out of the development? Forestry has proposed day use facilities and trails on the site. How will they be coordinated with or impacted by the development?
- Support for the proposal by the individuals donating the land has not been documented at this time. A negative reaction could terminate the proposal.

The burden for answering and addressing most of these questions and concerns lie with the developer however; the DNR must agree upon the concept and the implications of leasing this particular parcel to a private developer for developing a downhill ski area.

For further information contact Dorian Grilley, 297-2445

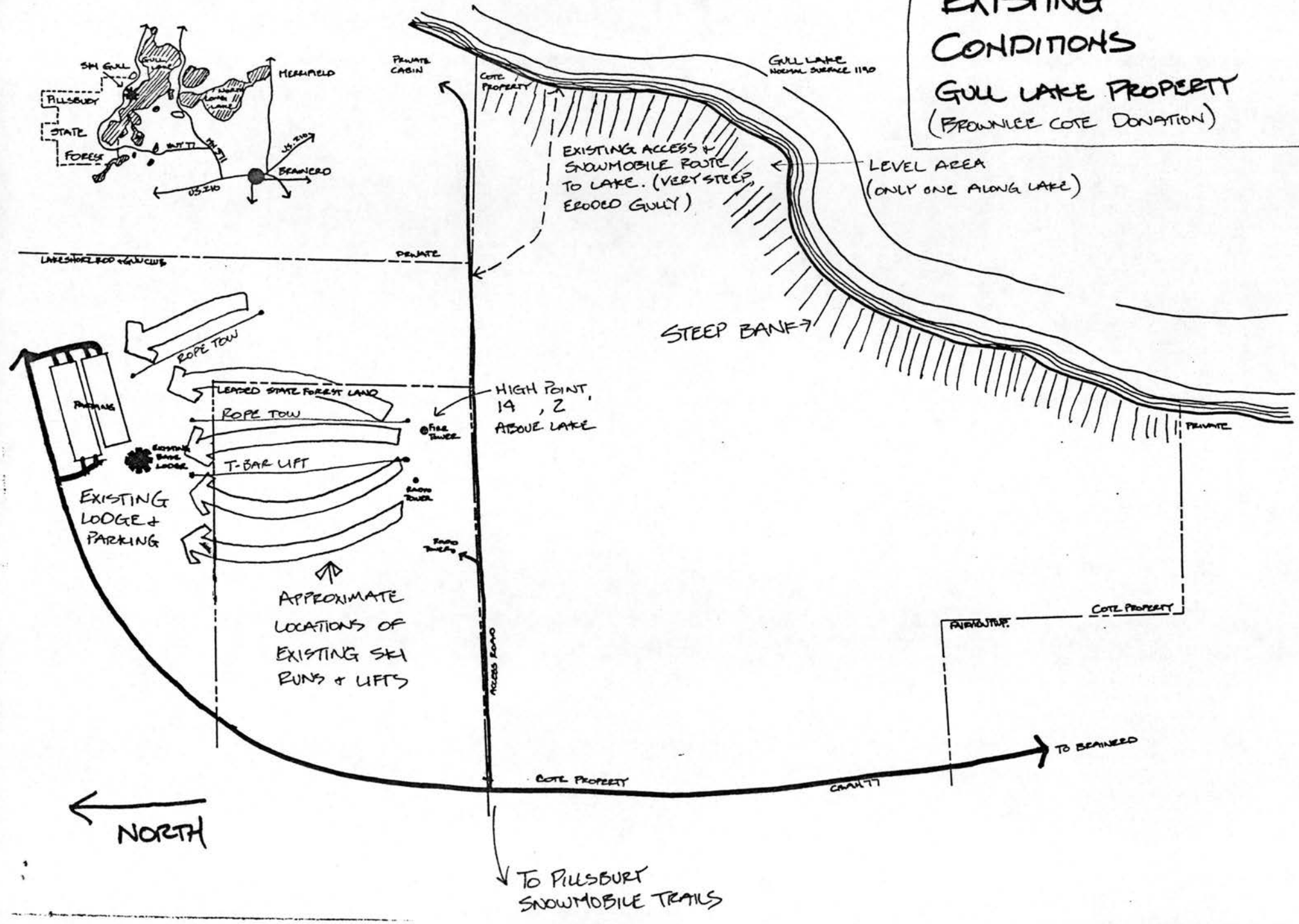
JH:DG
attachments (3)

cc: Dorian Grilley
John Hellquist
Darwin Anderson
Cliff Carlson

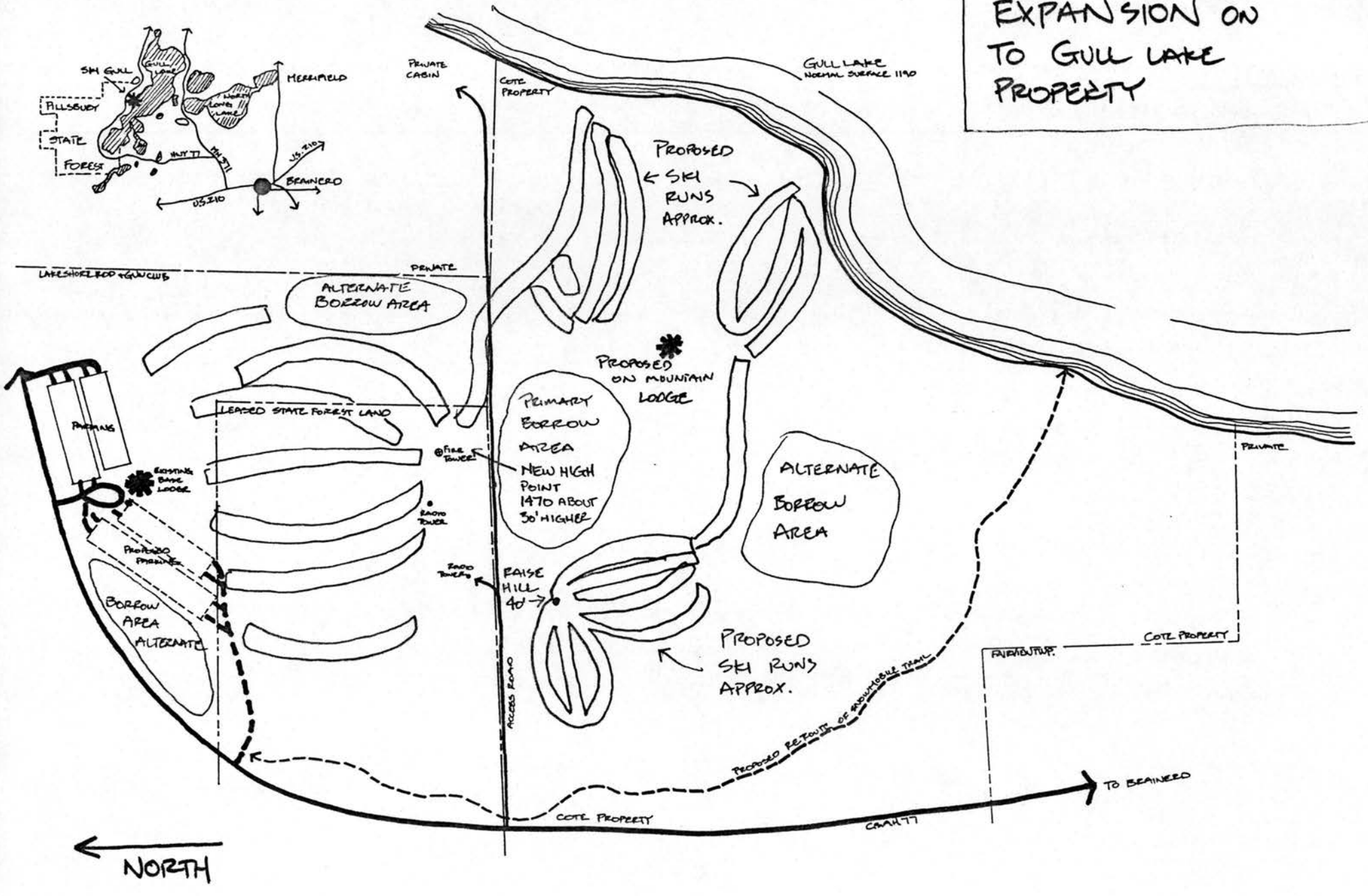
EXISTING CONDITIONS

GULL LAKE PROPERTY

(BROWNLEE COTE DONATION)



(IMPACT AREAS OF) PROPOSED EXPANSION ON TO GULL LAKE PROPERTY



Jan. 28, 1982

/ / /

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GULL LAKE LANDS
DONATED TO THE STATE

The Department of Natural Resources has announced the acquisition by gift of a 190 acre tract of land adjacent to Gull Lake near Brainerd, including 4,754 feet of shoreline on the west side of the lake in Cass County.

