

Rib Mountain State Park

Draft Vision, Goals, Objectives and Management Options
for use in the development of a revised master plan



June 2022



© JIM McEvoy 1991

TABLE OF CONTENTS

To the Reader	3
How to Comment.....	5
Next Steps In The RMSP Master Plan Process.....	6
Document Overview.....	7
Background.....	9
Rib Mountain State Park Master Planning Background.....	9
Rib Mountain State Park and its Role in the Community	10
Downhill Skiing and Climate Change	11
Draft Vision.....	13
Draft Goals and Objectives	15
Management Areas	18
Future Management and DNR Preferred Options	19
Options for Recreation Management.....	22
Bicycling	23
Hiking and Walking	30
Climbing, Bouldering and Scrambling	32
Camping	35
Cross-Country Skiing	37
Nature Center	38
Amphitheater and Day Use Facilities	40
Other Outdoor Activities in the Lease Area	42
Recreation Activities that the DNR is not proposing changes to existing management	44
Options for Resource Management	45
Options for Administrative Issues	48
Project Boundary	48
Administrative Facilities	50
Issues to Evaluate in the Assessment of Potential Impacts and Outcomes.....	51
Issues Within the Park	51
Issues Outside the Park	51
Appendices	52
List of Abbreviations & Acronyms	52
Definitions	53
References.....	55





TO THE READER

This document presents the Wisconsin DNR's draft vision, goals and objectives for Rib Mountain State Park (RMSP) as part of the RMSP master planning process. It also conveys different options for achieving those goals and objectives and identifies those options the department currently prefers. Department properties have formal plans, typically covering 15-year periods, describing their use and management. In developing these "master plans," the department follows Administrative Code NR 44. During the planning process the department gathers information about regional ecological and recreational needs and opportunities, public ideas and perspectives, property characteristics and features. The department also analyzes different management strategies, and the potential positive and negative impacts associated with each.

The public has multiple opportunities to provide input during the planning process. This document is being provided as part of the next public input opportunity in the park's master plan revision process. The public input received on the information presented at this stage of the process will be used to develop the RMSP Draft Master Plan. The information presented in this document may be included in the eventual RMSP Draft Master Plan as it appears here or the draft vision, goals, objectives and management options may be altered based on public input, staff expertise, or other considerations.

A central issue in this Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan revision is the future of downhill skiing. SE Group, a consultant with expertise in alpine skiing operations, design, and market analysis, evaluated the existing ski area operation, assessed current market conditions for downhill skiing, and developed potential alternative approaches to provide downhill skiing experiences at the property. Their report, [Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment¹](#), is available on the Rib Mountain State Park master planning webpage.

Three of the alternatives SE Group developed would add facilities to the existing ski area layout and potentially expand the ski operation.² The DNR collected public input on these alternatives in the Summer 2021. Although the input received suggested widespread support for adding a network of biking opportunities in the park, along with other outdoor recreation opportunities, the public response to the report was divided on the need and suitability of expanding the ski area. A summary of the 3,100 comments received is posted on the Rib Mountain State Park master planning webpage.³

The SE Group report briefly summarizes key impacts that climate change will have in the decades to come, and how warmer and wetter winter conditions are likely to impact downhill skiing at RMSP. SE Group presents information and analysis related to projected shifts in temperature and precipitation and how, in combination, they will shorten the ski season, result in less snow and more rain events in the winter, and reduce the number of days when snowmaking will be successful. As stated by SE Group, "While GPSA may be able to remain open in the coming years, its operating season will almost undoubtedly shrink as time goes on." (page 4 of the SE Group Report).

The department owns and manages over 1.6 million acres throughout Wisconsin on behalf, and for the benefit, of the public. In developing management plans for these properties, the department balances habitat and recreational needs and approaches decisions related to public use and management from a long-term perspective. The department seeks to allocate resources and manage habitats to reach desired outcomes over multiple-decade time frames.

¹ SE Group and International Mountain Bike Association Trail Solutions. June 2021. *Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment*. Prepared for Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership. Burlington, VT.

² In addition, the SE Group report included proposals for adding mountain biking trails, updating some of the hiking trails, adding a zip line and a mountain coaster coming down the north side, building "glamping" cabins, and some alternative recreation activities near a new base facility (e.g., bungee trampoline, water play, and quarry-themed activities).

³ Wisconsin DNR. August 2021. [Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan Revision: Summary of public input received on a report developed by SE Group](#).



With this perspective in mind, the department seeks to ensure that analysis of various downhill skiing options is informed by an understanding of the impacts that the changing climate is projected to have in the ensuing decades. These include changes to winter temperatures and precipitation, the ability of snowmaking and other adaptive techniques to supplement natural snowfall, changes in skier numbers and substitution behaviors, competition from other ski resorts, and other factors that may affect the long-term viability of the ski operation at Rib Mountain. The department does not wish to propose a major change and impact to the park if the benefits are likely to be limited in duration or value.

A large-scale expansion of the ski area would require a substantial investment of, and change to, public resources. Given this, the DNR is interested in ensuring it and the public have the best information possible regarding how climate change will affect the long-term viability of the downhill ski operation. This information will also aid in the analysis of potential configurations for the ski hill that are considered. As such, this document does not identify a preferred option for downhill skiing. The department is deferring selection of a preferred option until it has additional data and analyses on how future climate conditions are likely to impact the use and management of the ski operation, the effectiveness of adaptation actions, and potential skier demand at Rib Mountain in the coming decades. The department also seeks to work with Granite Peak, SE Group and other interested stakeholders to determine if other options with fewer impacts are possible to enhance the long-term viability of the ski operation. This approach will also ensure the public has the best information possible related to climate change when giving input on the eventual Rib Mountain State Park Draft Master Plan.

To address the climate change information need, the department will work with climate and recreation experts to gather and analyze data on projected future climate conditions and the associated impacts these changes will have on winter recreation activities. Although this process will evaluate a number of winter recreation activities in the state, it will also have a specific emphasis on downhill skiing and Rib Mountain. This process will result in a science-based report to inform not only this master planning process, but other planning projects in the future, including the update to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

For this process, input will be gathered from Granite Peak and other downhill ski operators, providers and consumers of snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and other types of winter recreation, and researchers, organizations and agencies involved with climate change and winter recreation in Wisconsin and the Midwest.

A scope of work for this process is being developed and will likely include the following types of topics:

- Identification of climate-related factors that influence the viability of different winter recreation activities and specifically downhill skiing operations in Wisconsin.
- Projected winter temperature and precipitation in different regions of the state through the end of the century and their impact on the viability of winter recreation activities, and specifically downhill skiing operations, in Wisconsin.
- The ability of adaptation practices (e.g., snowmaking) to enhance the viability of downhill skiing operations in Wisconsin and specifically at Rib Mountain.
- Expected climate variability (e.g., frequency, duration, and intensity of extreme warm or wet events in the winter) in Wisconsin through the end of the century, its impact on the viability of winter recreation activities, and specifically downhill skiing operations.
- The projected long-term viability of ski areas in regions of Wisconsin, and other states that may serve the same markets as Wisconsin, resulting from climate change and likely skier substitution behaviors.

The department expects that this work will be completed in six to nine months.

HOW TO COMMENT

The public may comment on the information presented in this document either online, by visiting the [Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan](https://dnr.wi.gov) website (dnr.wi.gov, keyword: property planning), or by contacting John Pohlman, DNR Property Planner, at:

John Pohlman – LF/6
Wisconsin Department of Natural
Resources
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921
608-264-6263

John.Pohlman@wisconsin.gov

The department welcomes any additional feedback people may have about any and all potential options for the park.



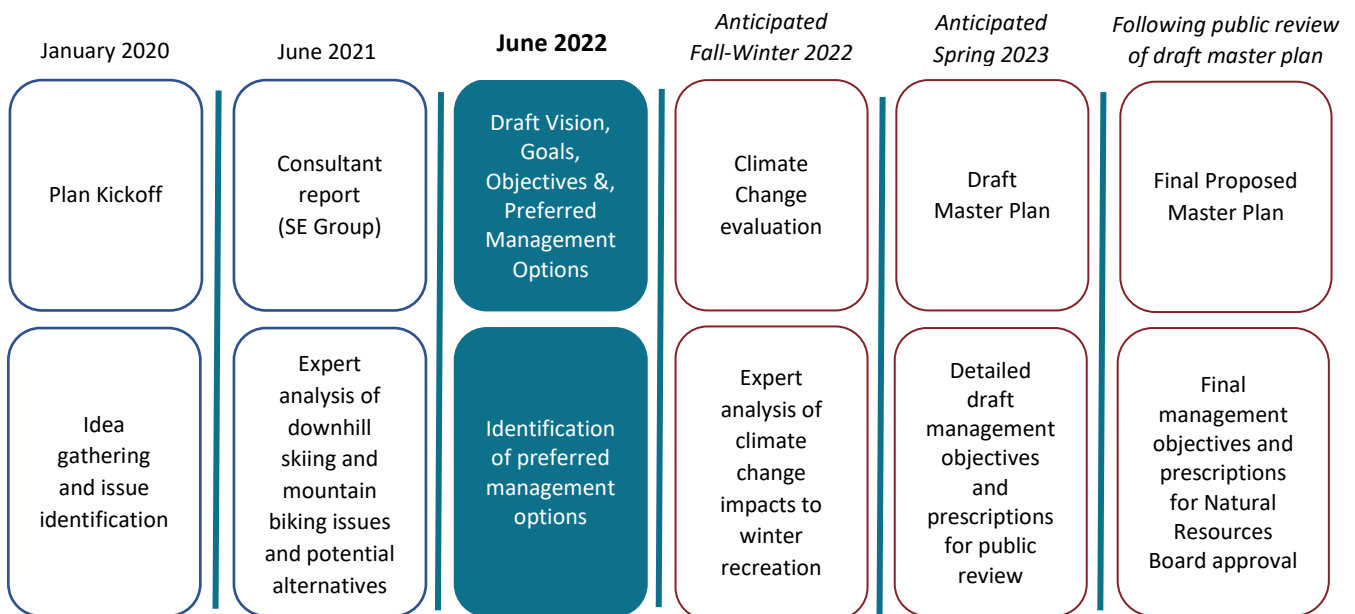
NEXT STEPS IN THE RMSP MASTER PLAN PROCESS

After the public input period for this document concludes and the results of the climate change analysis are submitted, the department will develop the RMSP Draft Master Plan based on available information including:

- The [existing master plan](#) (2005).
- The DNR document [Rib Mountain State Park and the Surrounding Region: a property and regional analysis providing background information for the revision of the Rib Mountain State Park master plan](#) (2020).
- SE Group’s document, [Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment](#) (2021) and public input on that report.
- Public input gathered:
 - In early 2020 during the initial outreach process (a [summary is available on the DNR website](#)).
 - In the summer of 2020 on the SE Group report (a [summary is available on the DNR website](#)).
 - In the spring of 2022 on the draft vision, goals, objectives and potential options (the current public input opportunity).
- Data gathering and evaluation of climate change and its impact on winter recreation.
- Resource conditions and recreation opportunities at the park.
- DNR staff expertise.

Figure 1 shows the steps in the planning process.

Figure 1. Steps in the Rib Mountain State Park Master Planning Process



DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

NOTE: Referring to different parts of the park

Rib Mountain State Park is comprised of three blocks of DNR ownership, totaling 1,556 acres. The largest block (which most people refer to as RMSP) is 1,524 acres. A small parcel (about 29 acres) is located adjacent to the Town of Rib Mountain's Doepke Park. A third parcel (3.3 acres), which for administrative purposes is assigned to RMSP, is located on CTY N and houses a joint DNR and DOT office building. The downhill ski area is within the park and is owned by the department. It is currently leased to the Granite Peak Corporation (GPC).

To help avoid confusion, in this document lands are referred to as follows:

"Granite Peak," "the lease area" and "the ski area" refer to the 406-acre area leased for use as a downhill ski area.

The phrases **"main part of the park"** and **"non-lease area"** refer to the portion of the property within the large ownership block but outside of the lease area. This area comprises about 1,112 acres.

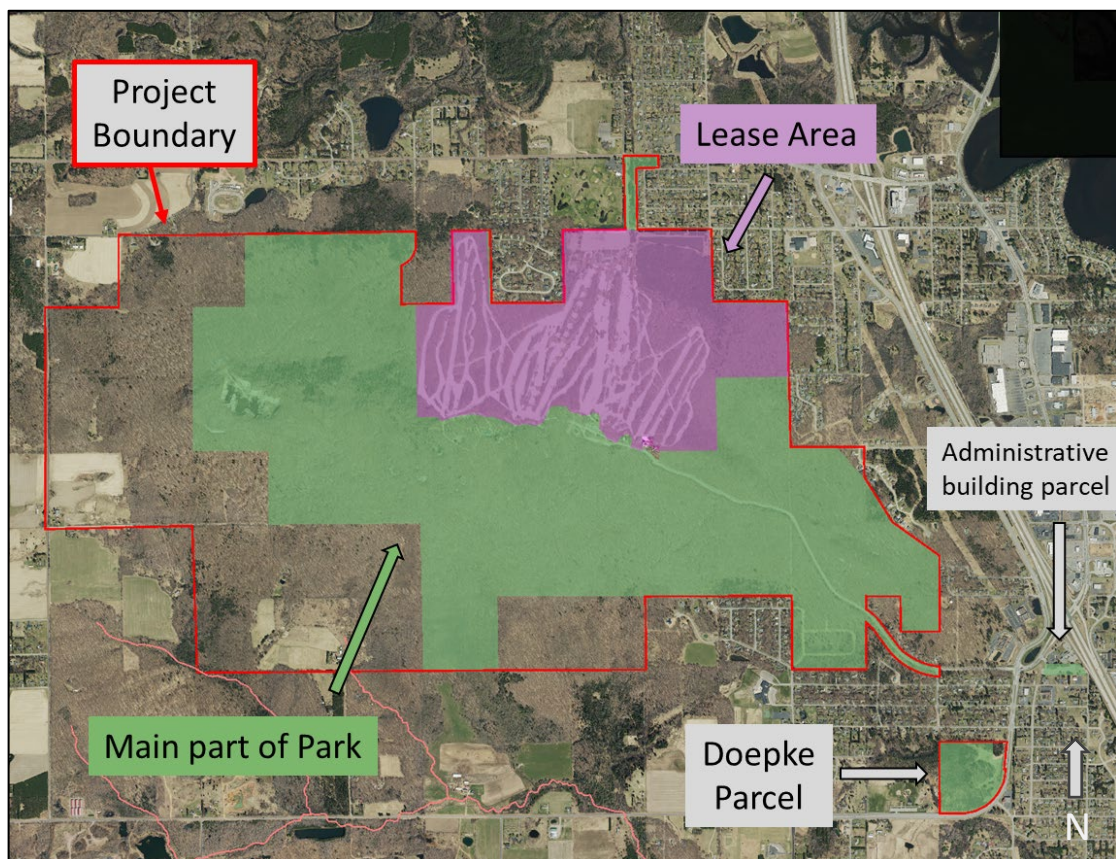
The phrases **"Rib Mountain State Park," "RMSP" or "the park"** refer to the entire DNR ownership (1,524 acres) within the large ownership block and includes both the non-lease area and the lease area.

"Doepke Park parcel" refers to the 29-acre parcel adjacent to the Town of Rib Mountain's Doepke Park.

"Administrative building parcel" refers to the 3.3-acre parcel on CTH N that houses a state office building.

Rib Mountain means the mountain itself.

Figure 2. Lands within Rib Mountain State Park



NOTE: Existing lease with Granite Peak Corporation

The department may lease lands that it owns to other public agencies, non-profit organizations, or to private enterprises if the lease will preserve the purposes for which the land was acquired and will provide public use or benefits (s. 23.09(10), Wis. Stats., and s. NR 1.48, Wis. Admin. Code).

The DNR currently leases 406 acres within RMSP to Granite Peak Corporation to operate the downhill ski area. The lease agreement was initiated in 2000 and runs for 30 years. The lease identifies actions that GPC may conduct in its operation of the ski area, lists actions which require DNR approval, sets the lease payment schedule, and describes additional conditions and responsibilities.

The lease affords Granite Peak Corporation the ability and option to develop ski runs, lifts, guest services, and other facilities necessary to run a successful winter sports operation in the leased area. The lease also allows, but does not require, GPC to develop other recreation offerings including off-road bike, horse, and cross-country ski trails, alpine slide, and to hold special events. If the master plan for RMSP is updated, that may invite discussions as to how the lease might be amended. This master plan will clarify whether the leased area may be modified, what future public uses may be provided in the park and in the lease area, and how these opportunities are coordinated to provide high quality experiences.



BACKGROUND

RIB MOUNTAIN STATE PARK MASTER PLANNING BACKGROUND

Downhill skiing was first developed at Rib Mountain State Park in 1937 and has been run by a variety of operators over the last eight decades. The ski area is currently leased to Granite Peak Corporation (GPC). Starting in 2000 when it entered a 30-year lease with the department, GPC has invested millions of dollars on upgrades to the ski area, lifts, visitor service facilities, snowmaking, infrastructure and other aspects of the operation. The result has been improved experiences for skiers, larger capacity and higher visitation rates, and increased economic activity in the Wausau area.

In 2014, GPC proposed an approximately 150-acre expansion of the downhill ski operation. In February 2015, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board authorized the department to undertake an amendment process to the 2005 master plan for the purpose of evaluating a potential expansion to the Granite Peak Ski Area. Although Granite Peak Corporation had publicly shared its vision for expanding the ski hill area, the department determined that a potential expansion should be evaluated in the broader context of the entire park and other recreational opportunities. As a result, at their October 2019 meeting, the Board authorized the department to undertake a comprehensive master plan revision process.

As with all its property planning processes, the department started by developing a Property and Regional Analysis to describe recreation and natural resource needs and opportunities. In February 2020, the department sought public reactions to that document as well as input on current and future uses of the park, management of habitats and species, and questions or issues that should be addressed in the planning process. A [summary of public input is posted on the department website](#).⁴

In developing this document, several sideboards⁵ were established, including that the department:

- Identify places that merit inclusion in the State Natural Area program. Ensure that any lands designated as state natural areas are adequately protected such that the features for which they are identified are minimally impacted by public uses or habitat management actions (s. 23.28(3), Wis. Stats.).
- Maintain existing recreation opportunities and seek to minimize substantive changes to popular experiences currently provided.
- Ensure that the state park continues to play an important role in the community.
- View recreation and natural resource opportunities, issues and trends from a long-term perspective.
- As feasible, provide additional and/or expanded recreation opportunities that take advantage of the park's unique features, that are "best fits" based on those features, and meet regional and statewide natural resource and recreation needs.

Future Management Possibilities

To help minimize confusion regarding terminology, in this document:

Future use and management possibilities presented in the [SE Group](#) report are referred to as **Alternatives**.

Future use and management possibilities presented by the [DNR](#) in this document are referred to as **Options**.

⁴ Wisconsin DNR. August 2021. [Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan Revision: Summary of public input received on a report developed by SE Group](#).

⁵ As part of the planning process, DNR leaders often identify specific issues or opportunities that should or should not be included in the development of a property management plan. These "sideboards" may include items such as recreation activities, habitat management practices, and species of particular interest.



RIB MOUNTAIN STATE PARK AND ITS ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Since its earliest days, the park has been an important asset to the Wausau area. The mountain remained undeveloped until 1929, when a special committee of the local Chamber of Commerce spearheaded a drive to have a road built to the summit, which was completed in 1931. During the 1930s, Civilian Conservation Corps workers created hiking paths, developed a campground, and built a gazebo in the park. They also cleared the first ski runs and installed a T-bar lift. And they built a beautiful shelter house at the base of the mountain's north slope, which opened in December 1939 and is still in use today as part of the ski area.

Downhill skiing has been a focal point of Rib Mountain State Park since its inception and remains an important feature for the community. Over the last four seasons, an average of more than 160,000 skier visitor days were recorded. The ski operation draws out-of-town visitors that pump millions of dollars of spending each year into the local economy.

Public uses of RMSPP have diversified over time and the property has become a popular destination for the community throughout the year. Today, the park annually receives more than 400,000 visits (including both the ski area and the rest of the park). The park drew a record number of visitors in 2020 when over 640,000 visits were recorded – a nearly 60% increase in visitation from the average of the previous five years. Preliminary figures for 2021 indicate 628,000 visits.

Rib Mountain State Park is one of the largest DNR properties adjacent to a metropolitan area. Land use trends suggest that in the ensuing decades the park is likely to be increasingly surrounded by residential developments. As such, **there is an opportunity for the DNR to provide outdoor recreation and other types of nature-based experiences in partnership with the City of Wausau, the Town of Rib Mountain, and the surrounding communities.** Indeed, the department's hope is that the park becomes even more of a community asset and a destination for residents and visitors.

Popular activities in the park are hiking, picnicking, snowshoeing, enjoying the views from the observation tower, and attending events at the amphitheater and Friends Gathering Space building. For exercise, many residents walk up and down the paved trail adjacent to the entrance road. The amphitheater, which was constructed in 1996 and holds about 200 people, has been a very popular amenity and is booked nearly every summer and fall weekend. It is a particularly popular spot for weddings.

A primary interest of many Wausau area residents is to enable the city to become an International Mountain Bike Association Ride Center™ (Ride Center). A Ride Center designation recognizes large-scale mountain bike facilities that offer a wide range of experiences and demonstrate the best practices in mountain bike trail design and construction. The evaluation criteria to become a Ride Center (there are three levels – gold, silver and bronze) are comprised of key aspects of high-quality mountain bike destinations and include, but are not limited to, trail experiences, services, community involvement, tourism and promotion. Typically, Ride Centers move up in rating over time as additional opportunities and attributes are added and support facilities are further developed. To date, only six places in the U.S. have been awarded a Gold Level Ride Center designation.

Friends of Rib Mountain State Park

The Friends of Rib Mountain is a group of volunteers working in collaboration with the DNR to improve, preserve, and promote Rib Mountain State Park. The Friends have played a critical role in raising funds for many of the park's facilities and ongoing management needs. Among many other accomplishments, they have helped fund and construct the Friends Gathering Space building, the amphitheater, parking and lighting projects, and hiking trails (along with maps and interpretive panels).

In addition, the Friends have raised funds to help the department acquire key parcels to expand the park and have established an endowment fund for future improvements.

The Friends also host nature hikes, special events, fall festivals, candlelight snowshoe hikes, summer music concerts, and naturalist programs. The operation of the concession stand at the top of Rib Mountain helps raise funds to support the Friends' activities.

IMBA Ride Centers

Areas designated as Ride Centers often enjoy *substantial economic activity due to large numbers of visitors* drawn to high-quality riding experiences.

The Wausau region supports many existing mountain biking trails and associated services that are needed to qualify for a Ride Center. A missing component of achieving a high-level designation is the lack of a lift- or shuttle-served mountain biking opportunity. If bike-specific, gravity-oriented trails are developed at RMSPP, utilizing a ski lift or shuttle service on a regular schedule to transport bikers to the top of the mountain would provide a unique experience and bolster Wausau's application to be a high-level Ride Center.

DOWNHILL SKIING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Few outdoor activities are as reliant on prolonged and consistent cold temperatures and snowfall as downhill skiing. In some ways, downhill skiing is a climate change “canary in the coal mine” and much research and media attention has been focused on how climate change will impact the ski industry in the decades to come. Climate scientists use complex models that project future temperature and precipitation patterns based on different scenarios of greenhouse gas emissions. These scenarios represent different levels of success in society's efforts to reduce global anthropogenic emissions.

The SE Group report cites multiple research papers that evaluate climate change's likely impacts on snow-based winter recreation. The papers cited utilize national datasets in temperature and precipitation models to predict potential impacts to the viability of ski areas from now until the end of the century.

The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) is a statewide collaboration of scientists and stakeholders formed as a partnership between UW-Madison's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the DNR. WICCI's goals are to evaluate climate change impacts in Wisconsin and foster solutions. WICCI climate scientists have “down-scaled” global climate models to project how the state's climate has been changing and how it might shift in the decades to come. Notably, WICCI scientists have described historical trends and developed future projections for temperatures and precipitation *by seasons of the year* and *regions of the state*. In February 2022, WICCI released an updated assessment report, [Wisconsin's Changing Climate: Impacts and solutions for a warmer climate](#).⁶

WICCI's work indicates that the amount of change in temperature and precipitation is projected to vary by both season and region of the state. Although the average daily temperature is projected to rise in the spring, summer and fall, the greatest warming has occurred, and is projected to occur, during the winter (about a 5° F increase by 2041-2060 from the temperatures experienced from 1980-2010). In addition, an approximate 10% increase in winter precipitation by 2041-2060 is projected (an increasing amount of which is likely to be rain or freezing rain).⁷ The report also shows that northern parts of the state are projected to warm, particularly winter nights, more than southern Wisconsin.

According to the SE Group report, climate models predict that the number of skiable days will continue to decline, and the ski season is projected to be reduced from five to approximately three months. In addition to the research cited by SE Group, other studies evaluate potential impacts that warming temperatures, increasing precipitation, and more variability in temperatures and precipitation will have on snow-based recreation. In the last 20 years, annual skier and snowboarder visits in the Midwest have declined from an average of 7.6 million (from 2001/02 to 2006/07) to 6.3 million (2016/17 to 2020/21), a 17% drop.⁸ Much research concludes that Midwest downhill ski operations will have a difficult time remaining viable by the end of the century.⁹

⁶ Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. 2021. [Wisconsin's changing climate: Impacts and solutions for a warmer climate](#). Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁷ See Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts Trends and Projections at: <https://wicci.wisc.edu/wisconsin-climate-trends-and-projections/>

⁸ https://nsaa.org/webdocs/Media_Public/IndustryStats/Historical_Skier_Days_1979_2021.pdf

⁹ There are many published research papers on this topic, including:



Some research addresses how, despite a reduction in the number of days when snow can be made and an increase in the number of rain and freezing rain events, snowmaking and other adaptation techniques can improve the viability of downhill skiing operations.¹⁰ Granite Peak has recently made substantial investments in its snowmaking capabilities (all runs have snowmaking capacity).

According to SE Group’s evaluation, as climate change reduces the number of skiable days, by the middle of the century there is likely to be a loss of approximately 41,500 “skier days” at Granite Peak primarily due to delayed opening and earlier closing dates. In response to a reduction in the number of days ski areas are open and in the number of ski areas that remain operational, skiers have several options. If their preferred ski area option is closed, they can choose to visit one that is open (referred to as “spatial substitution”), choose to wait until the ski area is open and either ski fewer days or ski the same number of days in a compressed time period (“temporal substitution”), or not ski and instead participate in a different activity (“activity substitution”).¹¹ Although skiers are likely to engage in all three substitution behaviors, research indicates that many existing downhill skiers are likely to continue participating to some degree.¹²

SE Group concludes that the ski area at RMSP is well-positioned relative to other Midwestern ski areas to respond to climate change because of Rib Mountain’s height, north-facing aspect, and northern latitude. Granite Peak Corporation also provides relatively strong access to investment capital. The SE Group report notes that if participation rates in downhill skiing remain consistent in the future, ski areas that can remain open will likely experience increases in visitation.¹³ During the 2020/21 ski season there were 31 ski areas in Wisconsin, many of which are south of Rib Mountain and may experience the adverse effects of climate change sooner and more acutely than Granite Peak.¹⁴ Although it is likely that additional skiing demand will materialize at Rib Mountain in the future due to ski area closures elsewhere, the amount and distribution of this increase throughout the ski season is unclear.

Chin, N. K. Byun, A. Hamlet and K. Cherkauer. 2018. Assessing potential winter weather response to climate change and implications for tourism in the U.S. Great Lakes and Midwest. *Journal of Hydrology: Regional Studies* 19(2018): 42-56.

Ning, L. and R. Bradley. 2015. Snow occurrence changes over the central and eastern United States under future warming scenarios. *Scientific Reports* 5: 1-8.

Scott, D., R. Steiger, M. Ruddy, N. Knowles and B. Rushton. 2021. Future climate change risk in the US Midwestern ski industry. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 40 (October 2021).

Steiger, R., D. Scott, B. Abegg, M. Pons, and C. Aall. 2019. A critical review of climate change risk for ski tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism* 22(11): 1343-1379.

Wobus, C., E. Small, H. Hosterman, D. Mills, J. Stein, M. Rissing, R. Jones, M. Duckworth, R. Hall, M. Kolian, J. Creason and J. Martinich. 2017. Projected climate change impacts on skiing and snowmobiling: A case study of the United States. *Global Environmental Change* 45(2017): 1-14.

¹⁰ Scott, D., G. McBoyle and B. Mills. 2003. Climate change and the skiing industry in southern Ontario (Canada): exploring the importance of snowmaking as a technical adaptation. *Climate Research* 23: 171-181.

Scott, D. and G. McBoyle. 2007. Climate change adaptation in the ski industry. *Mitig. Adapt. Strat. Glob. Change* 12: 1411-1431.

¹¹ Steiger, R., et al. 2019.

Dawson, J. and D. Scott. 2020. Systems analysis of climate change vulnerability for the US Northeast ski sector. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development* 7(3): 219-235.

¹² Dawson, J., D. Scott, and M. Havitz. 2013. Skier demand and behavioural adaptation to climate change in the US Northeast. *Leisure* 37(2): 127-143.