The land was donated to the state by Mr. & Mrs. R. F. Brownlee Cote of Lake Hubert with the stipulation that the land be made a part of the Pillsbury State Forest.

The Cotes are long time residents of the area. They operate Grandview Lodge, Camp Lincoln for boys, Camp Lake Hubert for girls and Tanque Verde Ranch near Tucson, Arizona.

DNR officials said the Cotes, in presenting the valuable tract of land to the state, expressed a desire to make a lasting contribution to conservation of natural resources and preservation of the environment.

The Department said the land will eventually be developed to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the public and will be managed to preserve and enhance the wildlife, forests, the 4,754 feet of Gull Lake water frontage and other resources, including historical values.

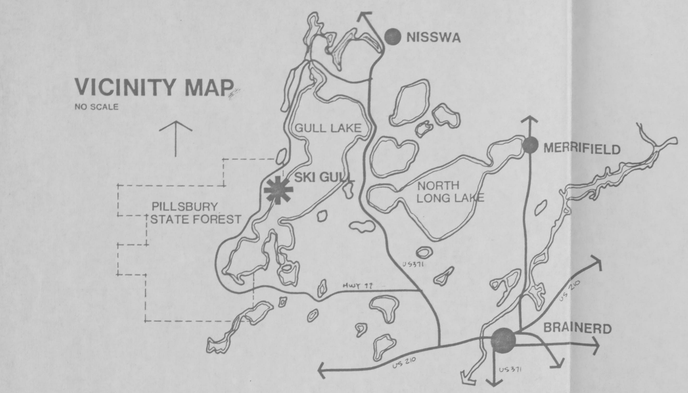
Commissioner of Natural Resources Joseph Alexander said the donation was "without doubt the most valuable gift of land ever received by the Department from a private donor."

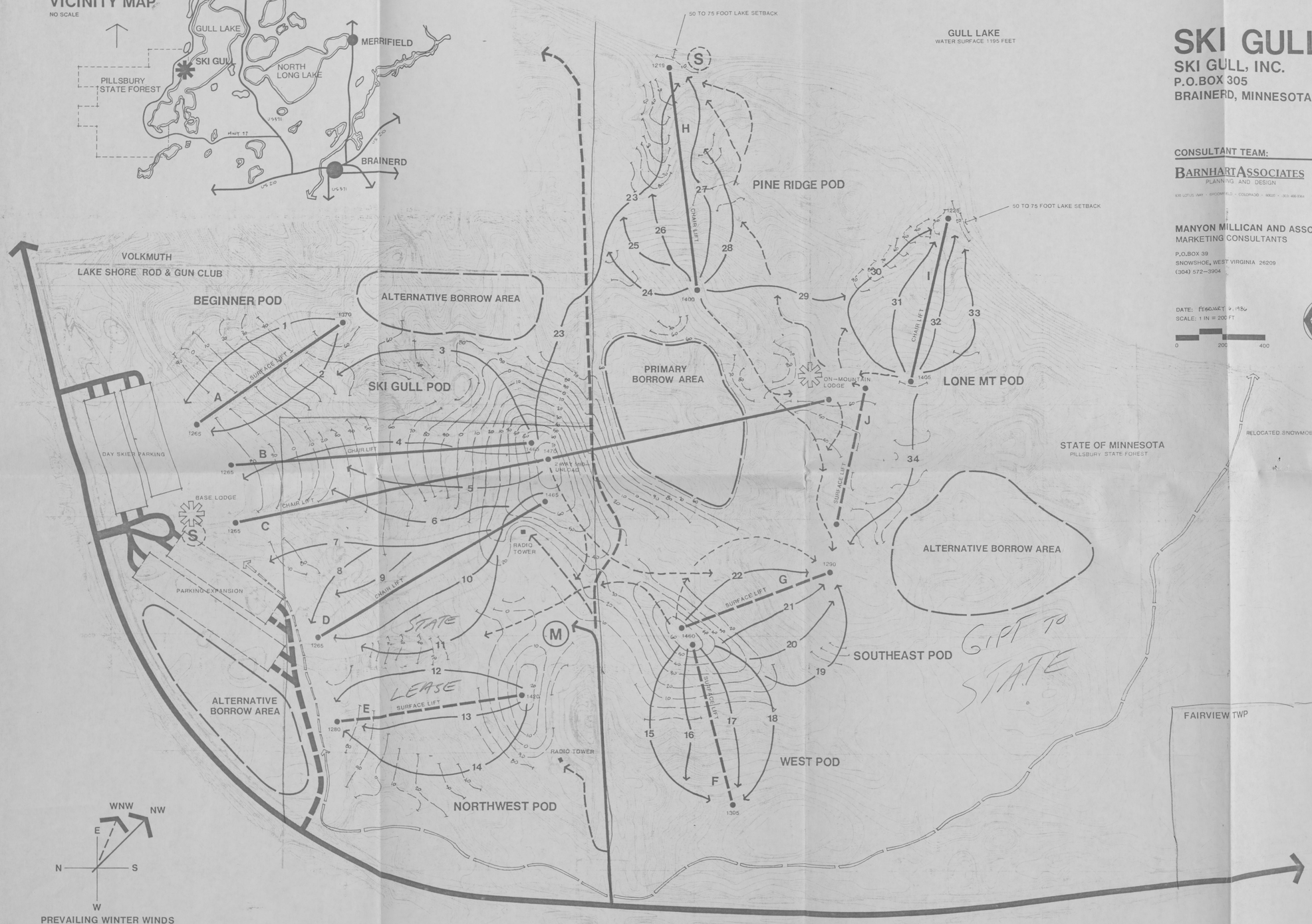
He emphasized that a great deal of credit for the gift is due to the Nature Conservancy, a private conservation group which encourages the donation of key tracts of privately held land to public agencies.

/ / /

SKI GULL CONCEPT PLAN

SKI GULL, INC.
P.O.BOX 305
BRAINERD, MINNESOTA 56401





PREVAILING WINTER WINDS

CONSULTANT TEAM:

BARNHART ASSOCIATES
PLANNING AND DESIGN
630 LOTUS WAY · BROOMFIELD · COLORADO · 80020 · 303 466 8364

MANYON MILLICAN AND ASSOCIATES
MARKETING CONSULTANTS
P.O.BOX 39
SNOWSHOE, WEST VIRGINIA 26209
(304) 572-3904

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 1980
SCALE: 1 IN = 200 FT
0 200 400

LEGEND

- SKI TRAILS
- SKI CATWALKS
- CHAIR OR SURFACE LIFTS (SOLID LINES INDICATE EARLY OR FIRST PHASE LIFTS)
- PROPOSED CONTOURS
- SKIER SUPPORT FACILITY
- SNOWMAKING & MAINTENANCE FACILITIES
- VEHICULAR ROADS (LIMITED USE/SUMMER ONLY — DASHED)
- SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

STATISTICAL SUMMARY

STUDY AREA

PRIVATE LAND	58.0 AC
STATE LAND	190.0 AC
TOTAL AREA	248.0 AC

DOWNHILL SKI DEVELOPMENT

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

STATE LAND USED	25.5 AC
4 SURFACE LIFTS	
9 SKI TRAILS	22.9 AC
500 DAILY SKIER CAPACITY (175 SKIERS LARGEST DAY)	

EARLY FIRST PHASES

STATE LAND USED	75.5 AC
6 CHAIR/SURFACE LIFTS	
20 SKI TRAILS	36.6 AC ?
1100 DAILY SKIER CAPACITY	

ULTIMATE DEVELOPMENT

STATE LAND USED	133.0 AC
10 CHAIR/SURFACE LIFTS	
34 SKI TRAILS	68.0 AC
2000 DAILY SKIER ?	

Frank Knoke

SF-00006-04

STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources

TO : PERT Technical Committee DATE: March 21, 1986

FROM : Joseph M. Kuncinka, Supervisor PHONE: 296-7847
Environmental and Management Analysis Section

SUBJECT : PERT Technical Committee Meeting

This is to remind you that there will be a meeting of the PERT Tech Committee on March 25, 1986 at 9:00 in the fourth floor conference room.

The agenda will include the following:

1. Amendments to the Mineland Reclamation Rules, for which you received the materials at the February 28th meeting.

2. Ski Gull ski area expansion. This was distributed for review under the regular project review process. There have been quite a few concerns expressed regarding the proposal. We need to discuss what further action or review should be undertaken on this project. Copies of the comments received to date are attached for your information.

JMK:KW:pmc
er313

Ken

SF-00006-03

STATE OF MINNESOTA

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources/Trails & Waterways

Office Memorandum

RECEIVED MAR 14

TO: Dorian Grilley, Planner
Division of Forestry

DATE: 3/12/86

FROM: BL Bill Lynott
Pert Techical Representative

PHONE: 6-0729

SUBJECT: SKI GULL SKI AREA EXPANSION, PILLSBURY STATE FOREST

We have reviewed the above document and have the following comments.

1. The proposal is to expand an existing alpine skiing area near Gull Lake (Cass County) onto an adjacent 190 acre parcel recently donated to DNR for conservation purposes and presently being managed as part of the Pillsbury State Forest. To judge by materials included for review, this proposed development would profoundly alter the heavily wooded, essentially undisturbed nature of this parcel. Considerable tree and shrub clearing would be necessary for the ski runs and two major proposed borrow areas are located on the site.

2. Soils on the parcel are sandy, and slopes are quite steep. We note the intention of the developer to artificially increase the height of the fire tower hill by 60 feet by means of borrow relocation, and further note his intention to re-grade steep slopes on the Lone Mountain and Pine Ridge ski pod areas within the 1000-foot Shoreland Zone for ski slope creation. Erosion is potentially a serious problem, as well as visual and esthetic impacts to this parcel, one of the last in public ownership on the lake. DNR's Shoreland Regulations, while not addressing ski areas directly, do address permissible levels of vegetation clearing and development on steep slopes.

3. We note that the present ski area has a capacity of 500 skiers per day but presently has a peak use of only 175 skiers per day. At full development, capacity will be 2000 skiers per day. Yet, SCORP research shows alpine skiing declining in terms of participation in the next decade. The rationale for using the last sizeable area of undeveloped public shoreline for this purpose needs to be better developed then it is in this document. It is also worth noting that under a bill presently on its way to passage in the legislature a leaseholder may demand that DNR sell his leaseholding, raising the possibility that the state may ultimately be unable to retain it in public ownership.

4. It is difficult to reconcile this proposal with DNR's stated policy objectives for state forests, among which, as given in the sub-area plan, are to provide for "...dispersed recreational activities that are compatible with other forest uses," and which "...require a minimum level of development and management." The use of this land to afford public opportunities for such dispersed recreational pursuits on and adjacent to a high quality lake, nearly all of the remainder of which is surrounded by private land, is reasonable and justified, however. Ski-touring, hiking, fishing pier, water access and picnicking facilities would all appear justified and needed.

5. We are troubled by the implication on page 8 (bottom) that DNR would not want to perform any development itself which would threaten this site's primitive character, but it is okay to lease the site to a private developer who is then free to do as he pleases.

6. In the final analysis, little is offered in the way of mitigation. Considering that the developer would be getting a prime parcel of land essentially dedicated for his use, we believe that developer-built and maintained ski-touring trails, fishing piers, boat ramps, and possibly other items, ought to be considered in order to compensate the public for the use of its land.

7. We have serious reservations about this proposal. We recommend more study by all concerned into the feasibility, justification, and mitigation needs of the project before it proceeds.

BL/lr

cc Paul Swenson
Steve Kirch
Gordon Kimball
Dan Collins
Ken Wald

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW TRANSMITTAL SLIP

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF PLANNING

MAR 1986
RECEIVED
Division of Waters

TO:

	Region III	Bob Hance
	Enforcement	Fred Hammer
	Fish and Wildlife	Earl Huber
	Forestry	
	Minerals	Dennis Asmusson
	Parks and Recreation	Frank Knoke
✓	Waters	Wayne Edgerton
	Trails and Waterways	Bill Lynott
	Natural Heritage	
	Lands	Stephanie Warne

FROM: Environmental Review Section by Ken Wald

PROJECT: Ski Gull ski area expansion expansion, Pillsbury State Forest FILE NO: DNR 86-4 DATE: March 3, 1986

MESSAGE: For your review and comment.

See attached memo from Jane Harper explaining project.

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS BY: March 12 to Dorian Grilley or Jane Harper, Division of Forestry with a copy to me.

COMMENTS: 3-12-86

Ken,

The Division of Waters has some concerns regarding this proposal:

1) The soils in this area tend to be very erosive. We have reservations about the erosion potential in the two ski areas proposed on the DNR land which end very near the shore of Gull Lake.

2) How much vegetation clearing would be necessary

to make these two ski areas safe?

3) What measures are planned to keep off road vehicles from using these areas during non-skiing times of the year?

4) We do not feel that the proposed 50 to 75 foot setbacks at the end of the ski runs are adequate.

5) What would be the view of the ski runs from the lake surface?

6) What are the esthetic impacts of increasing the height of the fire tower hill? How will the potential for wind and water induced soil erosion be addressed on this extreme slopes?

7) What are the reclamation plans for the primary borrow area? Should the primary borrow area be located on state lands?

8) as a matter of principle or policy, should the DNR be involved in this type of development in the shoreland area of a protected water?

It seems that this project has a lot of potential problems that need to be adequately addressed before a determination of its advisability can be made. However, perhaps the DNR first should make a decision on what our policy (Dept. Policy) on development in shoreland areas will be. There is no sense in making the proponent provide costly information on the two ski runs if we are going to ultimately deny the development anyway.

Wayne E.

SF-00006-03

STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources

TO: Dorian Grilley, Planner
Division of Forestry

DATE: 3/12/86

E.H.H.

FROM: Earl Huber, Surveys & Review Unit Manager
Ecological Services Section

PHONE: 6-0786

SUBJECT: Ski Gull Ski Area Expansion Project, Pillsbury State Forest

From our fish and wildlife perspective we are not in favor of the project. We think that this well wooded and brushy natural area would serve various public interests better if good forestry and wildlife management practices were carried out with limited and varied recreational development. Alternatives to the proposed project should be presented and discussed. It is felt that before any expansion is considered additional improvements and/or developments need to occur on the present ski facility followed by an assessment of the results and impacts on the recreational service being provided. This should help determine the need and/or justification for further expansion.

It is our judgement that if expansion of the ski facility onto state lands were even considered it should be in a much reduced scope than is being proposed. We would definitely be opposed to the Pine Ridge and Lone Mountain ski pods and to the 2 proposed borrow areas nearby. It is felt that other borrow areas used in the past can be utilized or that soils and contours can be better manipulated to eliminate or minimize the need for borrow from old or new areas.

It is felt that development is increasing and bit by bit impacting and reducing fish and wildlife habitat and resources of the area. Fish and wildlife are still the most important ingredients for balancing the ecosystem and making the area attractive to recreational users. Thus public lands are most important for retention and the benefit of all recreational interests. Natural areas on state lands will be most important to maintain as development on private lands continues to impact and reduce the natural resources and the quality of life in the area.

EHH:blt

cc: KEN WALD

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW TRANSMITTAL SLIP

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF PLANNING

TO:

	Region III	Bob Hance
	Enforcement	Fred Hammer
	Fish and Wildlife	Earl Huber
	Forestry	
	Minerals	Dennis Asmusson
✓	Parks and Recreation	Frank Knoke
	Waters	Wayne Edgerton
	Trails and Waterways	Bill Lynott
	Natural Heritage	
	Lands	Stephanie Warne

FROM: Environmental Review Section by Ken Wald

PROJECT: Ski Gull ski area expansion expansion, Pillsbury State Forest FILE NO: DNR 86-4 DATE: March 3, 1986

MESSAGE: For your review and comment.

See attached memo from Jane Harper explaining project.

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS BY: March 12 to Dorian Grilley or Jane Harper, Division of Forestry with a copy to me.