¹³ See also: Dawson, J. M. Havitz and D. Scott. 2011. Behavioral adaptation of alpine skiers to climate change: examining activity involvement and place loyalty. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 28: 388-404.

¹⁴ Number of ski areas operating per state during 2020-21 season. National Ski Area Association. https://nsaa.org/webdocs/Media_Public/IndustryStats/ski_areas_by_state_thru_2021.pdf.

See also: <https://www.skicentral.com/wisconsin-map.html>

DRAFT VISION

The following vision is proposed to be included in the updated Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan:¹⁵

Rib Mountain State Park provides a mix of recreational, educational and social experiences that capitalize on the unique features of the property including the mountain's height, ecology, geology, close proximity to Wausau, and views of the surrounding landscape. In addition to providing downhill skiing opportunities that draw visitors from throughout the Midwest, the park is an integral component of the Wausau area and provides valued natural areas, open space and high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities within a growing urban setting. The Park's unique geological features, native ecological communities, and culturally and historically important structures and trails are conserved and are an educational focus for visitors.

Many factors and issues influence management of the park. A few of the more notable issues that affect the department's ability to achieve the vision include:

- Rib Mountain State Park is **one of the largest DNR properties adjacent to an urban center**. The main entrance to the park is a 10-minute drive or a 30-minute bike ride from downtown Wausau. The Wausau metropolitan area is a regional commercial and cultural center with a moderately growing population of approximately 134,000 people. Lands surrounding the park are being steadily developed, primarily with residential housing.
- Rib Mountain is the highest elevation on any DNR property and contains the **largest vertical drop in the state**. Only a small area at the top is relatively flat. The mountain's orientation, height and overall size make it the foremost location on state-owned land for a downhill ski area.
- RMSP harbors **high-quality occurrences of rare, bedrock-related natural communities** including talus forest, bedrock glade, felsenmeer (glaciere talus), and forested seep. Quartzite bedrock glade, the subtype of glade found at RMSP, is one of the rarest natural community types in the Midwest. In addition, most of the park harbors a large block of northern mesic forest that supports several rare species, including forest interior birds. Large blocks of forested land are becoming rarer in central Wisconsin and are identified by the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan as a conservation opportunity in the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape. They are predicted to provide important movement corridors for plant and animal species as climate change advances.
- **Climate change is impacting the downhill ski industry** and will continue to affect skiing opportunities at Rib Mountain and other ski hills in the Upper Midwest. Climate models predict that the number of skiable days will continue to decline and over the next 70 years the ski season is, according to the SE Group report, projected to be reduced from five to approximately three months. Climate change will reduce the number of days when conditions allow snow to be made. Climate change models also project an increase in the number of rain and freezing rain events (as opposed to snow events) during winter months, which would

¹⁵ For comparison, the existing vision from the 2005 master plan is:

Rib Mountain State Park contains the regional landmark of Rib Mountain, which rises 640 feet above the surrounding landscape. It provides some of the most expansive vistas and unique geologic features within the Wisconsin State Park System. The park provides a place to enjoy these scenic views and other recreational, educational and social experiences. In addition to serving the state and the central Wisconsin region, the park is strongly linked to the adjacent communities, providing valued natural open space and outdoor recreational opportunities within a growing urban setting. The park also conserves Rib Mountain's unique geological features, native ecological communities, and culturally important structures and trails.



affect the quality of the snowpack for skiing. Climate change may also result in future drought periods. Currently, the ski area draws water from the Rib River during the winter for snowmaking.

- Demand to pursue different types of recreation will continue to change and evolve over the coming decades. One long-term trend that appears likely to persist is the **growth in various types of bicycling**. Examples include mountain biking on constructed, single-track trails, touring and off-road biking on easier and wider trails, and fat-tire or winter biking on a range of trail types. In addition, e-biking (on all types of bikes) is likely to continue its rapid growth.



- Although many residents of the greater Wausau area are frequent users of RMSP and share the perspective that the property is an integral component of their community, there is a **divergence of public views on future management and use of the park**. There is strong interest in maintaining the status quo and not further developing the property or expanding the ski area. There is also strong interest in expanding the recreational opportunities at the park (to varying degrees), and specifically expanding the ski area, as part of an effort to make the Wausau area a major recreational hub in the Midwest.

DRAFT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The department organizes property management goals and objectives differently today than it did 15 years ago when the existing master plan was written. In an effort to bring the updated master plan for RMSP into alignment with the department's current approach to describing goals and objectives, new broader goals are proposed here and the previous goals are nested under them as objectives. Some re-wording of these objectives, as well as some additional objectives, are proposed.

Goal: Enhance the Park's value as a year-round community asset.

Public input received in this process makes clear that RMSP is an asset to the Wausau community. The department, in collaboration with its partners, seeks to enhance Rib Mountain State Park's value to the Wausau area by increasing and diversifying the recreation opportunities available. The department seeks to provide outdoor recreation opportunities and modern facilities that enable and encourage visitors to enjoy the park's natural and scenic settings, take advantage of its unique features, and complement regional offerings. The department seeks to set-up RMSP to continue to contribute to local and regional economies by providing and managing sustainable, high-quality recreational opportunities that are compatible with the park's natural resources.

The department seeks to pursue this goal in cooperation with the Friends of Rib Mountain State Park, City of Wausau, Town of Rib Mountain, Marathon County Parks and Forestry, Granite Peak Corporation, Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership, and others.

Draft Objectives:

- Provide existing and additional year-round, active and passive outdoor recreational and educational opportunities that are suited to and compatible with the physical and ecological characteristics of the property.
- Maintain and enhance the scenic viewing opportunities from within the park and provide undeveloped spaces for quiet, solitude and the enjoyment of the natural surroundings.
- Provide and manage spaces for cultural and educational programs and social events that are compatible with other uses and recognize the park's limited amount of level terrain and parking.
- Provide lands for a downhill ski operation on the north-facing slope of the park.
- Develop, maintain and enhance park buildings, structures and signs to have a unified aesthetic character that is harmonious with the natural surroundings and recognize the park's history.
- Develop touring, off-road and mountain biking opportunities that help address gaps in regional offerings and that take advantage of the park's topography. Develop trails that provide high-quality experiences across the spectrum of skill levels and that link to nearby trail systems as feasible.
- Develop additional recreation opportunities that are compatible with existing uses and resource management objectives and are in high demand in the local community and the larger region.
- Contract with non-profit organizations to provide concession services (outside of the ski area) that meet park standards of design, service and hospitality.
- As feasible, given other recreation and natural resource objectives, provide linkages for the regional snowmobile trail network.
- Work with Marathon County, the City of Wausau, the Town of Rib Mountain and other nearby municipalities to integrate and coordinate property-level recreational and habitat management with regional needs and opportunities.



Goal: Provide downhill skiing at Rib Mountain as long as feasible.

The department leases land to a ski area operator (currently Granite Peak Corporation) to provide high-quality downhill ski experiences. The department seeks to work with the leasee to provide downhill skiing as long as feasible and to expand nature-based and other outdoor recreational opportunities within the lease area.

As is described earlier in this document, climate change is impacting downhill ski operations and is projected to reduce the length of future ski seasons, increase rainfall in the winter, increase the variability of temperatures, and decrease the number of days when snowmaking will be possible. Together, these changes will impact the viability of ski areas throughout Wisconsin, the Midwest and the country.

Draft Objectives:

- Lease land to operate a downhill ski operation on the north-facing slope of Rib Mountain.
- Enable the construction and operation of facilities needed to provide high-quality experiences for skiers and other visitors to the lease area.
- Coordinate with the leasee to provide other recreational activities that complement downhill skiing, enhance visitor experiences, and are consistent with existing park uses and resources.

Potential alternatives proposed by SE Group:

- Alternative 1 – no change.
- Alternative 2 – an approximately 50-acre expansion of the lease area to the east that would increase the carrying capacity from 3,200 to 3,690 daily visitors.
- Alternative 3 – the east expansion, and an approximately 200-acre expansion of the lease area to the west that would increase the carrying capacity from 3,200 to 5,870 daily visitors.
- Alternative 4 – the east expansion, and an approximately 220-acre expansion of the lease area to the west that would increase the carrying capacity from 3,200 to 6,230 daily visitors.

SE Group Alternative 2 would provide additional ski runs designed for beginner and intermediate skiers while Alternatives 3 and 4 would also include runs designed for more advanced skiers. Alternatives 3 and 4 would also include a beginner run starting from the top of the mountain. According to SE Group, their Alternative 2 would result in an increased capacity that could accommodate approximately 41,000 more skier visits each year. This would basically offset the projected loss in visitation due to climate change's reduction in skiable days in the decades to come. That is, as the ski season is shortened by the middle of the century, Alternative 2 would support about the same number of overall ski visits that occur now.

The much larger proposed expansions developed by SE Group (Alternatives 3 and 4) are estimated to potentially accommodate additional skier visits of 177,000 and 189,000 each year, respectively. Over the last four ski seasons, the ski area averaged 163,000 skier visits annually; thus, SE Group Alternatives 3 and 4 could accommodate more than twice as many skier visits as occur now.

The department gathered public input on these alternatives in the summer of 2021 and there was strong support for not expanding the ski area (Alternative 1) as well as strong support for the largest expansion (Alternative 4). The SE Group report and a summary of the input received is on the Rib Mountain State Park master planning [webpage](#).¹⁶

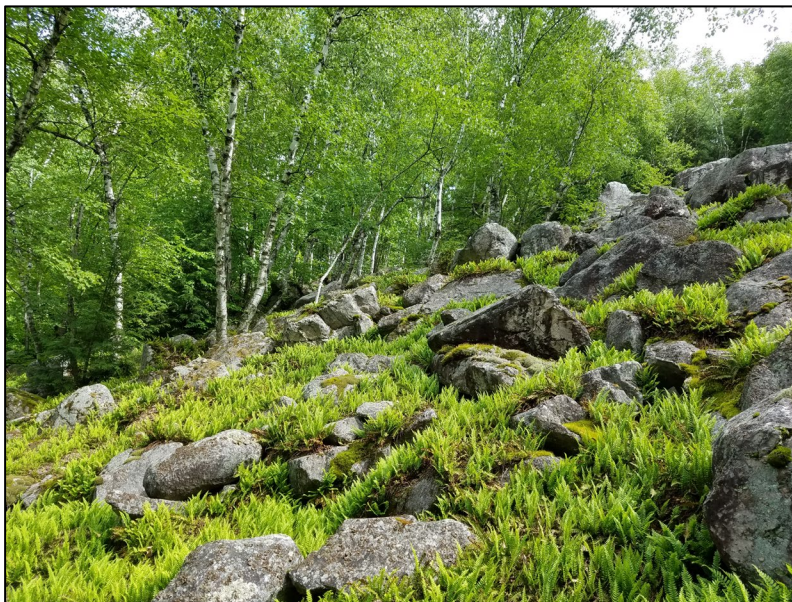
¹⁶ <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fl/PropertyPlanning/RibMtn>

Goal: Maintain the Park's existing high-quality ecological areas, forest canopy, historic and cultural features, and infrastructure.

Rib Mountain State Park's unique features and attributes draw over 400,000 visitors a year, making it one of the state's most popular parks. The department seeks to ensure that the park's rare and high-quality bedrock glades, talus forest and other native communities, historic and geologic features, and recreational uses are sustained.

Draft Objectives:

- Protect and manage rare, threatened and endangered species, species of special concern, and high-quality natural communities.
- Include areas of high ecological value within the park in the state natural area program.
- Maintain a high-quality, diverse, northern hardwood forest community dominated by larger, mature trees.
- Manage the forest community to provide public enjoyment and education, scenic quality, wildlife habitat and other ecological benefits.
- Maintain and enhance the natural aesthetic character within the park, with an emphasis on native vegetation and rock outcroppings.
- Preserve and enhance areas of geological and cultural significance and provide appropriate interpretive opportunities. Highlight the structures and trails constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps through educational signage or other means.
- Educate visitors about the geologic and human history of the park and surrounding landscape.
- Maintain and upgrade the park's facilities and infrastructure as needed to provide visitors with safe and high-quality experiences.



MANAGEMENT AREAS

The DNR implements a wide variety of actions to reach a property’s management goals and objectives. The department organizes these actions by management areas. At properties with uniform public use and habitat management objectives, the department typically includes the entire property as just one management area. For larger and more complex properties, many management areas are often delineated.

The 2005 master plan created four management areas in the park. This planning process will likely update the configuration of these management areas and may split one or more to create additional management areas. The eventual boundaries for each management area will depend on the goals and objectives that are included in the final version of the master plan. As such, the number of acres within each management area and their respective shapes are yet to be determined.



FUTURE MANAGEMENT AND DNR PREFERRED OPTIONS

During the course of the planning process, the department has evaluated different approaches to meet the draft objectives. This section describes the department’s preferred approach(es) to achieve these objectives. In addition, other approaches or options that the department considered are described.

For each topic, the existing opportunities at the park are noted along with background information on needs, trends, or other factors. For most topics, two or more options that the DNR believes are potentially feasible are described. Status quo options represent the current conditions at the park or currently authorized facilities, objectives, or actions.¹⁷ Table 1 lists the topics, the department’s preferred option(s) in bold text, and other potential options the department considered. The options described here are distinct for each topic and not tied to other topics (that is, Option 1 for mountain biking is not linked to Option 1 for hiking). In addition, multiple options within a topic may be feasible and ultimately included in the draft master plan. For example, all three options to adjust the project boundary of the park may be appropriate.

Following the description of options for each topic are summaries of considerations that the DNR believes are relevant. These considerations are presented in three themes: effects on visitor experiences, effects on natural resources, and economic costs and benefits.

The department is deferring selection of a preferred option for downhill skiing as it continues to gather additional information on how future climate conditions will impact the use and management of the ski operation, the effectiveness of adaptation actions, potential skier demand at Rib Mountain in the coming decades, and other factors affecting the ski operation. This approach will also ensure the public has the best information possible when giving input on the eventual Rib Mountain State Park Draft Master Plan. **Downhill skiing will be addressed with all other RMSP management topics in the Rib Mountain State Park Draft Master Plan.**



¹⁷ The 2005 master plan authorized several changes to the layout and composition of facilities at the park as well as some new facilities. Many, but not all, of these changes have been implemented over the last 15 years. Examples of actions that were authorized but not yet completed include a new nature center, group and walk-in campsites in the northwest portion of the park, and a heated shop building with pressurized water. For purposes of developing a set of future management options, the DNR evaluated the changes and new facilities approved in 2005 that have not yet been completed to determine if they should be retained as authorized actions.

Table 1. Management Topics, their Associated Options, and **DNR's preferred options (in bold)**

Topic	Options
Recreation Management	
Downhill Skiing	The DNR's preferred option will be selected following an evaluation of projected climate change impacts on downhill skiing at RMSP.
Bicycling	<p>Option 1: Status quo (no trail-based biking opportunities).</p> <p>Option 2: Provide a multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain suitable for biking and hiking/walking.</p> <p>Option 3: Provide mountain biking trails, located primarily in the existing lease area, that accommodate a variety of skill levels.</p> <p>Option 4: Provide an extensive network of mountain biking trails, located in both the existing lease area and elsewhere in the park, that accommodate a variety of skill levels.</p> <p>Option 5: Designate some mountain biking trails for winter fat-tire biking.</p>
Hiking	<p>Option 1: Status quo – maintain the 13 miles of trails and re-route as needed.</p> <p>Option 2: Provide a multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain suitable for hiking/walking and biking.</p> <p>Option 3: Provide additional hiking-only trails.</p> <p>Option 4: Develop a parking area for visitors entering the park from Grouse Lane.</p>
Climbing and bouldering	<p>Option 1: Status quo (allow bouldering in two designated sites).</p> <p>Option 2: Allow bouldering throughout the park and focus the activity in appropriate places.</p> <p>Option 3: Allow technical climbing (with ropes and gear) in designated places.</p> <p>Option 4: Allow sport climbing (with fixed anchors) at a designated site in the quarry.</p>
Camping	<p>Option 1: Status quo (construct a new group campground and hike-in camp sites in the northwest portion of the property as described in the 2005 master plan).</p> <p>Option 2: Provide a small, rustic campground with common parking area and facilities.</p> <p>Option 3: Do not provide camping at the park.</p>
Cross-country skiing	<p>Option 1: Status quo (no groomed cross-country skiing opportunities).</p> <p>Option 2: Manage the multi-purpose trail, outside of the lease area, as a winter multi-use trail.</p>
Nature Center	<p>Option 1: Status quo (construct and operate a nature center near the observation tower as described in the 2005 master plan).</p> <p>Option 2: Do not provide a nature center as described in the 2005 master plan.</p> <p>Option 3: Construct an addition to the park entrance visitor center to house nature educational displays and materials as well as a meeting/classroom space.</p>



Topic	Options
<p>Amphitheater and day use areas</p>	<p>Option 1: Status quo.</p> <p>Option 2: Provide additional and improved facilities to accommodate more and a wider range of events.</p>
<p>Other outdoor activities in the lease area</p>	<p>Option 1: Status quo – follow the existing lease.</p> <p>Option 2: Update the lease agreement to allow additional facilities that support nature-based or educational activities within the lease area.</p>
<p>Hunting and trapping Observation tower Snowmobiling Snowshoeing</p>	<p>No change – status quo option only.</p>
<p>Natural Resources Management</p>	
<p>Habitat management</p>	<p>Option 1: Status quo - continue a primarily passive approach to forest management.</p> <p>Option 2: Diversify the structure and composition of the forest canopy through more active management of the forest.</p> <p>Option 3: Continue management of the state natural area.</p>
<p>Administrative Issues</p>	
<p>Project Boundary (Real Estate)</p>	<p>Option 1: Status quo (no change to the existing project boundary).</p> <p>Option 2: Contract the project boundary of the main part of the park near Cloverland Lane to exclude developed parcels.</p> <p>Option 3: Expand the project boundary of the main part of the park to include lands that would potentially connect RMSP with Marathon County’s Nine Mile County Forest.</p> <p>Option 4: Expand the project boundary west of Thornapple Road to protect a large forest block and provide additional recreation opportunities.</p>
<p>Administrative Facilities</p>	<p>Option 1: Status quo. Maintain existing administrative facilities and remodel and expand the shop building as described in the 2005 master plan.</p>



OPTIONS FOR RECREATION MANAGEMENT

This section describes recreation management options, by topic, for Rib Mountain State Park. Background information and potential effects on recreation experiences and natural resources are presented. The DNR has also developed a description of general impacts associated with outdoor recreation. That document, [Impacts Associated with Outdoor Recreation](#), is available online under Common Elements on the DNR Property Planning website (dnr.wi.gov, keyword: Property Planning).



BICYCLING

Existing opportunities

Bicycling is allowed on all roads in the park. There are no trails designated for off-road bicycling, mountain biking, or fat-tire biking in the park nor are these types of trails authorized in the 2005 master plan.

Background

Bicycling continues to be a popular activity in the region and the Wausau metro area has taken more and more steps to be a bicycle-friendly community. In 2015, the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization developed a bicycle and pedestrian plan that identifies a 100+ mile bicycle route network and signage system. The system spans the entire Wausau metro area and includes routes that pass by RMSP on the east and north sides and continue south to Nine Mile County Forest.

Participation in mountain biking has grown substantially over the last decade and it is a popular activity throughout the state. A variety of off-road and mountain biking trails occur in the Wausau area including at Nine Mile County Forest and Sylvan Hill and Ringle parks. Together, they comprise over 40 miles of trails across a range of skill levels from beginner to advanced. Some trails are singletrack, purpose-built and technically challenging, while others are on wider, easier paths that double as cross-country skiing trails in the winter. An active local club, Central Wisconsin Offroad Cycling Coalition (CWOCC), has been involved with designing, constructing and maintaining many of these trails. The club and Marathon County host several popular mountain biking events throughout the year that draw many local and out-of-town participants.

Based on input during the initial public comment period there is broad support for adding bicycling options at RMSP. Although many respondents supported biking opportunities in both the ski area and elsewhere in the park, others supported biking if the trails were concentrated in the existing lease area.

There is support for touring and off-road biking opportunities at RMSP. Some people noted that a trail encircling the mountain could be linked to existing trails that lead to downtown Wausau as well as to local residential roads and that both connections would greatly increase the number of visitors to the property. Several people noted the potential to connect biking trails at RMSP to Sunnyvale County Park to the northwest as well as to the network of existing biking trails at Nine Mile County Park to the south and that these linkages would add substantial value to the community.

There is also considerable support for purpose-built mountain biking trails. These can include: (1) trails that wind through the forest with bikers combining coasting and pedaling as they flow over banked turns, undulating terrain, and various types of rollers and jumps, and (2) gravity mountain biking trails that rely on a biker's technical skills to navigate twists, turns, switchbacks and obstacles as they ride downhill. Given RMSP's size and elevation change, the

Types of bicycle trails

Definitions

Touring bicycle trails

Easier trails -often surfaced with asphalt or packed rock screenings- that are appropriate for a wide range of ability levels. These trails can be ridden using many types of bikes. An example is the Mountain-Bay State Trail.

Off-road bicycle trails

Intermediate-level trails, often in the woods with a variety of surfaces from native soil to wood chips. These trails can range from easy to physically challenging and are appropriate for more adventurous riders. Can be ridden using hybrid or mountain bikes. Examples include the wider trails at Nine Mile County Forest.

Mountain bike trails

Specially constructed, generally narrow trails that can be designed to provide a range of difficulties. Some trails may include different types of challenge features such as jumps, banks, berms and drops; other trails are designed to wind through woods or grasslands on relatively level ground. Downhill "gravity" trails use topography to provide unique experiences for riders. Examples include those built by CWOCC at Nine Mile County Forest, Sylvan Hill and Ringle.

Fat-tire bike trails

Trails for winter fat-tire biking can include a range of difficulties and widths and may be groomed or ungroomed. They can be sited on hiking or mountain biking trails, former logging roads, DNR service roads or other similar routes.



park could provide many miles of both types of mountain biking trails suitable for a variety of skill levels (from technically challenging to beginner level).

The switchbacks in constructed mountain bike trails are often bermed to varying degrees based on anticipated rider speed and the angle of turn. In downhill ski areas, these constructed berms need to be placed in the wooded corridors so that they are not inadvertently damaged in the winter by the ski grooming equipment.

A downhill biking experience, of course, requires ways for bikers to get back to the top of the mountain. One option, in addition to the entrance road that bikers can use to get to the top of the mountain, is to designate specific trails as “uphill biking only.” Another option is a shuttle service that provides rides up the mountain, typically during set times on weekends or other days with enough riders to support the operation. A third option is the unique opportunity at RMSP for bikers to use a ski lift to travel up the mountain. The existing ski lifts are owned and operated by Granite Peak Corporation.

A growing segment of bicyclists use battery-powered electric bikes or “e-bikes.” There are now battery-powered versions of bikes with narrow tires (road bikes), wider tires (various types of mountain bikes) and very wide tires (fat-tire, winter bikes). E-bikes are allowed on nearly all state trails and increasingly on other designated bike trails on state land, too. Although the weight distribution of an electronic mountain bike may affect performance on very steep downhill trails, allowing e-bikes here would enable riders to use their battery-assist going uphill and travel downhill by gravity.

The DNR believes that a multi-purpose bicycling and hiking trail around the mountain along its lower reaches would be very popular with both residents and out-of-town visitors and would add to the quality of life in the Wausau area. Such a trail would require a partnership between the DNR and the leasee (Granite Peak Corporation) to mutually determine opportunities and respective responsibilities for the trail in the lease area.

If mountain biking trails are developed at RMSP, it will likely be advantageous to develop a connecting “ridge trail” along the summit from which other trails depart and head down the mountain. This trail could be a combination of roads and designated bike trails.

Potential Alternatives for mountain biking developed by SE Group

The SE Group report developed a set of alternatives for mountain biking trails that cover the full range of skill levels. To minimize impacts, the switchbacks would be placed in wooded areas. The report assigned color codes to the trails based on difficulty (green, blue and black). The trails have been drawn conceptually on the maps in the SE Group report and have not yet been evaluated “on the ground.” The SE Group’s alternatives include:

Alternative 1: No mountain biking trails are proposed.

Alternative 2: Mountain biking is added to 2.3 miles of existing hiking trails, and 12 miles of new shared-use trails (mountain biking and hiking) and 13 miles of new mountain biking trails are constructed. Of the 27 miles of trails that mountain biking would be allowed, about 8 miles are within the existing lease area and about 19 miles are outside. This alternative includes using an existing lift within the ski area to transport mountain bikers to the top of the mountain.

Alternative 3: Mountain biking is added to 2.4 miles of existing hiking trails, and 12 miles of new shared-use trails (mountain biking and hiking) and 16 miles of new mountain biking trails are constructed. Of the 31 miles of trails that mountain biking would be allowed, about 6 miles are within the existing lease area and about 25 miles are outside. This alternative includes using a new lift within the proposed western expansion of the ski area to transport mountain bikers to the top of the mountain.

Alternative 4: Mountain biking is added to 2.2 miles of existing hiking trails, and 13 miles of new shared-use trails (mountain biking and hiking) and 14 miles of new mountain biking trails are constructed. Of the 29 miles of trails that mountain biking would be allowed, about 6 miles are within the existing lease area and about 23 miles are outside. This alternative includes using a new lift within the proposed western expansion of the ski area and a new lift on the south side of the mountain to transport mountain bikers to the top of the mountain. The SE Group does not recommend if the DNR or the ski area leasee should own and operate a proposed lift on the south side of the mountain.

In addition to these alternatives, the SE Group proposed a “Community Connectivity” alternative that includes up to 14 access points into the park from surrounding neighborhoods to a system of shared-use trails (hiking and mountain biking).

The SE Group's Alternative 4 proposes a new lift on the south side of the mountain to provide lift-served access for mountain bikers. A lift on the south side of the mountain would fragment the forest cover and impact existing recreation uses in this part of the park. This concept is not included in the DNR options.

The DNR's experience in managing trails is that combining several uses on narrow trails can lead to diminished experiences for users and reduced sustainability of trails. Multiple uses can be effective in certain, limited situations – for example to facilitate an efficient use of a broader trail network – but the DNR generally seeks to establish separate trails for higher impact uses such as technically-challenging mountain biking. Similarly, the DNR typically does not add mountain biking to existing hiking trails, both to maintain the hiking experience for existing users and because many hiking trails are not designed for and cannot support mountain biking use. For logistical reasons, the DNR limits the number of designated public access points into state parks.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Continue allowing bicycles on all roads open to the public in the park. Do not construct bicycling trails and do not add mountain biking as a use on existing hiking trails.

Option 2: Provide a multi-purpose trail suitable for biking and hiking or walking encircling the mountain.

This option would construct a multi-purpose, fully developed, 8- to 10-foot-wide trail surfaced with packed screenings or asphalt that encircles the mountain. The trail would be located to minimize climbs and descents to the degree possible, creating an easy walking and bicycling experience of approximately 5 to 7 miles in length. Up to four connections from the trail to surrounding roads (Snowbird Avenue, Grouse Lane, Daisy Road and State Park Road) could be developed. Although not designed to provide a mountain biking experience, this trail would be located to enable mountain bikers, as they reach the bottom of the mountain, to make their way to uphill-only trails or other ways to get back to the top.

This multi-purpose trail would completely encircle the mountain and pass through the existing lease area. The existing lease agreement would need to be amended, if acceptable to the leasee, to clearly authorize this trail within the lease area and to articulate roles and responsibilities related to its use and management. A conceptual alignment of a multi-purpose trail is shown in Map 2 on page 27.

The DNR's ownership at the west end of the park does not include the lower elevations of the mountain. As a result, a potential multi-purpose trail located only on existing DNR-owned land would need to climb and descend a considerable elevation change west of the former quarry. If the DNR is able to acquire a small amount of additional land or a public access easement here, this trail could be located at a consistent elevation, both improving user experiences and reducing construction and maintenance costs.

If additional public lands or easements are acquired between RMSP and Nine Mile County Forest, this multi-purpose trail could be extended southward to link the two properties.

Option 3: Provide mountain biking trails, located primarily in the existing lease area and the eastern side of the park, that accommodate a variety of skill levels.

This option would construct enough flow and gravity downhill mountain biking trails to attract riders from throughout central Wisconsin, which the department expects to be in the range of 6 to 12 miles. The trails would be designed to accommodate a variety of skill levels, potentially including some technically

DNR's Preferred Options

Option 2: Multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain.

Option 4: Extensive network of mountain biking trails.

Option 5: Winter fat-tire mountain biking trails.



challenging trails with advanced features. Depending on the characteristics of the trails, some may also be appropriate for fat-tire biking in the winter.

The majority of these trails would be within the existing lease area and the eastern side of the park. At least one “uphill only” bike trail (in addition to the entrance road) would be designated. The SE Group report identifies potential trails that could be incorporated in this option (for examples see [Figure 15](#) Alternative 2 – Summer). Most of these trails would be designated for biking use only. In order to develop an efficient trail network, in some situations short stretches of trails may be designated for both hiking and biking use.

The existing lease allows construction of mountain biking trails in the lease area. Discussions between the department, Granite Peak and local mountain biking interests would be needed to determine the acceptability of this option, trail design, and construction and maintenance needs and funding.

Option 4: Provide an extensive network of mountain biking trails, including lift-served gravity trails, located in both the existing lease area and elsewhere in the park, that accommodate a variety of skill levels.