COMMENTS:

RECEIVED

MAR 04 1986

Dept. of Natural Resources
Div. of Parks & Recreation

SF-00006-03

STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT Natural Resources

File: 3510

TO: PERT Technical Representatives

DATE: 2-18-86

FROM: Jane Harper - Division of Forestry

PHONE: 297-2145

SUBJECT: Ski Area Expansion - Pillsbury State Forest

Attached, for your review, is a proposal for the expansion of Ski Gull, a downhill ski area on the western side of Gull Lake near Brainerd. The proposal was sent to Cliff Carlson, Brainerd Area Forest Supervisor, by a consultant hired by the Ski Gull non-profit corporation. Also enclosed is a copy of the first draft of the Sub Area plan written to guide the Division of Forestry's recreation management activities in the Pillsbury State Forest. The plan is incomplete, but it still provides some background on the site.

The idea of expanding the ski area was first presented over a year ago at the Division's public meetings held during the sub area planning process. No commitment was made - we said that the proposal would be considered. Our decision was to be based on the extent of the development and its environmental effects. At that time we requested a more detailed proposal. It finally arrived last week.

In addition to the ski area the need for a public access, x-country ski trails and a day use area were discussed. Opposition to a proposal to put a campground on the site was widespread; the proposal was dropped shortly thereafter. After a thorough examination by the DNR Bureau of Engineering the access was dropped because of the high construction costs and extensive site modification. Day use and ski trail facilities have been retained in the plan.

This initial review is to express the department's concerns only. Forestry has neither accepted nor rejected the plan. The concept has been discussed with many Brainerd regional personnel and local residents. No objections to the concept have been voiced to date. The local people are overwhelmingly in favor of the idea. Forestry also plans to hold several public meetings should we decide to go ahead with the project. Forestry also plans to contact the family that donated the property for their reaction to the proposal.

Because the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan expressed some doubt about future increases in downhill skiing the Region 5 Economic Development Commission is involved with a feasibility study which will include use projections. These projections will include the expanded season made possible with the installation of artificial snow making machines.

Since Gull Lake is classified as a recreational lake and the region's economy is heavily based on tourism, we feel that this would be a good opportunity to cooperate with the private sector in developing a recreation facility. Forestry's major concerns are: 1. The facility should be expanded in phases to satisfy the market, starting with the existing lease site; 2. Borrow areas on the Cote property should be kept to a minimum; 3. Consideration will be given to summer uses such as a public access, hiking, picnicking and interpretation; 4. Ski Gull will play a role in the development and maintenance of cross country ski trails on the site; 5. All the department's environmental concerns are dealt with in a satisfactory manner; 6. The leased acreage be kept to a minimum and that we lease only the areas to be developed as ski runs.

Please review the attached material and report your concerns to Dorian Grilley or myself by March 12th. Dorian's phone number is 297-2445. Thank you for your input.

JH:DG
attachments (3)

cc: Darwin Anderson
Cliff Carlson
Jim Lawler
John Hellquist

SUB-AREA PLAN FOR DAY-USE AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT ON THE GULL LAKE PROPERTY AND THE PILLSBURY STATE FOREST

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forestry
St. Paul, Minnesota 55146

Foreword

Minnesota's state forests encompass about three million acres of state administered land. Management of the state forest lands is based on multiple use principles. Multiple use does not imply the use of all lands for all purposes, but recognizes that site characteristics determine the ability of an area to support various uses. The intent is to balance uses based on their compatibility. Recreation is recognized as an appropriate use of state forest land under the definition of "forest resources" in the Forest Resource Management Act of 1982 (Laws of Minnesota, Chapter 511, subd. 8). The definition reads:

> Forest Resources means those natural assets of forest lands including timber and other forest crops, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness, rare and distinctive flora and fauna, air, water, soils and educational, aesthetic and historical values.

Purpose

This document was prepared to present planned development proposals for the gift to the state, by Mr. and Mrs. Brownlee Cote, of 190 acres of land on Gull Lake near Brainerd, herein called the Gull Lake Property. This effort is in accordance with a request for funding for the 1984-85 biennium submitted to the Minnesota Legislature. The request identified the need to rehabilitate several high quality state forest recreation areas throughout the state.

In addition this plan was prepared to satisfy the master plan requirements of the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975 (M.S. 86A). The Outdoor Recreation Act requires that a plan be prepared, reviewed by both public and private interests, and approved before any new recreation facilities or other development except for repairs and maintenance can take place. The proposals in this plan should ensure that the scenic, historic, scientific, natural and recreational qualities of the Gull Lake Property will be properly managed for the continuing use and enjoyment of Minnesota's citizens.

Authority

The Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975 includes state forests and state forest sub-areas as a part of the state's outdoor recreation system. The subdivision of the act (subd. 7) concerning state forests and state forest sub-areas states that:

a) A state forest, as established by section 89.021, shall be administered to accomplish the purposes set forth in that section, and a state forest sub-area shall be established to permit development and management of specialized outdoor recreation at locations and in a manner consistent with the primary purpose of the forest.
b) No unit shall be authorized as a state forest sub-area unless it is located within a state forest and contains suitable natural

resources to accommodate any of the following uses:

1) Day use areas. Areas which permit recreational use of the forest in its natural state, not requiring an overnight stay, including but not limited to picnicking, fishing, swimming, boat launching, hiking, interpretation and nature observation.
2) Campground. Provide minimum facilities needed to accommodate overnight camping.

c) Outdoor recreation facilities located within state forests shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision.

Character and Level of Recreational Development

The DNR policy statement number nine entitled Recreational Use of Minnesota State Forests outlines the procedure and criteria for establishing state forest sub-areas. The policy states that the goal of the State Forest Recreation Management Program is:

> To fulfill the outdoor recreation potential within state forests by providing developed recreation areas (sub-areas) and opportunities for dispersed recreational activities that are compatible with other forest uses.

The goal, as stated above, is consistent with the state forest management philosophy of multiple use. In general, recreational development in state forests is to be at a level that does not have a significant affect on the forest's other resources. When developed, facilities in a state forest should be characterized by contact with nature and require a minimum level of development and management. These policies generally limit development in state forests to primitive, minimum impact campgrounds, day use areas and recreational trails.

Planning Process

Following the process outlined in the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975, the Division of Forestry has established the following planning process for recreation areas in need of redevelopment:

1. An announced public input period designed to solicit public input for the development of the plan during which interested parties may contact a representative from the Division of Forestry.
2. Plan preparation by the Division of Forestry.
3. Review and approval by DNR's Planning and Environmental Review Team. 4. Plan review by the State Planning Agency.
5. An announced public review period during which interested parties may again contact a representative from the Division of Forestry to discuss the proposed development.
6. Plan approved

GULL LAKE PROPERTY - PILLSBURY STATE FOREST

Introduction

The Gull Lake Property is located on the western side of Gull Lake about 15 miles northwest of Brainerd. The site contains almost one mile of lakeshore on one of the most popular recreation and resort lakes in the state. The land was given to the state for conservation purposes. Access to the site is limited by steep wooded banks along the lake and the dense woods along the highway. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Forestry is in charge of managing the site.

Location, Access and Adjacent Ownership

The site is located in the northeastern corner of the Pillsbury State Forest. County Highway 77, a heavily traveled route on the western side of Gull Lake, runs along part of the western boundary of the site. The eastern boundary is the lake. To the south is all private land. To the southwest is 120 acres of land owned by Fairview Township. The Fairview town hall is located on this tract of land. Ski Gull, a downhill ski area, exists to the north of the site on both leased state forest land and private land. There is additional private land to the north that is undeveloped and a small tract, along the lake, with a cabin constructed on it.

Access to the site is provided by a forest road that runs straight east from Highway 77, along the northern boundary of the site, to a point just above the lake. In addition to recreational use the road is used for access to a leased radio tower site, ski hill maintenance, access to a cabin on private land and for forest management purposes. An easement exists on the road providing for access to the private land and cabin to the north of the property. A spur from the main road continues to the south and east down through a gully to the lake. The spur is steep and washed out in places and is only accessible with a four-wheel drive truck, and then only during dry periods. The remainder of the shoreline is very steep making access to the lake from the site difficult. There are two spots where it would be easiest to access the lake from the site. One is the existing road and the other is south of the existing road by about two tenths of a mile. This spot is a much larger and nearly level but it is much harder to access from the site because there is no road access. The remainder of the site is rolling to steep and is all wooded.

History and Archaeology

The Pillsbury State Forest was named after John S. Pillsbury who served as governor of Minnesota from 1876 to 1877. In 1900 he tendered 990 acres of cutover pine lands in southern Cass County to the Minnesota State Forestry Board, enabling the area to become the first forest reserve. This land formed the nucleus of the Pillsbury State Forest when it was established by the legislature in 1935. In 1903 construction on the state's first tree nursery was begun on the site. The first fire tower was erected in 1911 and was later abandon after the construction of the Gull Lake Lookout Tower in 1939. In general the first settlers only stayed long enough to find that the land was not suited to agriculture and moved on.