This option would construct enough flow and gravity downhill mountain biking trails to attract riders from throughout the Midwest, which the department expects to be in the range of 12 to 20 miles. The trails would be designed to accommodate a variety of skill levels, including some technically challenging trails with advanced features. Depending on the characteristics of the trails, some may also be appropriate for fat-tire biking in the winter.

These trails would be located within the existing lease area and elsewhere in the park. At least two “uphill only” bike trails (in addition to the entrance road) would be designated. The SE Group report identifies potential trails that could be incorporated in this option (for examples see [Figure 15](#) Alternative 2 – Summer or [Figure 17](#) Alternative 3 – Summer). Most of these trails would be designated for biking use only. In order to develop an efficient trail network, in some situations short stretches of trails may be designated for both hiking and biking use.

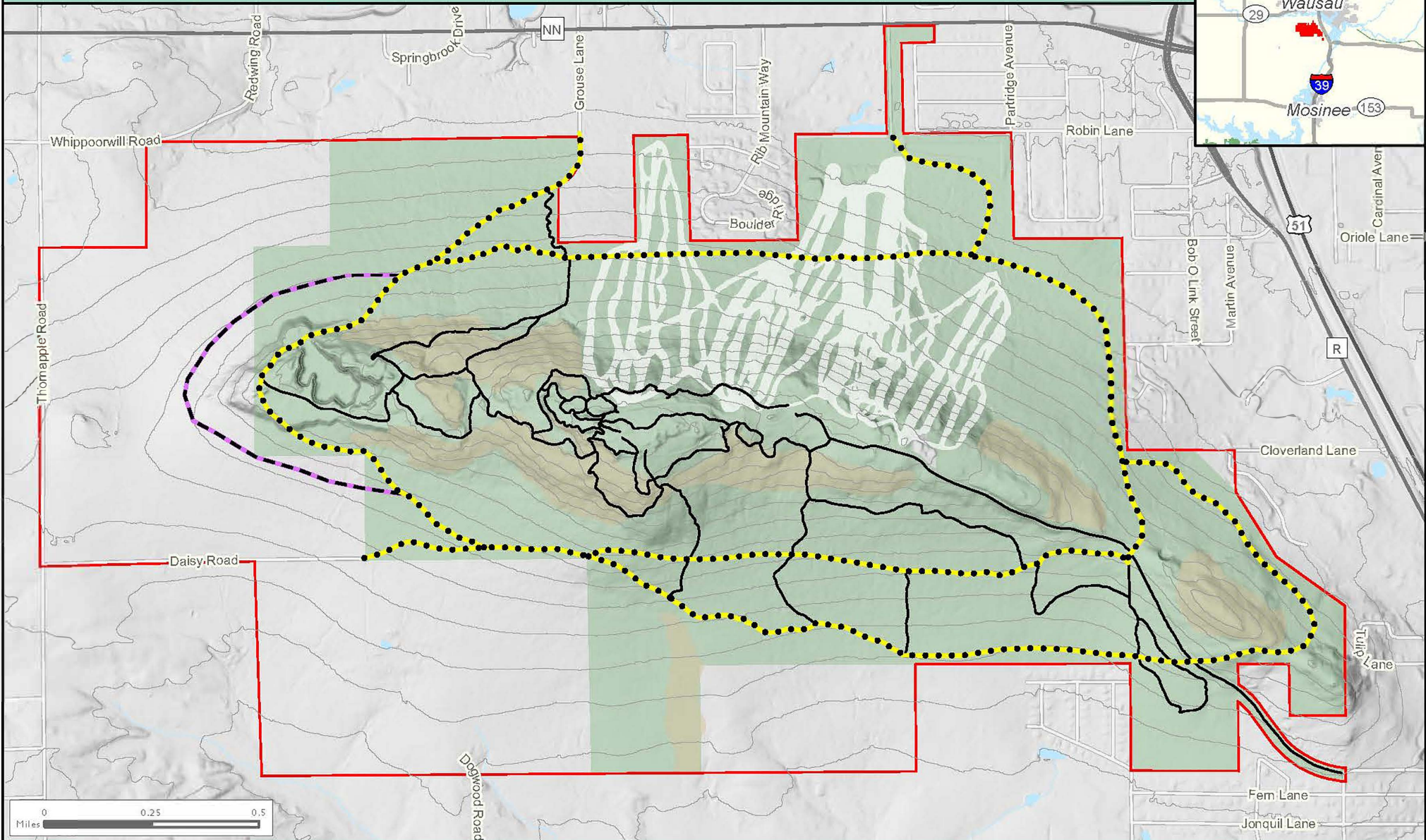
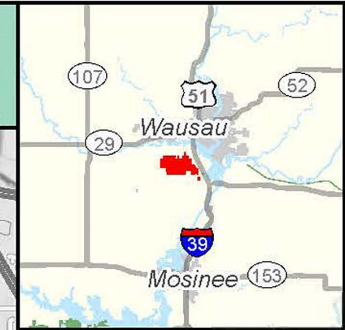
The existing lease allows construction of mountain biking trails in the lease area. Discussions between the department, Granite Peak Corporation and local mountain biking interests would be needed to determine the acceptability of this option, trail design, and construction and maintenance needs and funding.

Option 5: Designate some mountain biking trails for fat-tire use in the winter.

A portion of the mountain biking trails could be designated and maintained for fat-tire mountain biking in the winter.

Rib Mountain State Park CONCEPTUAL MULTI-PURPOSE TRAILS

DRAFT



MAP 2

- Project Boundary
- DNR Managed Land
- Areas Of High Ecological Value
- Existing hiking trail
- Conceptual multi-purpose trail
- Conceptual multi-purpose trail if additional land acquired

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



Bureau of
Facilities and Lands
Jan 03, 2022

MAP 1

The data shown on this map have been obtained from various sources, and are of varying age, reliability and resolution. This map is not intended to be used for navigation, nor is this map an authoritative source of information about legal land ownership or public access. Users of this map should confirm the ownership of land through other means in order to avoid trespassing. No warranty, expressed or implied, is made regarding accuracy, applicability for a particular use, completeness, or legality of the information depicted on this map.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

The development of a multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain is expected to enhance the experiences for many recreational bikers and walkers in the park.

Given the extensive system of hiking trails in the park, adding a network of mountain biking trails would inevitably cross some hiking trails. Some hiking trails could be re-designed (and possibly re-routed) to accommodate both hiking and mountain biking in stretches where appropriate to facilitate each network. Extra steps may need to be taken to ensure user safety in situations where multiple uses are authorized. Some hikers' experiences may be diminished by mountain bikers.

From the perspective of people participating in different types of bicycling, the construction of a trail network at RMSP that accommodates a variety of skill levels and experiences is expected to be very popular with nearby residents. The addition of lift-served or shuttle-served mountain biking would likely also draw visitors from many hours away for multi-day outings.

Providing lift-served mountain biking as described in SE Group Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 would potentially utilize the Blitzen lift, which ends at the top adjacent to the amphitheater. Given the number of special events that occur at the amphitheater on summer weekends (including many weddings), unloading mountain bikers at this location would likely adversely impact the experiences of people at the amphitheater. There would be less impact if a different lift was used.

Adding mountain biking trails in the park would likely result in increased crowding at the top of the mountain, particularly on weekends. In addition, some existing recreational uses, such as hunting, may be adversely affected by large numbers of people biking throughout the park.

Effects on natural resources.

Construction of a network of biking trails has the potential to cause erosion issues as well as provide more opportunities for the spread of invasive plant species. Invasive species already have a negative impact in many areas of the park. The construction of biking trails would also create narrow corridors through the forest causing some level of habitat fragmentation. There may also be a reduction in the wildlife value of the large block of forest due to more people biking and hiking on trails.

Socio-economic costs and benefits.

The cost of constructing sustainable, high-quality mountain bike trails can vary considerably based on terrain, skill level of trail, design features, and many other factors. It is estimated that mountain bike trails here would generally cost \$5,000 to \$25,000/mile to develop using a combination of volunteer labor and professional design and development work. Ongoing maintenance would require additional costs. Some of these costs could be offset by volunteers and state trail pass revenue if the trail is part of the designated state trail system.

The Wausau area already supports many high-quality mountain biking opportunities (e.g., Nine Mile County Forest, Ringle, and Sylvan Hill) that RMSP could complement. A network of biking trails, including the potential for lift-served or shuttle-served gravity runs, would likely draw many visitors to the Wausau area for multi-day outings. This would result in increased spending in the local community in restaurants, shops and hotels, which would benefit local businesses and generate sales tax revenue. SE Group estimates that their Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 (which include 27 to 30 miles of mountain biking trails) would generate more than \$1 million in economic impact.

A new 8- to 10-foot wide, fully developed, multi-purpose trail that is surfaced with packed screenings or asphalt would likely cost between \$40,000 and \$100,000/mile to develop using a combination of volunteer labor and professional design and development work. Ongoing maintenance would require additional costs. It is possible that this multi-purpose trail would become a destination for people – that is, people would make a trip of biking from

their house to the park, around the mountain, and then back home. It is likely that some of these visitors would be interested in stopping for food and drinks during their outing; the concessions available at Granite Peak might be popular with these visitors and would provide economic benefits for the company.

People accessing the park on foot or bike are currently not required to pay an entrance fee and as a result there may be only a limited increase in revenue for the park from an increase in bicyclists and hikers. An increase in the number of visitors not paying entrance fees would put an additional strain on the park budget. Options to partially address this situation could be to require bicyclists on the multi-purpose trail to have a state trail pass and/or to have mountain bikers pay user fees to ride the trails.



HIKING AND WALKING

Existing opportunities

The park has 13 miles of hiking trails that offer a diversity of experiences. Many of the park’s trails are lightly developed and provide a rustic experience. Other trails are more developed and easier to walk. A paved trail parallels the main entrance road all the way to the top of the mountain. Many of the existing trails cover considerable topographic relief.

Background

Hiking has long been one of Wisconsinites’ most popular outdoor activities, with an estimated two-thirds of the state’s population participating.¹⁸ The observation tower and the network of trails surrounding it are top summertime draws for the park. In addition, hiking to the quarry, either from the upper entrance road or from Grouse Lane, is popular. Many nearby residents walk up the paved trail for exercise throughout the year.

Some of the trails, especially on the south side of the mountain, are oriented down the slope and have drainage and erosion issues. Re-routing these trails would provide users with a better experience and reduce environmental impacts.

Based on the public comments during the initial input period, hiking continues to be the most popular activity in the park with 88% of respondents that visited RMSP in the last year participating. There was support for expanding hiking opportunities in the park.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Maintain the existing network of trails. Re-route hiking trails where erosion is an ongoing issue or where visitor experiences could be improved.

Option 2: Provide a multi-purpose trail that could accommodate hiking or walking and biking.

This option would construct a multi-purpose, fully developed, 8- to 10-foot-wide trail surfaced with packed screenings or asphalt that encircles the mountain (see page 27 for a conceptual map). Locate the trail to minimize climbs and descents to the degree possible, creating an easy walking and bicycling experience of approximately 5 to 7

Potential Alternatives developed by SE Group

The SE Group report developed alternatives for future management at RMSP. These alternatives address hiking as follows:

Alternative 1: No change to existing hiking trails.

Alternative 2: Of the 13 miles of existing trails, maintain 8.7 miles as is, close 2.0 miles of trails that are eroding and replace with 1.6 miles of new hiking trails, and add mountain biking as an authorized use on 2.3 miles. Construct 12 miles of new shared use trails (combined hiking and mountain biking).

Alternative 3: Of the 13 miles of existing trails, maintain 8.6 miles as is, close 2.0 miles of trails that are eroding and replace with 1.6 miles of new hiking trails, and add mountain biking as an authorized use on 2.4 miles. Construct 12 miles of new shared use trails (combined hiking and mountain biking).

Alternative 4: Of the 13 miles of existing trails, maintain 8.4 miles as is, close 2.5 miles of trails that are eroding and replace with 1.6 miles of new hiking trails, and add mountain biking as an authorized use on 2.2 miles. Construct 13 miles of new shared use trails (combined hiking and mountain biking).

The SE Group’s report also proposes up to 14 access sites into the park from surrounding neighborhoods that are a combination of hiking and hiking/bicycling trails.

DNR’s Preferred Options

Option 1: Maintain existing network and re-route trails where needed.

Option 2: Multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain.

Option 3: Provide additional hiking-only trails.

Option 4: Develop a parking area off Grouse Lane.

¹⁸ [Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\) – 2019 to 2023.](#)



miles in length. Develop up to four connections from the trail to surrounding roads (Snowbird Avenue, Grouse Lane, Daisy Road and State Park Road). If additional public lands or easements are acquired between RMSP and Nine Mile County Forest, extend the multi-purpose trail to link the two properties.

Option 3: Provide additional hiking-only trails.

Hiking remains a very popular activity in the park and demand for additional trails is strong. This option would construct additional dedicated hiking trails with a focus on trails that seek to provide less strenuous experiences. Some of these could be on the east side of the park where few trails currently exist. It is expected that about 4 miles of additional trails would be appropriate.

Option 4: Develop a parking area for visitors entering the park from Grouse Lane.

A large number of area residents access the park from Grouse Lane and hike the Turkey Vulture, Dynamite, Homestead and Quarry trails. This popular entrance is used year-round and it is common for vehicles to be parked along much of Grouse Lane out to CTH NN. Given the narrowness of the road and the residences here, safety concerns have been repeatedly raised.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

The current network of hiking trails is well-used. Hiking on existing trails generally has not had impacts on other visitor experiences, although sometimes people bouldering on rocks and placing crash pads next to trails can lead to some congestion. A multi-purpose trail encircling the mountain would likely be very popular. Additional hiking trails would likely help spread out visitors but is unlikely to increase overall visitation to the property. Many of the existing trails can be strenuous given their alignment going up and down the mountain. It is likely that new trails that are less challenging would be well used.

A new parking area off Grouse Lane would likely be well used throughout the year.

Effects on natural resources.

Hiking trails can be vectors for the spread of invasive species, as is evidenced by the locations of several invasive plant species along trail corridors in the park. Some hiking trails are experiencing erosion and need repair or re-routing. Hiking itself as an activity likely has minimal impact on local wildlife.

A new parking area off Grouse Lane would result in a cleared area of about an acre.

Economic costs and benefits.

A new multi-purpose trail with a surface of packed screenings or asphalt would likely cost between \$40,000 and \$100,000/mile to develop using a combination of volunteer labor and professional design and development work. Ongoing maintenance would require additional costs. New primitive to lightly-developed hiking-only trails are typically constructed using volunteers (often members of the Friends group) and cost between \$2,000 and \$5,000/mile to develop. Ongoing maintenance would require additional costs. It is likely that providing additional hiking opportunities at the park would have only minimal increases to economic activity in the Wausau area.

A new parking area off Grouse Lane would likely cost between \$150,000 and \$300,000.

Providing additional developed walk-in access points to the park can lead to increased staffing costs without commensurate increases in revenue to the DNR from visitors.



CLIMBING, BOULDERING AND SCRAMBLING

Existing opportunities

The 2005 master plan prohibits climbing in the abandoned quarry area as rock conditions were determined to be unstable and unsafe. The master plan designates a 215-acre State Natural Area that comprises many rock outcroppings and limits recreation in this area to hiking, snowshoeing and hunting. The current property map states that rock climbing with ropes or other technical gear is not allowed in the park and identifies two areas of the park where bouldering is allowed. There is confusion in the climbing and bouldering community as to where these activities are allowed in the park.

Background

The exposed rock at Rib Mountain is quartzite, a metamorphized sandstone. Quartzite is a very hard, but somewhat brittle rock that fractures along random angles. The large fields of quartzite pieces found in the park were formed by freezing and thawing over millions of years that cracked the large blocks of rock into smaller and smaller pieces. Some very large blocks remain, which often have numerous cracks and crevices making them attractive places to climb, boulder, or scramble.

During the initial public input period for the master plan revision (in early 2020), many comments were received from people interested in more bouldering and climbing opportunities in the park and a clearer indication of which areas are open or closed to these uses.

It is the Natural Resources Board's policy that, "Rock climbing is a traditional recreational activity that may occur on non-designated use areas on department lands, and is consistent with the department's mission to provide recreational opportunities to the public. Rock climbing should be considered in master planning for department properties which contain areas where rock climbing may occur" (s. NR 1.33, Wis. Admin. Code). Rock climbing is prohibited in state natural areas unless specified as an allowable use in a master plan and the allowable area is posted as open to climbing (s. NR 45.13, Wis. Admin. Code).

Although only a small percentage of Wisconsin residents participate in climbing and bouldering, due to several factors (including the growth of indoor climbing gyms) the activity appears to be gaining in popularity.¹⁹ It is increasingly drawing younger participants, including high school students.

Given the rock formations in the park, there are only a few spots that could provide a climbing experience using ropes and other technical gear and these places could only provide a short climb. Most likely, climbing here would involve placing an anchor rope at the top of (or over) a large boulder. There is one spot in the former quarry that may be able to support a small sport or traditional climbing experience, which may be popular as part of a training program.

Definitions

Climbing:

An activity of ascending or descending steep rock walls, ice walls or artificial structures, usually with the assistance of specialized equipment. Climbing typically involves following a particular route (or "problem") up a rock face. Climbers usually apply chalk on their hands to improve grip.

Traditional (or trad) climbing involves the use of temporary protection devices such as top ropes, cams, nuts, and carabiners. Sport climbing involves the use of permanently fixed anchors or bolts that climbers use for protection.

Bouldering:

An activity performed without the use of ropes, anchors, or other equipment except mats (crash pads) to minimize injuries from falls. People bouldering rarely go higher than 10 to 15 feet off the ground. Like climbing, bouldering typically involves following a particular route (or "problem") up a boulder or rock face and the use of chalk.

Scrambling:

An activity of moving over rocks that is performed without the use of gear or mats. People scrambling do not follow routes or "problems" but rather are more randomly moving up or over rocks and boulders.

¹⁹ [Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\) – 2019 to 2023.](#)

There are numerous places that provide a range of quality bouldering experiences ranging from beginner to advanced levels. Many of these places are near and to the west of the observation tower with several immediately adjacent to existing hiking trails.

It is likely that these opportunities could draw participants from throughout the central Wisconsin area. Although some people from the southern part of the state (Milwaukee and Madison) and from the Twin Cities may visit the park for a bouldering experience, it is likely that RMSP will never be a substantial draw since people coming from these metropolitan areas would travel past better bouldering (and climbing) opportunities on their way to the park.

Although people bouldering rarely go higher than 10 to 15 feet off the ground, injuries can occur. In some cases, people have been severely injured at RMSP and have required emergency services, which can place a strain on the local rescue operations.

Scrambling over rock formations along the ridge has been a favorite activity of youngsters for generations. Some areas, such as the Queens Chair formation, are popular destinations for scrambling and have little vegetation, lichens, or organic material remaining on them or at their bases due to their heavy use.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Continue to prohibit climbing in the park and allow bouldering in the two designated places. Place signs that more clearly identify these locations.

Option 2: Encourage bouldering in appropriate places.

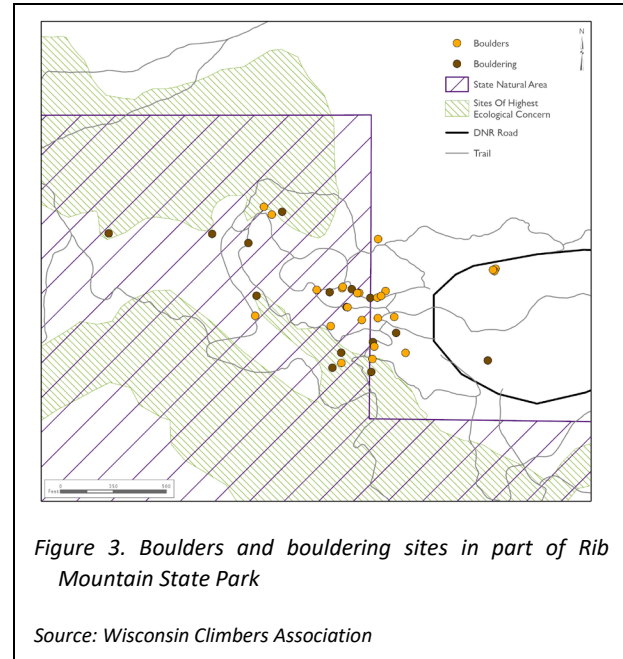
This option would not restrict bouldering but rather identify and encourage bouldering in places that provide quality experiences and would have minimal impacts to ecological features and existing hiking trails. Identify places that are relatively easy for emergency personnel to access in case of injuries. Work with the Wisconsin Climbers Association to develop a map with coordinates that locate these sites for people interested in bouldering.

Option 3: Allow traditional climbing (with ropes and gear) in a small number of designated places.

This option would allow climbing with ropes and technical gear in a small number of designated places in the park that would have minimal impacts to ecological features and existing hiking trails. Identify places that are relatively easy for emergency personnel to access in case of injuries. Work with the Wisconsin Climbers Association to develop a map with coordinates that locate these sites for people interested in technical climbing.

Option 4: Allow sport climbing (with fixed anchors) at a designated site in the former quarry.

This option would have the department work with the Wisconsin Climbers Association to install a set of permanently fixed anchors at a suitable site in the former quarry.



DNR's Preferred Options

Option 2: Bouldering in appropriate places.

Option 3: Traditional climbing in designated places.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Providing bouldering opportunities that are clearly designated with maps or coordinates would likely result in increased participation in the park, improve experiences for people bouldering, and clarify enforcement.

Because most of the rock faces and boulders in the park are limited in height (most are less than 15 feet) there are only a few spots where traditional climbing is practical; allowing climbing in designated spots would likely draw a limited amount of use that would not be expected to substantively impact other visitors. Establishing a fixed set of anchors in the former quarry would likely be used by area climbers, particularly those involved in training exercises, and would not be expected to impact other visitors.

In situations where bouldering opportunities are near trails, crowding can sometimes occur. These situations can generally be addressed by ensuring people bouldering keep crash pads away from trails. It is not expected that people participating in bouldering would have an impact on hunters, bird watchers, picnickers, winter activities, or other existing visitors to the park. If biking trails are added to the park, it will be important to maintain adequate distance between biking trails and bouldering areas.

Effects on natural resources.

Rock faces and cliffs are rare in Wisconsin and support ecologically unique conditions. These conditions can support lichens, mosses, invertebrates, and other species in the cracks and small indentations in rock faces. Although these micro-habitats and species have not been well-studied, some plants and animals associated with rock faces and formations appear to be rare or have very restricted distribution. Impacts from bouldering and climbing can include brushing and scrubbing off soil, lichens, mosses, and other material from small ledges, indentations and cracks (sometimes referred to as “gardening”) and trampling vegetation under bouldering mats. Many people climbing and bouldering use a special chalk on their hands to improve their grip. In popular areas, a buildup of chalk can often be seen.

Secondary impacts can occur from volunteer trails, erosion, and trampling. Encouraging bouldering and climbing in specific places may restrict most impacts to pre-identified areas and help to protect sites with higher ecological quality.

Socio-economic costs and benefits.

Providing additional bouldering and climbing opportunities would require some increased department staff time to monitor use and ensure public safety. It is also likely to result in a proportionate increase in falls and injuries, some of which are expected to require assistance from the local emergency services provider – the South Area Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) District. Injuries on boulders or in the quarry are time consuming and often require many personnel and special equipment to safely treat and extract people that are seriously injured.

Providing additional bouldering and climbing opportunities at RMSP is likely to result in a modest increase in visitation to the park, from both nearby residents and people traveling from out of the region. Although this expansion would result in some increase in economic activity in the Wausau area, given the relatively limited number of participants it is not likely to be noticeable.

CAMPING

Existing opportunities

There are no camping opportunities currently available in the park.

Background

Although the small, rustic campground that previously existed at the summit provided spectacular views and a popular vantage point to watch sunrises and sunsets, the camp sites did not provide the type and quality of camping experience desired by an increasing number of campers. The campsites were small, closely spaced and could not accommodate RVs. Further, the campground did not comply with current design standards. Use of the campsites declined over many years and cost the DNR more to operate than they generated in revenue.

The 2005 master plan approved the conversion of the campground to picnic areas, which have proven to be very popular - overall visitation to the park has steadily increased since the campground was converted. The 2005 master plan also authorized development of a group campground and several hike-in campsites to be located in the northwest corner of the park; these have not yet been constructed.

During the initial phase of public input, some comments were received requesting the department re-develop a modest-sized campground at the summit or elsewhere on the property. After analyzing the issue, the department's conclusion is that there is not adequate level space on or near the summit for a modest-sized campground that meets the current design standards, without undoing the conversion that created the day use areas.

If enough mountain biking trails are constructed at RMSP to provide multi-day experiences and given the recent expansion of biking opportunities in the Wausau area (mountain biking at several locations along with the possibility of linking the Mountain Bay State Trail to the River Bend Trail in Merrill and on to the Bearskin State Trail), camping opportunities designed for bicyclists may be well used here. A campground could be designed to cater to walk-in tent campers and bicyclists, including those that drive to the park and bring their mountain bikes.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

As described in the 2005 master plan, develop a group campground and several hike-in campsites in the northwest portion of the park.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 2: Provide a small, rustic campground with common parking area and facilities.

Option 2: Provide a small, rustic campground with common parking area and facilities.

This option would construct a small (possibly up to ten sites) rustic campground along the mid to lower reaches of the mountain. The sites would generally be 100 feet apart and a short distance from a common parking area designed for cars rather than RVs or other large vehicles. Individual sites would include a tent pad, fire ring, and picnic table. The parking area could have electricity for charging vehicles or bikes and a wash station for bikes. Vault toilets and drinking water would be provided in a central location.

Option 3: Do not provide camping at the park.

This option would not provide group, walk-in, or rustic camping in the park.



Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Currently, camping is offered by the Marathon County Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department at Marathon Park in Wausau (2.75 miles from RMSP to northeast), Big Eau Pleine County Park (15 miles to southwest), Dells of the Eau Claire County Park (18 miles to the northeast), and several private campgrounds within 20 miles of Wausau.

Although in 2005 there was belief that a group campsite and walk-in campsites would be needed in the coming years, that demand has not materialized. If these facilities were constructed, it does not appear that they would be used to an extent to warrant their construction and operation.

Given the other mountain biking opportunities in Marathon County, it is likely mountain bikers would be interested in multi-day outings to the area. A small rustic campground focused on bikers would likely add an important draw for people interested in multi-day mountain biking experiences. If constructed, camping is not expected to adversely affect other visitors to the property.

Effects on natural resources.

Some tree clearing and grading would be needed in a modest-sized area for a rustic campground. Associated developments would include vault toilets, potable water, and a small amount of parking, all of which would involve tree removal and ground disturbance. Visitor activity associated with camping may be a vector for the introduction and spread of invasive species.

Economic costs and benefits.

Costs to develop campsites vary considerably based on the types of experiences provided. The existing master plan (the Option #1 status quo) calls for a new rustic group campground and three to four hike-in primitive campsites. The plan proposes this campground to be located on the northwest side of the park near the Turkey Vulture trail. This is estimated to cost \$75,000 to \$150,000.

Option #2 proposes a small rustic campground along the lower or middle reaches of the mountain with a focus on providing camping for bikers and car campers. This style of campground is estimated to cost \$50,000 to \$125,000.

Development of a new campground (either Option #1 or #2) would require additional staff to maintain and operate.



CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Existing opportunities

There are currently no groomed cross-country ski trails in the park. As with other department properties, people can cross country ski (on ungroomed surfaces) in any part of the park unless posted as closed.

Background

There are several cross-country skiing (classic and skate) opportunities in the Wausau area including 18 miles of groomed trails (four miles of which are lighted for evening skiing) at Nine Mile County Forest. In addition, trails are periodically groomed at Sylvan Hill/Tribute Golf Course.

Comments received in the initial public input period indicated support for cross country skiing, possibly on a touring bicycle trail. There was interest in connecting the cross-country skiing opportunities at Nine Mile County Forest with potential opportunities at RMSP. The DNR does not have the resources to groom cross-country ski trails at RMSP and, as a result, this task would need to be undertaken by a local volunteer organization. The existing lease agreement permits GPC to develop cross-country ski trails within the lease area.

If a multi-purpose trail that encircles the lower portion of the park is constructed, the trail's location in the leased area would be partially within the downhill skiing area. It would not be possible to groom this stretch for cross-country skiing. Given the topography of the mountain, developing a network of cross-country ski trails elsewhere in the park that could provide a quality experience does not appear feasible.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Do not provide groomed cross-country ski trails at RMSP.

Option 2: Manage the proposed multi-purpose trail, outside of the lease area, as a winter multi-use trail.

If a multi-purpose trail is constructed that encircles the mountain along its lower reaches (see map on page 27), outside of the lease area the snow could be packed using rollers or other devices to create a surface suitable for walkers, fat-tire bikers, cross-country skiers, and others. Similarly, if a multi-purpose trail linking RMSP and Nine Mile County Forest is constructed, this trail could be managed for multiple winter uses as well.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 2: Manage a trail encircling the mountain for multi-purpose winter use.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Providing multiple winter uses on a proposed multi-use trail (if constructed) would likely be popular with residents in nearby neighborhoods. Providing hiking, fat-tire biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and other similar activities on the multi-purpose trail is unlikely to adversely affect other visitors to the park.

Effects on natural resources.