An archaeological survey of the site by the state has not been conducted. It is recommended that a survey be conducted to determine if any historical or archaeological sites are present, at proposed construction sites, before any development takes place. An agreement between the DNR and the Minnesota Historical Society dated December 23, 1971 establishes procedures for dealing with historical and archaeological sites. copies of this agreement are available from the DNR or the Historical Society.

Geology, Soils and Topography

The entire Pillsbury State Forest is located within the St. Croix Moraine Association. The till associated with this moraine is generally sandy and stony. The soils are not suited for agriculture and are mostly forested. Erosion and compaction are major concerns when developing facilities on these soils.

Topography is another important factor to consider when planning recreation facilities on the Gull Lake Property. The site contains some of the steepest slopes in the forest. Topographic variety is desirable for screening and separating different uses as well as for creating a desirable trail with good scenic variety. The ground and end moraines in the forest provide this type of topographic variety and are excellent for many types of low impact or dispersed recreational activities. Erosion, compaction and disruption of the inherent scenic quality of the landscape are the factors that must be considered when developing facilities on areas with topographic diversity. With careful planning and development steep slopes can be an asset to a facility.

Water

Most of the Pillsbury State Forest drains to the small lakes, potholes and marshes found within its borders. Most of the Gull Lake Property also drains to low areas with the exception of the area along the shoreline of Gull Lake. There are no areas that remain wet all year although some areas retain water during wet periods.

The water quality in Gull Lake is very good providing opportunities for many water oriented activities. The abundance of small lakes and marshes in the forest, and near the Gull Lake Property, makes excellent wildlife habitat providing opportunities for hunting and wildlife observation. Being one of the only undeveloped parcels on Gull lake makes the Gull Lake Property an important recreational resource, now and in the future.

Climate

The central Minnesota climate is suitable for all types of recreational development compatible with state forest management.

Vegetation

The majority of the vegetation on the Gull Lake Property consists of central hardwoods, aspen and pine. The underbrush is dense making

travel, even by foot, difficult. The diversity of timber types makes excellent wildlife habitat as well as being a recreation resource. Much of the timber is quite old and is in need of harvesting to ensure the continued availability of the resource for logging, recreation and wildlife.

The mix of vegetation on the Gull Lake Property and the Pillsbury State Forest is suitable for all types of dispersed development that is compatible with other types of forest management. If properly planned and constructed the affects of a new facility on the vegetation could be minimal.

Fish and Wildlife

Fishing and hunting are quite popular in the Pillsbury State Forest and the surrounding area. Gull Lake, in particular, is very popular as a fishing lake. Many people come to the Pillsbury to hunt as well. Planning of any new facilities must consider wildlife habitat as well as water quality and seek to minimize the negative effects.

RECREATION DEMAND

Introduction

Assessing the need for various outdoor recreation facilities is often difficult. Use statistics for existing facilities, when available, can also identify trends. The accuracy of projections based on surveys is limited to general use. An unused facility may not indicate a lack of demand, it may indicate a lack of knowledge about the facility by the general public. Thus projections of recreation demand must be tempered by the intuitive judgement of the recreation planner and manager.

Projections made for a particular geographic area, such as the Brainerd Forestry Administrative Area, need to be quite extensive to account for the diversity of recreational opportunities and land types. The State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 1985 Draft (SCORP85), the source for this plan's demand information takes into account many factors when projecting future recreational activity. Factors such as the changing age structure of the population, population growth and changes in the geographic location of the population are used. SCORP reported projected changes using a computer mapping process which showed the areas that would be most affected in the darkest tones.

Statewide Demand

One of the most important factors to consider when assessing a facility or potential facility in Minnesota is the quality of the resource. The resource can be natural or man made however most of the facilities in Minnesota have been developed around the states outstanding natural resources. In addition to the quality of the resource other factors such as the accessibility of the facility to the population and the numbers of people who participate in the activity are to be considered when assessing a facility.

SCORP participation surveys indicate that Minnesotan's demand for summer recreation is greater than for winter recreation but participation in winter activities is growing at a faster rate. Swimming and bicycling are by far the most popular summer activities followed by fishing and boating. Other popular summer activities include picnicking, hiking and camping. Snowmobiling and ice skating are the most popular winter activities followed by ice fishing and cross country skiing. Statewide, participation in these activities ranged from about 3.5 to 13.5 million occasions per year except for swimming, 23 million, and bicycling, 54 million.

Participation in all of these activities is expected to increase between now and 1995. Projected increases range from about 10 percent to almost 17 percent except for swimming, 9 percent, and bicycling, 8 percent. In general the greatest increases in numbers are in the activities with higher participation rates such as swimming and bicycling. Over half of the activities mentioned above have projected total increases of over one million occasions. The remaining half are projected to increase by at least 600,000 occasions by 1995.

Central Minnesota Demand

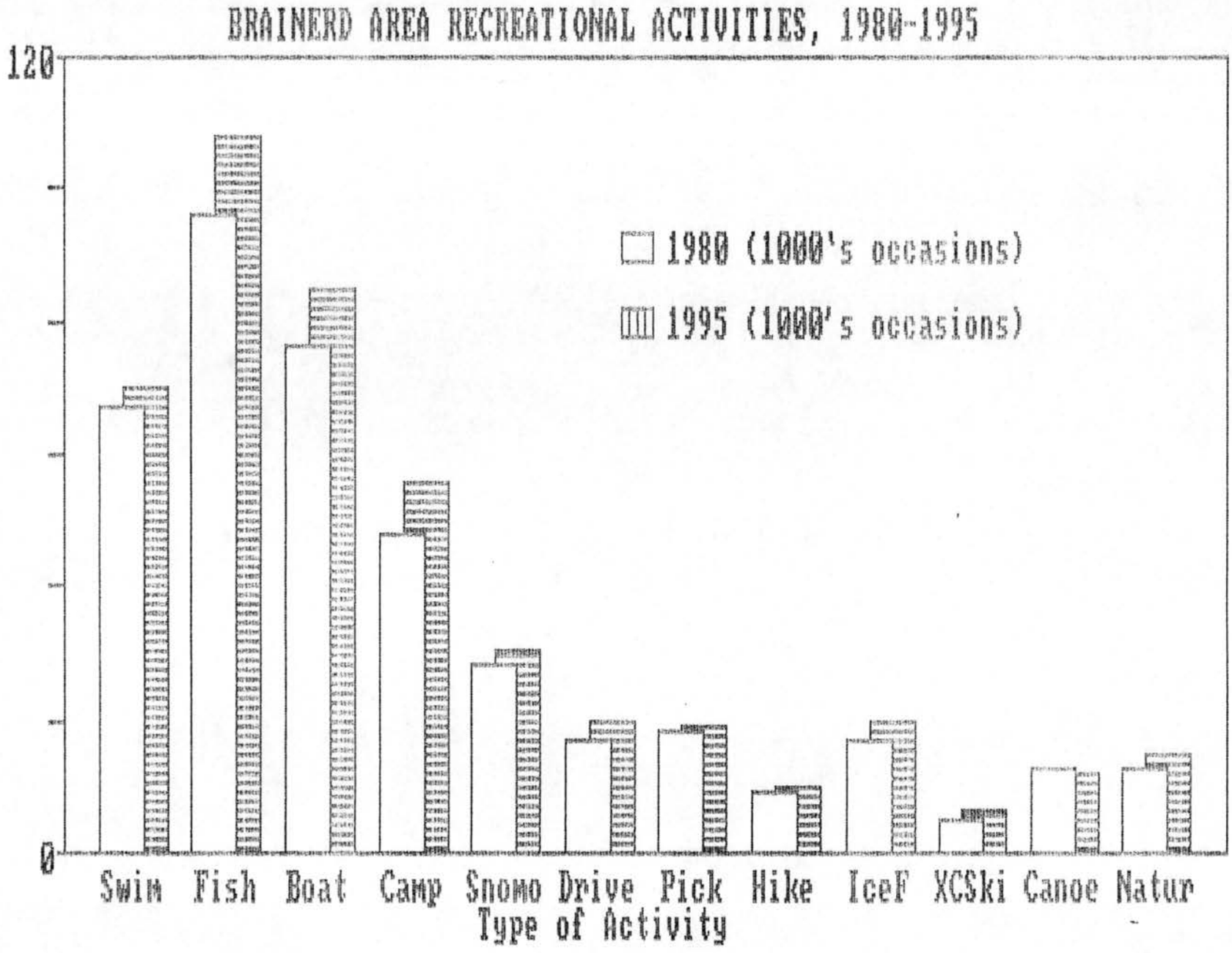
The most popular recreational activities in the Brainerd Area were water oriented (see bar graph). Camping was the next most popular activity followed by snowmobiling. The 1985 SCORP shows this area to have one of the highest concentrations of recreational activity in the state.

All of the surveyed recreational activities except canoeing are expected to increase between now and 1995. Increases of 10% or greater were noted for summer fishing, boating, camping, driving for pleasure, hiking, ice fishing, cross country skiing and nature study. Nature study is expected to increase at the fastest rate at 20%. Other significant increases include camping and ice fishing at 17%, driving at 16% and summer fishing and cross country skiing at 13%. If new facilities are planned in this area they should be constructed to accommodate these uses.

Downhill Skiing

Downhill skiing is not usually analyzed in state forest recreation area plans, but a downhill ski area, Ski Gull, already exists on the adjacent 80 acres of state forest land and a proposal has been submitted to lease part of the site and expand the area on to the Gull Lake Property.

Participation in downhill skiing reaches its peak in the 15-24 year old age class. Since the 15-24 age class is expected to decline greatest in numbers, of all age classes, in the next 10 years, participation in downhill skiing is projected by SCORP to decline. This does not indicate that downhill skiing will not continue to be a popular activity, but rather it implies that new development should satisfy existing demand in order to justify construction costs. New development must be of a higher quality or strategically located to attract users.


BRAINERD AREA RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, 1980-1995
120
0
1980 (1000's occasions)
1995 (1000's occasions)
Swim
Fish
Boat
Camp
Snomo
Drive
Pick
Hike
IceF
XCSki
Canoe
Natur
Type of Activity

The proposed expansion of Ski Gull, with careful planning, could be a significant improvement in quality to a facility that is already strategically located. Further market analysis is needed to determine whether or not the proposal will be cost effective. This analysis will be coordinated by Ski Gull and be included in their proposal to lease the land owned by the State of Minnesota.

RECREATION FACILITIES

The majority of the recreation facilities in the Brainerd area are private. These facilities are mostly resorts that provide water oriented recreation and camping. In general the private sector provides the more capital intensive, service oriented facilities while the public lands and waters provide the setting for outdoor recreation activities. This situation ensures that public and private facilities serve different purposes and do not compete directly for tourist dollars.

Private facilities greatly out number public facilities in the vicinity of Gull Lake. Public recreation areas on Gull Lake include several public accesses and the Gull Lake Recreation Area which includes a campground, picnic area, access and swimming beach. The majority of the private recreation areas on the lake are resorts.

The Pillsbury State Forest contains the largest tracts of public land and the most facilities in the immediate vicinity of Gull Lake. The facilities in the forest include the Rock Lake Campground and Ski Trail, the Walt Stark Horse Assembly Area and Campground and the Pillsbury Snowmobile Trails which serve as horse trails in the summer. In general the facilities in the forest are frequently used with the exception of the ski trail which is in a remote location with poor terrain for skiing. The Rock Lake Trail does not satisfy user needs of convenience or quality and therefore does not receive much use. Ski trails have been developed in more convenient locations using the Grants-In-Aid program or private funds and are receiving more use. The opportunity exists in the Pillsbury to add to the private and Grants-In-Aid trail system. Use of existing high quality facilities has indicated that development of additional camping or snowmobiling opportunities are not needed at this time.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities For Development

The Gull Lake Property would make an excellent site for many different recreation facilities but the needs for recreational development in the area are much more limited. Development is further limited by the site's terrain and a desire to preserve the site's primitive character. In addition the Division of Forestry does not intend to develop any facilities that would compete with privately developed facilities. These restrictions along with the physical restrictions of the site itself limit the development that could be done by the Division of Forestry to day-use and trail facilities. Other development, such as the proposed expansion of the adjacent downhill ski area, would have to be done by private developers on land they have leased from the state.

Development of an access is limited by the substantial costs involved in traversing the site's steep terrain. Development of a campground would also be limited by the terrain however; competition with private interests is the main reason a campground is not being considered. These private interests are able to satisfy the present demand and have the capability to expand to accommodate future needs.
Day-use and trail development on the property would have the potential to be very popular with people staying in nearby resorts, the residents of the area and with people just passing by on Highway 77. The opportunity to expand the downhill skiing facility and adding a cross country skiing system in the Pillsbury would also add to the attractiveness of the area to tourists. The day-use and trail facilities could provide for picnicking, hiking, cross country skiing, swimming, shore fishing and the existing connection from Gull Lake to the Pillsbury snowmobile trails. A day use area on the site would also provide an excellent opportunity to interpret and educate people on the Pillsbury State Forest's management activities. With this in mind, the proposed development listed below will emphasize cooperation with other recreation providers and the residents of the area by providing facilities that compliment the private resort and ski area development while still maintaining the site's natural qualities.

Proposed Development

Trails

- Construct miles of hiking/ski trail that provides access to the lake and has the opportunity to connect with Ski Gull and trails in the Pillsbury.

- Cooperate with local cross country skiing groups to develop a proposal for new cross country ski trails in the Pillsbury which would replace the Rock Lake Trail. These trails should be in a location more suitable to skiing and more accessible to the user.

- Provide a snowmobile connection from lake to Pillsbury trail system (existing road).

Day-use

- Construct 8 car parking area accessible from Highway 77.

- Provide interpretive signing and bulletin board.

- Develop 6 picnic sites along trail near lake.

- Develop fishing dock accessible from trail.

Ski Area

- Grant lease for ski area expansion if proposal meets scenic, quality and construction considerations acceptable to the DNR (leased area to be 10-15 acres). New ski runs should show significant improvements in quality not quantity.

MAINTENANCE

The Gull Lake Property has the potential to be a very popular facility. With this will come the responsibility to maintain its quality and appeal. Both short term and long term maintenance will be needed. In the past, money for the personnel needed to maintain forest recreational facilities has been, for the most part, has been inadequate for the task. Proper levels of funding for maintenance of recreational facilities is a cost-effective means of preventing deterioration and maintaining quality facilities.

Annual maintenance costs would include a part time maintenance worker, a student in the summer and materials and supplies needed to maintain the facility. In the past maintenance at many forestry facilities has been done with workers from the Greenview program which hires retired residents of the area. This program should be used at Gull Lake if possible. Maintenance should not be a major problem at the facility as is the case with campgrounds which have many more visitors. No-trace use should be emphasized which should cut down on some of the maintenance problems. In the future it may be possible to have some or all of the maintenance done by cooperative agreement with the ski area, the township or the county. These possibilities should be explored as much as possible.

Estimated Annual Maintenance Costs:

- Part-time worker	$1,500
- Materials & supplies	500

Enforcement

An effective enforcement program is necessary for forest recreation facilities to provide adequate protection to forest visitors, natural resources and public and private property. State laws and forest campground and day use rules (NR-1) and other rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Natural Resources establish bounds of acceptable behavior and provide legal framework for enforcement action. Necessary manpower must be supplied in order to enforce these rules and regulations. This manpower is usually supplied by DNR Conservation Officers, DNR Forest Officers and the County Sheriff.

In the case of the Gull Lake Property this level of enforcement should be sufficient. Another important consideration is the design of the facility. When proper precautions are taken at this stage many future maintenance problems can be avoided. Signs stating the rules and regulations should also be posted to ensure compliance.

BARNHART ASSOCIATES
PLANNING AND DESIGN

830 LOTUS WAY · BROOMFIELD · COLORADO · 80020 · (303) 466-9364

February 10, 1986

Mr. Cliff Carlson
Area Forest Supervisor
State of Minnesota
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forestry
203 West Washington Street
Brainerd, MN
56401

Dear Mr. Carlson:

Please find enclosed several copies of a preliminary development concept for the Ski Gull ski area. As we discussed, the concept plan is part of the current reconnaissance level study undertaken by Ski Gull, Inc. to explore the feasibility of expanding the existing ski area onto the Pillsbury State Forest to the south. The plan is subject to further refinement and modification as more data becomes available during the master planning phase.