Maintaining snow-packed conditions on the multi-purpose trail would generate some air emissions. Generally, winter recreational uses are not associated with invasive species problems, erosion, or other impacts sometimes associated with warm-weather trail use and management.

Economic costs and benefits.

It is likely that providing multiple winter uses on a multi-purpose trail in the park would result in only minimal increases to economic activity in the Wausau area. The trail would increase workload for DNR staff.



NATURE CENTER

Existing opportunities

A nature center has not been constructed so no existing use is available.

Background

The 2005 master plan calls for a nature center to be developed. It states:

Construct a nature center building on the western end of the Scenic Recreation Zone in the vicinity of the existing observation tower that serves as an educational and recreational focal point for the park. The building will be sited to provide access to the park's highest concentration of interpretive and educational features and to provide scenic vistas if possible. The nature center building will include: public restrooms, a nature center exhibit area and an outdoor deck with table seating. The building may also include a modest Friend's concession space for the sale of pre-prepared food, beverages, nature literature and merchandise, a winter sports equipment rental area and a meeting / classroom space to accommodate groups up to 80, with a sink, projection screen, audio-visual equipment and an equipment / storage room. Use of or rental of the meeting / classroom space will be limited to: interpretive / educational gatherings, Department and State Agency meetings, non-profit recreational / park events and use by park related organizations, including the Friends of Rib Mountain. The meeting room space will not be offered for use or rental for social events such as wedding receptions, banquets or private parties. (p. 15)

Given other higher priority needs, the department and the Friends group have not had the resources to pursue this project to date. The department believes that a nature center would add an important component to visitor experiences and would likely be popular throughout the year.

The existing Friends concession building is aging and in need of upgrades. Combining a nature center with a place to host the Friends concession operations would be beneficial.

During the initial public comment period, there was support for building a nature and interpretive center.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

As envisioned by the 2005 master plan, construct a nature center and associated parking near the observation tower with views to the south and west. The nature center would be an education and recreation focal point of the park. The center would include an exhibit area, a meeting/classroom space to accommodate groups up to 80, an equipment/storage room, public restrooms, an equipment rental area, and an outdoor deck with table seating. In addition, the center would house a modest Friend's concession space for the sale of pre-prepared food, beverages, nature literature and merchandise. Priority for use of the meeting/classroom space would be for interpretive and educational gatherings, agency or non-profit organization meetings, recreation or park events and use by park related organizations, including the Friends of Rib Mountain.

Option 2: Do not provide a nature center.

This option would not build a new nature center in the park and would retain the Friends concession operations in the existing building.

Option 3: Construct an addition to the park entrance visitor center to house educational displays and materials as well as a meeting/classroom space.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 3: Construct an addition to the park entrance station for nature education and displays.

The existing park entrance building currently serves as a focal point for visitors. This option would add some of the components of the nature center envisioned in 2005 to an expanded park entrance building and would have several benefits. It would likely draw many visitors, be easier for DNR staff and volunteers to oversee, efficiently use limited resources, and provide visitors with a simplified approach to learning about the property and recreation opportunities.

This option would also retain, and upgrade as needed, the existing Friends concession facility near the observation tower.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Visitor experiences at RMSP are already high-quality given the views, day use facilities, trails, and other facilities present. Yet, a missing component has been a facility to interpret and educate visitors about the geology, natural and cultural history, and ecology of the park and its surroundings.

If a new nature center is constructed by the observation deck, as envisioned in 2005, it would be near many of the park's most popular trails and could provide spectacular views to the south. However, it could lead to more crowding in this area. It would also present a substantial challenge (and cost) to provide water and sewer to the western end of the park. Locating the nature center at the west end of the park would also present additional staffing issues.

Expanding the entrance station and housing a "nature exhibit wing" in that building would potentially address some of these issues while still providing interpretive experiences to better understand the ecological and geological context of the park.

Effects on natural resources.

A new nature center or an expanded entrance station would impact the natural resources within the building and parking footprints and surrounding buffer areas. Construction of a new nature center by the observation tower would require ground disturbance associated with providing water and sewer and would require tree removal and permanent conversion of the natural communities in the building's footprint.

Economic costs and benefits.

The cost to build and operate a new nature center or an expansion of the entrance station will depend on its size, design, and features. The facility would likely require at least one or two employees to operate and run interpretive programs. The facility would likely draw a modest amount of people to the property that would not normally visit and thus would have a commensurately modest impact on park revenues.

In 2009, the Schmeckle Reserve Interpreters developed a conceptual plan for a new building to provide interpretation and education, meeting space, sales area, and other features. The plan did not include an estimated cost. Expanding the entrance station and housing a "nature exhibit wing" in that building would likely cost in the range of \$200,000 to \$400,000.



AMPHITHEATER AND DAY USE FACILITIES

Existing opportunities

The amphitheater is one of the most popular sites in the park. Constructed in 1996 with funds raised by several partner groups, it holds about 200 people on benches that provide spectacular views to the north. The amphitheater is primarily used for weddings, musical performances, talks, and similar types of events. The Upper and Lower day use areas are primarily used for picnicking and social gatherings. The Lower Day Use Area has a new, open-sided shelter (Northern Vista) while the Upper Day Use Area is near the concession building staffed by the Friends group. Both areas have parking areas and bathrooms. The Friends Gathering Space building is located across from the amphitheater. Several historic structures constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps are located in or near the day use areas including the log picnic shelter, gazebo, stone drinking fountain, stairs to the Sunrise Overlook, hiking trails and retaining wall.

Background

The revised vision for RMSPP includes a desire to enhance the park's value as a community asset. One approach to help achieve this could be to provide more and upgraded facilities that draw Wausau-area residents as well as out-of-town visitors to the park. An important aspect of this could be to provide more amenities at the top of the mountain that take advantage of the views to both the north and south.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Maintain the existing facilities but do not expand or upgrade them.

Option 2: Provide more and upgraded facilities at the top of the mountain to accommodate additional visitors and a broader range of events.

This option would position the top of the mountain to better host different types of events. Potential facilities could include upgrades and expansion to the amphitheater, a patio and shelter designed to accommodate food trucks/carts and other temporary vendors, and additional parking, benches and bathrooms.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 2: Provide more and upgraded facilities at the top of the mountain to accommodate additional visitors and a broader range of events.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Upgrading and expanding the facilities to host events at the top of the mountain would draw more people to the park, increase the value of the park as a community asset, and enhance many visitors' experiences.

Effects on natural resources.

Upgrades and expansions of the amphitheater, day-use areas and their associated parking lots would impact the natural resources within the building and parking footprints and surrounding buffer areas. Given the existing vegetation and its management, impacts due to upgraded and expanded visitor facilities here are expected to be minimal.

Economic costs and benefits.

The cost to upgrade and build new facilities will depend on their size, design, and features included. The costs would likely range from \$600,000 to \$1,000,000.

The benefits could include more visitors to the park, which would likely include both local community residents and out-of-town visitors. Increasing the use of the park would drive more economic activity in the community through the purchase of goods and services and would enhance Wausau-area residents' quality of life.



OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN THE LEASE AREA

The SE Group report identified an assortment of other outdoor activities to potentially include in an expanded ski area to the west of the existing lease area. These activities include “glamping” cabins, zip line and canopy tour, mountain coaster, family fun zone with a ropes/challenge course, wild play/natural learning area (to interpret geology, natural history, etc.), bungee trampoline, waterplay, or quarrying-themed play activities.

Existing opportunities

These additional outdoor activities are not currently available in the lease area or elsewhere in the park.

Background

Some people that provided input on the SE Group report were excited about these types of opportunities and expressed that they were likely to visit the property to use these facilities. Many of these respondents noted the economic benefits these types of experiences would generate.

Other people were strongly opposed to these types of activities at RMSP. They stated a belief that the purpose of state parks should be to protect important natural resources, educate visitors and provide nature-based recreation – not amusement or adventure activities. Some people suggested that a zip line, mountain coaster, or family fun zone might be appropriate at RMSP, but only within the existing lease area.

The existing lease allows GPC to construct and operate a variety of facilities that provide warm-weather experiences with an outdoor recreational focus including trail-based activities such as horse riding and off-road mountain biking and an alpine slide. The lease also allows the DNR to approve additional categories and types of uses in the lease area if desired.

The department supports adding facilities in state parks that provide nature-based outdoor recreation or education opportunities. The department believes that a “canopy tour” zip line or ropes course that is designed to show and educate visitors about the ecology of tree canopies is appropriate for a state park. Similarly, a natural learning area (particularly to interpret geology and natural history of the mountain) is appropriate for RMSP. Activities that are not enhanced by a natural setting, such as a bungee trampoline, or are intended simply to provide an amusing ride down the mountain, such as a zip line or a mountain coaster, are not consistent with the intent of state parks.²⁰

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Only allow the activities described in the existing lease.

Option 2: Update the lease agreement to allow additional facilities that support nature-based or education activities within the lease area.

Potential Alternatives developed by SE Group

The SE Group report developed alternatives for future management at RMSP. These alternatives include other outdoor activities as follows:

Alternative 1: No additional outdoor activities.

Alternative 2: No additional outdoor activities.

Alternative 3: Construct a new base area to the west of the existing lease area to support an expanded downhill ski operation. The base area would also provide access to a zip line (riders would get to the top using a ski lift) and a mountain coaster. Additional activities proposed include a challenge course, glamping cabins, wild play/natural learning area, bungee trampoline, waterplay or quarry-themed play activities.

Alternative 4: Same as Alternative 3.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 2: Update the lease agreement to allow additional facilities that support nature-based or education activities within the lease area.

²⁰ See Wisconsin State Parks System 2015-2020 Strategic Directions document.

The creation of a new master plan may provide an opportunity to update the lease agreement. A new or amended lease agreement could specifically allow facilities designed to provide nature-based outdoor activities within the existing or expanded lease area. These facilities could include a ropes course or zip line providing a canopy tour or other nature-based educational amenities. It does not appear that the DNR could authorize a leasee to construct facilities for which the DNR itself does not have authority to construct (e.g., glamping cabins).

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

The development of additional facilities to support nature-based outdoor activities within the existing lease would diversify the offerings at Granite Peak and are likely to be popular. These experiences may draw additional visitors to Granite Peak and the Wausau area.

Effects on natural resources.

Depending on the facilities constructed, some tree clearing and grading would likely be needed within the lease area.

Economic costs and benefits.

The costs of constructing recreation infrastructure in the lease area would likely be the responsibility of the leasee.

Increases in the number of people visiting the leased area to participate in additional outdoor activities would result in commensurate increases in spending at Granite Peak and economic returns for the business. This additional visitation may also have a positive impact on other businesses in the Wausau area.



RECREATION ACTIVITIES THAT THE DNR IS NOT PROPOSING CHANGES TO EXISTING MANAGEMENT

Many of Rib Mountain State Park's current recreational offerings are well suited to serve the park's visitors into the future. The DNR is currently considering continuing the existing management (status quo) for the following activities and topics:

- Hunting and trapping

Hunting and trapping are allowed in most areas of the park excluding the designated use areas or areas near residential buildings. Areas of the park closed to hunting and trapping include lands within 100 yards of designated use areas and areas closed by Natural Resources Board action (s. 29.089(1m), Wis. Stats.).

During the initial public input opportunity, some people expressed concerns about gun hunting in the park due to the number of people visiting the property, in addition to the surrounding residences. An expansion of the lease area for the downhill ski operation would reduce hunting and trapping opportunities in the park.

- Observation towers and deck

Many visitors to the park enjoy the views from the observation tower and deck. Under the status quo management, these facilities would be maintained. If, in the future, they are closed due to safety concerns, these facilities may be re-built as practical and feasible.

- Snowmobiling

A snowmobile trail currently runs approximately 1.5 miles along the southwestern property boundary and links part of the regional network of snowmobile trails. No change of the existing alignment is proposed. The trail passes through the park - there is no access to the snowmobile trail from parking areas or trails within the park.

- Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is allowed in most areas of the park and on most trails. New in 2020, the 2-mile Middle Yellow Trail loop is groomed for snowshoeing by the Friends of Rib Mountain. Users can access this trail from the parking lot just south of the entrance station.

OPTIONS FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

One of the draft goals for the property is to sustain and enhance the park's natural resources. The department's 2020 Rapid Ecological Assessment²¹ of the park identified several important resources, including a large northern mesic forest dominated by older trees, several bedrock habitat types, seepage wetlands and intermittent streams, and some rare species.

Current management of natural resources in the park is primarily passive. Most of the habitat management that takes place is focused on removing invasive species and maintaining safe conditions for park users.

There are four general areas of the park, which are briefly described here. In the draft master plan that is developed later, these areas will be mapped and have fuller descriptions of management objectives and potential outcomes.

The park is comprised of the following areas:

- **Ridgetop Area.** This area is managed to provide spaces and facilities for visitors to gather in small to large groups and enjoy the views. The setting is mostly open woodland with an emphasis on maintaining a park-like aesthetic with large trees and grassy areas. Trees are selectively thinned and dead, damaged or diseased vegetation is removed to maintain views and provide adequate sunlight to maintain the grass.
- **Downhill Ski Area.** This area is on the north-facing slope and its management is subject to the lease agreement between the department and Granite Peak Corporation. Habitat management in the ski runs focuses on cutting vegetation back to ensure an open aspect. The wooded strips between the runs are generally passively managed, although dead, damaged or dying trees near the edges are removed. Ice and snow damage to trees bordering the ski runs occurs due to snowmaking and natural ice events.
- **Talus Forest State Natural Area.** This area includes bedrock glades and talus forest, as well as the forested seep on the southern part of the park. Current management focuses on protecting the bedrock features, addressing invasive species, and maintaining suitable forest cover. Management is largely passive now, but there are opportunities for more active management and restoration work. Several hiking trails weave through the area.
- **Northern Hardwood Forest.** Most of the trees on the mountain were burned by a catastrophic fire in 1910 and much of the current forest cover got its start in the subsequent decades. This has left large portions of the property with limited diversity in the age and structure of the tree canopy, which can result in susceptibility to pest or disease outbreaks as well as wind or storm damage. There are opportunities to diversify the structure and composition of the forest canopy through more active management of the forest.

Natural Resource Management

To learn more about how DNR generally manages the features that occur in Rib Mountain State Park, click the links below to access each topic's [Property Planning Common Element](#). Given their relative rarity, the department has not developed Common Element descriptions for bedrock glade, talus forest or felsenmeer.

Cover Types

[Northern Hardwoods](#)

[Central Hardwoods](#)

[Oak and oak-dominated mixed forest](#)

[Aspen](#)

Ecological Features

[Forested Seep](#)

²¹ Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. 2020. [Rapid Ecological Assessment for Rib Mountain State Park, Marathon County, WI, Revised and Updated](#).



DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo - continue a primarily passive approach to forest management.