I would appreciate if you and your staff could provide input into the concept plan. Your review and comment is crucial to determine what, if any, additional information and detailed environmental studies may be required by your agency before Ski Gull, Inc. can secure a long term lease and use of the State property.

We would like to finalize our report, including a cost estimate and schedule for the next master planning phase, for Ski Gull, Inc. by the end of the month. If possible, Ski Gull, Inc. would like to begin some modest first phase construction yet this summer.

To aid in your evaluation of the concept plan, the following brief narrative discusses the development concept and some of the anticipated impacts of the proposed land modifications:

Existing Ski Area

The existing ski area is located on the western shore of Gull Lake approximately 15 miles from Brainerd, Minnesota. The area is operated by a non-profit organization, Ski Gull, Inc.

The Ski Gull contains approximately 22.9 acres of developed ski trails and has a vertical drop of 172 feet. The area is served by one T-bar lift and three rope tows, all of which are old and outdated. The existing terrain has a good northerly orientation, but contains several small benches or flat areas which interrupt the desired and natural flow of skiing. At present, the existing area must rely totally on natural snowfall. As a result, the season is only 30 to 40 days in length, generally January to mid February.

Despite these short comings, Ski Gull enjoys strong local support from the Gull Lake and Brainerd areas. During the 1983 and 1984 ski seasons, Ski Gull recorded approximately 2000 skier visits per year. Ski Gull was not open during the 1984-85 season due to the lack of natural snowfall. With the early snow this winter, Ski Gull had over 1300 skier visits during December alone. If January and February are also strong, the ski area could double its previous annual attendance. Peak attendance the last several seasons is approximately 175 skiers per day.

To improve the skiing experience and growth at Ski Gull, several major improvements are needed. The area must have a reliable snowmaking system to both extend its ski season and to improve the snow surface. Additional and more challenging ski terrain with a vertical drop approaching the Upper Midwest norm of 300 feet is needed to satisfy the local skier and to attract the more distant skier. Finally, the area needs to upgrade its existing lifts, probably including one or more modern chair lifts to become more competitive with other Minnesota resorts.

Site Analysis

On-site inspection and map analysis of the study area, including the Ski Gull ski area and the adjacent 190 acres (State lands), indicates that there is good ski terrain development potential. The best area is located along the shore of Gull Lake, south of the existing ski hill on State land. This area contains a predominant ridge with several summits paralleling the lake shore. This area has the greatest vertical drop of over 210 feet with slopes in excess of 45%.

The remainder of the State land is composed of smaller hills and ridges along with deep depressions or kettle areas. Three gullies trisect the land and run perpendicular to the lake shore. Side slopes vary from 15% to 45% in this area with ski terrain development limited to the side slopes of two larger depressions with an approximate vertical elevation of 140 feet. Several large flats with slopes under 10% are located near the top of Ski Gull and along the county road.

An additional area for ski terrain development is located adjacent to and west of the ski area. This area contains 140 vertical feet with side slopes of 10% to 30%.

Unfortunately, most of the potential ski terrain is suitable for novice to intermediate skiers. There is very little steep terrain with sustained pitches of over 40% for the advanced intermediate to advanced skier. The only terrain suitable for the expert skier (over 60%) is located in the southeast corner of the study area adjacent to the lake shore. Unfortunately, this

terrain is located too close to the lake shore to develop a lift terminal or skier run out area.

The land forms within the study area are remnants of previous glaciation. Preliminary soils information from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service indicate that the area is probably dominated by sand with up to 15% gravel and by soils with 2 to 4 feet of sand over loam or sandy loam glacial till.

Solar aspect varies with the slope and site features. Areas along the lake shore are largely east facing with other areas having a south or west exposure. With the exception of the existing ski trails, there are few large areas with an ideal northern exposure.

The entire parcel is heavily timbered with a mixed-wood forest. The predominant timber types are aspen, Norway Pine and oak. Several areas are being considered for harvest by the State.

In addition to the existing ski mountain, there are improvements belonging to the Lake Shore Rod and Gun Club, owners of the private property at the base of Ski Gull, two radio transmission towers along with an abandoned lookout tower at the top of Ski Gull and a gravel road which provides access to the radio towers and several summer cabins along the lake.

The Skiing Concept

The development concept for Ski Gull includes both redevelopment and expansion of the existing ski area. Key to this concept is the development of a logical and safe skier circulation pattern which fosters a good skier experience at the resort.

Seven separate development areas or ski pods are possible, four located on State land south of the existing access drive and three at the existing ski area. A ski pod is a configuration of one or more lifts and the supportive ski trail network. The seven ski pods represent the most likely ski development areas of the study area.

The development concept presented on the attached map links these ski pods together by ski lifts, ski trails and/or skier catwalks to allow for the easy and convenient skier circulation from one ski pod to another. The location of the 10 lifts and 34 ski trails provides, at full mountain development, multiple access and egress to the skiing on the State Forest.

One major chair lift (lift C), with a two-way unload, would provide primary skier access and egress from the existing base area to the Pine Ridge and Lone Mountain pods. It would also serve repeat skiing within the Ski Gull pod.

Additional skier access into the back pods would be provided by a ski trail (23) into the Pine Ridge pod and a 10% catwalk to the ski trails of the Southeast pod. Trail 23 would be the longest ski trail at Ski Gull (1800 feet) and have the greatest vertical drop of 255 feet. A second means of skier egress to the base area would be possible from the top of the West and Southwest pods.

Table 1 summarizes the statistics of the ski trails for the concept plan.

Two day lodges with skier support facilities would be needed with the dispersed skier concept. The existing base lodge would serve the Beginner, Ski Gull and Northwest pods. A new facility is illustrated at the southern terminal of lift C and would serve the ski pods on the State land. The latter facility is located on a saddle between the Pine Ridge and Lone Mountain pods and overlooks Gull Lake.

This facility could be developed into an attraction during the off season by providing summer chair lift rides and dramatic views of the lake area. The existing forest lookout tower might also be appropriately relocated to this location.

Skier parking for the resort would occur at existing base area. The existing parking lot will need to be expanded to accommodate the increase in skier capacity. Approximately 5 to 6 acres of parking area would be needed for the estimated 670 cars at ultimate development. Additional area would also be needed for snowmobile parking.

The existing snowmobile trail would have to be relocated if the Lone Mountain pod were developed. An alternate trail location is illustrated on the concept plan, but the alignment has not been inspected in the field. It appears that this alignment would be feasible and compatible with the ski area development.

Not included on the concept plan are potential cross country ski trails and other summer recreational activities. The terrain within the study area appears to be suitable for cross country skiing. These trail have greater development flexibility and can be located and designed once the alpine trails and borrow areas have been identified.

Summer alpine and water slides are often compatible with ski area developments. They can utilize the same chair lifts, ski trail alignments and support facilities, thus helping to improve the overall financial feasibility of these installations. These summer recreational facilities will be explored, if appropriate, at a later phase of planning.

Phasing

A phasing strategy has not been developed for the concept plan. Such a strategy will be dependant upon on additional input from the marketing plan, financial feasibility and available funding along with the lease schedule of the State land.

A logical phasing would probably include the redevelopment of the Beginner and Ski Gull pods along with the development of the Lone Mountain pod and/or the Pine Ridge pod. This phasing strategy would create the greatest amount of vertical feet and the longest ski trail, while offering the most challenging ski terrain.

Interim improvements could be made to the existing ski hill before proceeding to the development on the State land, but these improvements would probable be limited to minor grading in the Beginner pod, a new beginner lift and interim snowmaking. Construction of a new chair lift(s) and major snowmaking system would have to wait until the major grading on the summit was completed.

Estimated Skier Capacity

At full development, Ski Gull would have a comfortable capacity of over 2000 skiers per day. Skier capacity of the likely first or early phases is estimated to be approximately 1100 skiers per day. These estimated capacities would result in an average resort density of approximately 30 skiers per acre of developed ski trails. This density is slightly less than those resorts located near the Twin Cities, but higher than the northern Minnesota resorts.

The potential ski terrain within the study area could support a much higher number of skiers, primarily because there is an overabundance of lower ability terrain. Acceptable skier densities vary with skier ability level. That is, the slower moving beginner and novice skiers can tolerate more skiers per acre than the faster moving upper ability level skiers.

Market factors and competition heavily influence utilization patterns of ski resorts and must be considered in resort design. In estimating the Ski Gull capacity, the skier density assumptions have been reduced for a more balanced distribution of skiers. The phasing of the different ski pods and, in some cases, the development of individual ski trails will further help to balance the skier distribution of Ski Gull.

An ideal ski terrain distribution is roughly 25% beginner, 50% intermediate and 25% advanced. The previously discussed first or early phase construction would result in a skier distribution of approximately 46% beginner, 46% intermediate and 8% advanced. If the total resort were developed, as illus-

trated on the concept plan, the distribution would be 50% beginner, 47% intermediate and 3% advanced.

Input from the preliminary market study may modify these skier density assumptions, the skier distributions and the overall terrain phasing strategy for Ski Gull. Final design of the land form modifications could also help to adjust the skier distribution of the resort to conform more with the ideal.

Construction Implications and Environmental Mitigation

Substantial land form modification will be necessary to accomplish the above development concept and to improve the existing ski terrain. The concept requires building up the summit of the existing ski hill approximately 30 to 40 feet and mass grading the northern face. Additional modification will be required on the Northwest and West/Southeast pod summits to increase the vertical elevation and to allow for skiing interchange between the ski pods.

Material for the mass grading could be taken from several borrow areas within the study area. The preferred location is on State land immediately south of the existing ski hill summit. This area is unsuitable for downhill ski development and is one of the possible timber harvest areas. Further, it is not visible from the county road or Gull Lake. The final borrow area location and feasibility will depend upon detailed soil and geo-technical evaluations.

Other potential borrow areas as illustrated on the plan would require longer and more expensive hauls to the construction sites, would probably produce less material and/or would be more visible from the highway.

Depending upon the final design of the ski trails and lift terminals, approximately 875,000 cubic yards of material will be needed to build up the three areas and to regrade the face of the existing ski hill. The Ski Gull summit and associated trail regrading, the likely first phase, will require upwards to 550,000 cubic yards. These figures are very preliminary and include 25% more material for compaction.

Additional trail grading will be required on some of the trails in the Pine Ridge and Lone Mountain pods, namely the lower portions of trail 23 and 30. This will be necessary to widen the narrow gullies to better accommodate the anticipated volume of skiers utilizing these trails and to create suitable lift terminal locations. Also, regrading will be necessary in the vicinity of the proposed on-mountain lodge site to create an adequate skier circulation area around both the building and upper lift terminal. In most cases, the cut and fill can be balanced minimizing the amount of import material which will be needed.

In all cases, the land form modifications both for the ski area and borrow area(s) will require revegation to minimize the long term visual impact and erosion. It is anticipated that the borrow area could be contoured with small hills and depressions, similar to the existing site features. Indigenous plant materials would be utilized, if available and feasible.

An adequate snowmaking system will be required. This usually involves the construction of a pump and compressor building, water storage areas and subsurface distribution lines. The concept plan illustrates two possible locations for the snowmaking facility, one on the shore of Gull Lake and one near the existing base building. One or both of these facilities may be needed depending upon the water source. Additional study is needed to determine the feasibility of pumping water from Gull Lake. Well water could also be utilized if it were stored on-site in one or more ponds within the base area or possibly within a borrow pit. Analysis of the soil conditions will indicate if ponds can be developed. The latter idea would help to minimize the revegetion effort and provide an attractive site feature.

The proposed Ski Gull improvements will be designed to minimize the potential negative visual and environmental impacts. Development areas along Gull Lake, with the exception of the potential snowmaking pump facility, would be set back at least 50 to 75 feet from the edge of the water. If proper construction techniques are used, followed by prompt revegetation to minimize water and wind erosion of the disturbed areas, there should be little impact to the lake or its eco-systems.

Modern trail design and clearing techniques will be used to minimize the visual impact of the ski trails, particularly from Gull Lake. Where possible selective thinning of the existing trees will be done to create a "glade-like" ski trail. Straight trail edges and lift alignments will be minimized. Where possible lift alignments will be located along the edge of the ski trail. The lift structures will be painted a suitable dark color.

Night skiing will probably be continued at Ski Gull. This could include the new ski pods along Gull Lake. Negative visual impacts can be mitigated by controlling the hours of operation of the resort.

There should be little negative impact from the snowmaking operation. Ski Gull in not located near any existing or major populated residential areas.

Area Required for Lease

Approximately 133 acres of the State land will be required for the ultimate development of Ski Gull. This would include all of the area north of the sum-

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mer access road and approximately half of the area to the south of the road. This area could be increased if other areas are needed for fill material.

Approximately 75.5 acres would be needed in the first or early phases of the development. This would include the Pine Ridge and Lone Mountain pods plus the primary borrow area as illustrated on the concept plan.

These calculations do not include potential cross country and/or snowmobile trails.

I hope the above information helpful in your department's evaluation of the Ski Gull expansion potential. Please call me if you have any questions or need any clarification of the information within this letter.

Thank you for your support and assistance. I look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,

Barnhart Associates

Terry R. Barnhart
Principal

enclosures
cc: Jim Rutteger
Dil Stackhour
Manyon Millican

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SKI TERRAIN ANALYSIS
Ski Gull Concept Plan
February 10, 1986

Ski Pod	Trail #	Length	Ave Width	Acreage	Ave % Slope	Steepest Pitch	Ability Level
Beginner	1	800	200	3.00	14%	14%	Beg
Pod	2	800	150	2.52	14%	15%	Beg/Nov
(100 ft)	3	1100	100	2.53	11%	25%	Nov
Ski Gull	4	1350	175	5.42	15%	35%	L Int
Pod	5	800	150	2.75	16%	25%	Nov
(200 ft)	6	850	100	1.95	15%	33%	L Int
	7	1000	80	1.84	16%	30%	L Int
	8	450	80	1.06	18%	40%	Int
	9	400	50	.37	20%	55%	Adv
	10	1200	100	2.39	17%	40%	Int
	11	800	100	1.84	26%	33%	L Int
NW Pod	12	850	100	1.95	18%	26%	L Int
(150 ft)	13	800	100	1.84	19%	40%	Int
	14	1000	150	3.44	15%	33%	L Int
West Pod	15	900	100	2.07	17%	30%	L Int
(150 ft)	16	600	100	1.38	25%	40%	Int
	17	700	150	2.41	21%	29%	L Int
	18	850	100	1.95	18%	33%	L Int
Southeast	19	700	100	1.61	18%	33%	L Int
Pod	20	500	100	1.15	26%	38%	Int
(165 ft)	21	500	150	1.72	29%	36%	Int
	22	700	100	1.61	24%	36%	Int
Pine	23	1800	80	3.31	14%	33%	Int
Ridge Pod	24	400	70	.64	20%	71%	Adv
(190 ft)	25	300	70	.48	27%	48%	Adv
	26	400	100	.92	28%	50%	A Int
	27	900	100	2.07	21%	33%	Int
	28	650	100	1.49	22%	34%	Int
Lone Mt	29	600	100	1.38	17%	33%	Int
Pod	30	1000	70	1.61	19%	67%	Adv
(185 ft)	31	700	80	1.29	26%	50%	A Int
	32	650	100	1.49	28%	67%	Adv
	33	700	100	1.61	24%	50%	A Int
	34	800	90	1.65	13%	25%	Int
Total Ski Trails				64.71			
Catwalks (4900 feet)				2.81			
TOTAL SKIABLE ACREAGE				67.52			

Jan. 28, 1982

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GULL LAKE LANDS
DONATED TO THE STATE

The Department of Natural Resources has announced the acquisition by gift of a 190 acre tract of land adjacent to Gull Lake near Brainerd, including 4,754 feet of shoreline on the west side of the lake in Cass County.

The land was donated to the state by Mr. & Mrs. R. F. Brownlee Cote of Lake Hubert with the stipulation that the land be made a part of the Pillsbury State Forest.

The Cotes are long time residents of the area. They operate Grandview Lodge, Camp Lincoln for boys, Camp Lake Hubert for girls and Tanque Verde Ranch near Tucson, Arizona.

DNR officials said the Cotes, in presenting the valuable tract of land to the state, expressed a desire to make a lasting contribution to conservation of natural resources and preservation of the environment.

The Department said the land will eventually be developed to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the public and will be managed to preserve and enhance the wildlife, forests, the 4,754 feet of Gull Lake water frontage and other resources, including historical values.

Commissioner of Natural Resources Joseph Alexander said the donation was "without doubt the most valuable gift of land ever received by the Department from a private donor."

He emphasized that a great deal of credit for the gift is due to the Nature Conservancy, a private conservation group which encourages the donation of key tracts of privately held land to public agencies.

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