The primary objective of existing management is the long-term development and maintenance of large trees with old growth or old forest characteristics. Limited tree harvests would occur and management would focus on felling trees that present a safety concern to visitors. In most cases, the selective tree cutting to address hazard trees would only be conducted in designated use area and along designated trails. The composition and structure of the forest would be dictated by succession and natural events (storms, pests, etc.)

Option 2: Diversify the structure and composition of the forest canopy through more active management of the forest.

The management intent of this option would be to adjust the largely even-aged structure of the existing forest. Most of the trees on the mountain were burned by a catastrophic fire in 1910 and much of the current forest cover got its start in the subsequent decades. This has left large portions of the property with limited diversity in the age and structure of the tree canopy. This can result in susceptibility to pest or disease outbreaks as well as wind or storm damage.

This option would seek to strategically harvest trees over time to increase the diversity in the age, size and types of trees present. This will help diversify the shrub and understory layers as well. An important objective of this approach is to minimize adverse impacts to the aesthetic appeal of the forest, both from the perspectives of visitors within the park and from people in the surrounding area viewing the property.

Option 3: Continue management of the state natural area.

This option would continue management practices that protect bedrock features and forested seeps, address invasive species, and preserve rare species. This option would allow recreation activities that typically occur at approved DNR-owned state natural areas including: hiking, cross country skiing, hunting, trapping, outdoor education, collecting wild edibles, and wildlife viewing and photography. Limit trails to areas that will minimally affect the ecological values of the sites and encourage bouldering in areas separate from the highest-quality bedrock-related sites.

DNR's Preferred Option

Option 2: Diversify the structure and composition of the forest canopy through more active management of the forest.

Option 3: Continue management of the state natural area.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Managing the forest more actively to create a more diverse forest condition may temporarily detract from some visitors' experience. Some visitors may view the harvesting of trees as unsightly and disruptive. Some trails would be temporarily closed during tree cutting operations. Continuing management of the SNA is unlikely to impact most visitors.

Effects on natural resources.

The age structure of the current forest is influenced by the catastrophic fire that occurred in the early part of the last century. Many of the trees in the park today got their start just after the fire or when the pioneer (sun-loving) species that initially became established started to die back. As a result, the forest is largely even-aged and would benefit from a greater diversity in age classes.

Economic costs and benefits.

Continued passive management of vegetation would not result in direct economic benefits from timber management. Although the amount of marketable timber that could be removed is limited in part by the topography and lack of access, some harvesting is possible and would generate some income



OPTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

PROJECT BOUNDARY

Existing opportunities

The existing project boundary of the park encompasses 2,201 acres, of which the DNR owns 1,553 acres. The property is comprised of two parts: (1) the large block which totals 1,524 acres (and includes the lease area) and (2) a 29-acre parcel adjacent to Doepke County Park on CTH N. This smaller parcel was purchased and incorporated into the park to meet federal requirements related to lands that were removed from the park boundary as part of the road building project at CTH N, Hummingbird Road and Park Road. The map on page 7 shows the project boundary (red line) and the lands owned by the department. In addition, a 3.3-acre parcel on CTH N, which for administrative purposes is assigned to RMSP, houses a state office building.

Background

A DNR *project boundary* establishes the preferred area where DNR may acquire land from willing sellers. This boundary is approved by the Natural Resources Board (NRB). The master planning process is an opportunity to review the current project boundary for RMSP and identify any changes needed based on changes to the landscape and resource and recreations needs. The project boundary differs from the *park boundary*. Lands within the park boundary are currently owned by the DNR and managed as part of Rib Mountain State Park. Lands outside the park boundary but within the project boundary are not DNR owned or managed. The DNR may explore the option to purchase these lands in fee title or through easements only if current landowners are willing to sell.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo.

Under the status quo option, the department would not change the existing project boundary of the park.

Option 2: Contract the project boundary near Cloverland Lane to exclude developed parcels.

The existing project boundary includes parcels on Cloverland Lane that have been developed with residential housing. The department is not interested in purchasing these parcels and, as such, they could be removed from the project boundary.

Option 3: Expand the project boundary to include lands that would potentially connect RMSP with Marathon County's Nine Mile County Forest.

The intent of this boundary expansion would be to enable a connection from RMSP to Marathon County's Nine Mile County Forest. This unit of the County Forest is managed for multiple uses including sustainable timber harvests and several types of trails including mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, hiking, and snowmobiling. Over 30 miles of trails exist on the property along with a chalet, multiple shelters, and a developed shooting and archery range. The terrain ranges from low, flat ground to fairly steep terrain, providing a diverse experience. There are also two designated trout streams, Four Mile Creek and Black Creek, running through the forest. Given the exceptional quality of the experiences offered, Nine Mile is a very popular destination for local residents and other visitors.

DNR's Preferred Options

Option 2: Contract the project boundary near Cloverland Lane to exclude developed parcels.

Option 3: Expand the project boundary to include lands that would potentially connect RMSP with Marathon County's Nine Mile County Forest.

Option 4: Expand the project boundary west of Thornapple Road to protect a large forest block and provide additional recreation opportunities.



Establishing a connection between RMSP with Nine Mile could create a regionally significant destination for mountain biking, hiking, trail running, adventure races, and other activities. Option 3 would extend the RMSP project boundary south and west towards Nine Mile and would allow the DNR to acquire lands or easements. Marathon County Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department has expressed potential interest in helping make a connection between the two properties.

Option 4: Expand the project boundary west of Thornapple Road to protect a large forest block and provide additional recreation opportunities.

A large, wooded hill rising to over 1,400 feet, lies west of Thornapple Road. Because this area's topography is not as high or steep as Rib Mountain, public ownership of lands here could expand public recreational opportunities that are likely to be popular such as hiking, mountain biking, off-road bicycling, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, snowmobiling, hunting, and other activities. It could also help maintain the large, forested block here.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Connecting RMSP and Nine Mile County Forest with a recreational corridor would likely enhance visitor experiences at both properties by providing a range of extended (multi-hour to multi-day) recreation experiences. The connection would also provide opportunities for commercial enterprises and businesses to provide a range of services, which would further enhance experiences for people travelling between the properties. Adding public land west of Thornapple Road could increase the amount and diversity of public recreation opportunities.

Effects on natural resources.

If larger blocks of land between RMSP and Nine Mile County Forest are protected, there would be considerable ecological benefits including providing movement corridors for native plants and animals. Additional public land west of Thornapple Road could continue management practices in a large block of forest that benefit native species.

Economic costs and benefits.

The cost of acquiring land or an easement from the park towards Nine Mile County Forest would depend on the amount and characteristics of the rights acquired. A connecting corridor between the two public properties would likely add considerable value to adjacent and nearby residential and commercial properties. The acquisition of land by the department west of Thornapple would limit future residential or commercial development of the acquired lands.

Fiscal and social challenges may occur from project boundary expansions. Project boundary expansions can, at times, lead to concerns regarding a perceived loss of existing tax revenue in the municipality in which the department acquires land. However, the department makes an annual payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) under ss. 70.113 and 70.114, Wis. Stats., to the appropriate municipality for all property it owns in fee title. More detailed information on how the department pays PILT may be found at the DNR website (dnr.wi.gov) by searching for the keyword "PILT." Although the DNR makes PILT payments to local taxing jurisdictions, the state's ownership of land would prevent future development of these lands.

If fiscal resources and approvals to acquire lands are not available within the department when landowners are willing to sell, the lands would not be acquired.



ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITIES

Existing opportunities

The existing administrative buildings provide staff with spaces that support and enable property management actions and provide essential visitor services. The existing administrative buildings include the park entrance and visitor services building (PEVS), shop building, storage buildings and garages.

Background

The 2005 master plan authorized the following administrative facilities:

- Remodel and expand (or build a new facility) the existing metal shop building to include 2 additional heated parking bays, staff restrooms, an emergency shower, and staff lunch room.

The shop building has not been remodeled or expanded; however, the department believes this remains a needed improvement.

DNR Options

Option 1: Status quo. Maintain existing administrative facilities and remodel and expand the shop building as described in the 2005 master plan.

Considerations

Effects on visitor experiences.

Maintaining the existing administrative facilities is critical to continuing a high level of service for visitors. Address the upgrades and expansion of the shop building remains a much needed action and will indirectly result in improved visitor experiences.

Effects on natural resources.

The area surrounding the shop building has been cleared and graded and no substantive impacts to natural resources are expected in upgrading and expanding the building.

Economic costs and benefits.

The costs of upgrading and expanding the shop building are estimated to be about \$1,000,000.

DNR's Preferred Options

Option 1: Status quo – maintain the existing administrative facilities and remodel and expand the shop building as described in the 2005 master plan.

ISSUES TO EVALUATE IN THE ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

In the initial public input period in early 2020, the public was asked to identify issues to address in the planning process. Some of the topics raised were incorporated into the development of the management options presented earlier in this document; others are related to potential impacts and outcomes resulting from implementing the master plan. These issues will be evaluated as part of the master plan. In addition, an evaluation of the significance of cumulative effects, risks, precedents and controversies associated with the master plan will be included.

Based on the public input and staff expertise, the DNR will evaluate the following issues (and potentially others) as part of the master plan.

ISSUES WITHIN THE PARK

- Natural resource management including:
 - The state natural area and high-quality occurrences of natural communities in the park including talus forest, bedrock glade, felsenmeer, and northern mesic forest.
 - Rare, threatened or endangered species and game animals.
 - Forest management.
 - Cultural, historical, or archeological resources.
 - Air and water resources.
 - Geological resources.
 - Scenic resources.
 - Climate change impacts on natural resources and habitat management.
- Recreation management (including the lease area) including:
 - Recreation opportunities.
 - Recreation facility development, maintenance, and operation.
 - Numbers of visitors.
 - Short-term and long-term needs and trends.
 - Climate change impacts on recreation opportunities.
- Administrative management including:
 - Telecommunication tower leases

ISSUES OUTSIDE THE PARK

- Land uses and property values.
- Visitor impacts on the economy of the Wausau area.
- Sounds and lights.
- Local recreation resources and opportunities.
- Traffic volumes, road maintenance, and safety related to snow making.
- Emergency services provided by the South Area Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) District.
- Air and water resources, including municipal water and wastewater systems.
- Runoff related to snowmelt.
- Scenic resources.



APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

CWOCC	Central Wisconsin Offroad Cycling Coalition
DOT	Wisconsin Department of Transportation
DNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (also referred to as “the department”)
GPC	Granite Peak Corporation
GPSA	Granite Peak Ski Area
GWPP	Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership
NR 44	Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter NR 44
NRB	Wisconsin Natural Resources Board
PILT	Payment in Lieu of Taxes
RMSP	Rib Mountain State Park
WICCI	Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts
Wis. Stats.	Wisconsin State Statutes



DEFINITIONS

The following terms used in the document are defined as:

- **Management areas** - The DNR organizes each property’s management objectives and actions by “management areas.” At properties with uniform public use and habitat management objectives, the department typically assigns the entire property one management area. For larger and more complex properties, multiple management areas are often delineated.

Once management objectives are defined, each management area is assigned one of seven land management classifications (LMCs) that best meets the general intent of the objectives. These LMCs are described in ch. NR 44, Wis. Admin. Code.

Rib Mountain State Park currently has four management areas.

- **Project boundary** - Project boundaries are established areas on the landscape, created by a Natural Resources Board (NRB) action, as a preferred area where the department may acquire land. Private landowners within a DNR project boundary are under no obligation to sell their land to the DNR and the project boundary does not affect their ability to use their land. For Rib Mountain State Park, the project boundary for the main part of the park encompasses 2,201 acres.
- **Property boundary** - The area within which the DNR owns land. For Rib Mountain State Park, the property boundary for the main part of the park encompasses 1,524 acres.

- **Recreation-related**

- **Alpine slide** – a ride which uses a bobsled-like wheeled sled to travel downhill by gravity in a smooth concave track, usually made of concrete.

- **Bicycle trails:**

Touring - Easier trails, often paved or surfaced with packed rock screenings or native soils, that are appropriate for a wide range of ability levels. Can be ridden using many types of bikes.

Off-road - Intermediate-level trails, often in the woods with a variety of surfaces from native soil to wood chips. These trails can range from easy to physically challenging and are appropriate for more adventurous riders. Can be ridden using hybrid or mountain bikes.

Mountain biking - Specially constructed, generally narrow trails that can be designed to provide a range of difficulties. Some trails may include different types of challenge features such as jumps, banks, berms and drops; other trails are designed to wind through woods or grasslands on relatively level ground. Downhill “gravity” trails use topography to provide unique experiences for riders.

Fat tire - Trails for winter fat-tire biking can include a range of difficulties and widths and may be groomed or ungroomed. They can be sited on hiking or mountain biking trails, former logging roads, DNR service roads or other similar routes.

- **Bouldering** – An activity performed without the use ropes, anchors, or other equipment except mats (crash pads) to minimize injuries from falls. People bouldering rarely go higher than 10 to 15 feet off the ground. Like climbing, bouldering typically involves following a particular route (or “problem”) up a boulder or rock face and the use of chalk.
- **Canopy tour** – a system of zip lines that travel through a forest canopy.
- **Climbing** – An activity of ascending or descending steep rock walls, ice walls or artificial structures, usually with the assistance of specialized equipment. Climbing typically involves following a particular route (or “problem”) up a rock face. Climbers usually apply chalk on their hands to improve grip.



- Traditional (or trad) climbing involves the use of temporary protection devices such as top ropes, cams, nuts, and carabiners. Sport climbing involves the use of permanently fixed anchors or bolts that climbers use for protection.
- **Glamping** – a blend of the words “glamorous” and “camping” and referencing a style of camping with amenities and services not usually associated with traditional camping.
 - **Mountain coaster** – a ride which uses a roller coaster-like cart to travel downhill by gravity on rails.
 - **Scrambling** – An activity of moving over rocks that is performed without the use of gear or mats. People scrambling do not follow routes or “problems” but rather are more randomly moving up or over rocks and boulders.
 - **Zip line** – an elevated cable on which people in harnesses attached to the cable by a pulley travel downhill by gravity.



REFERENCES

In addition to previously cited documents, the department used the following publications in developing this document:

SE Group and International Mountain Bike Association Trail Solutions. 2021. *Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment*.

Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). 2005. *Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan Revision and Environmental Assessment*. Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). 2015. Wisconsin State Parks System 2015-2020 Strategic Directions. Bureau of Parks and Recreation.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). 2018. *Recreation Opportunities Analysis* (Chapter 8).

Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). 2019. *Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). 2020. *Rib Mountain State Park and the Surrounding region*.

Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). 2020. *Rapid Ecological Assessment for Rib Mountain State Park, Marathon County, WI, Revised and Updated: A Rapid Ecological Assessment Focusing on Breeding Birds, Rare Plants, and High-quality Natural Communities*. Accessed at: [DNR website](#)

All images are by Wisconsin DNR.

