

MINES OF SPAIN STATE RECREATION AREA RECREATION USE PLAN

In advance of the 100th anniversary of Iowa state parks in 2020, the Department of Natural Resources is developing plans for future recreation opportunities that are compatible with the resources of each state park.

MINES OF SPAIN STATE RECREATION AREA - A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1917, the legislature passed the State Park Act, authorizing the new Board of Conservation to begin creation of an Iowa State Park system encompassing some of the state’s most unique and threatened natural, scenic, and historic places to ensure that these would be protected for the future. The landmark Iowa Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan of 1933 provided a further blueprint for state park action, recognizing the importance of acquiring important areas, including Mississippi River bluff lands, like the “Mines of Spain” bluffs south of Dubuque.

The Mines of Spain at Dubuque was significant not only because of its natural beauty and diversity, but also its rich history. For hundreds of years, Native Americans lived and mined lead there as did the first European settler in Iowa, Julien Dubuque who received a land grant from the Spanish government for the 189 square mile “Mines of Spain” in the late 1700’s. Lead was important in the manufacture of bullets and mining continued, although after the Civil War, it waned and came to an end in 1914.

By the 1970’s, public ownership of the Mines of Spain had long been a goal of many public and private organizations and individuals.. In 1980, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation acquired the 1,240 acre Lott property encompassing scenic Catfish Creek’s confluence with the Mississippi. The Iowa Conservation Commission took formal title on December, 29, 1980 and also assumed management of the 30 acre E. B. Lyons Woodland Conservation Preserve of the City of Dubuque which continues to operate as an outdoor education – interpretive center and area office.

The Mines of Spain was recognized as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 1994 and a 600 acre portion of the site was later designated the Catfish Creek State Preserve. Although an ambitious Master Plan was prepared in the 1980’s, not all plan elements have been implemented. A new entrance and roadway system was constructed. The Horse Shoe Bluff Interpretive Area, the site of an old limestone quarry, boasts a wetland and wildlife viewing blind and an associated walkway and stairway system. Trails provide hiker and cross-country skier access and picnic facilities are located at several locations. Portions of the MOS are open to public hunting. In addition, the DNR manages a seven acre portion of the nearby Riprow Valley site and provides a parking lot and picnic facilities there.

In 2010, the E. B. Lyons Center received a major addition providing expanded exhibit, classroom, and auditorium space. In 2014, an adjacent 52 acre tract was purchased as a buffer area as well as space for additional parking, a new area maintenance building, picnic shelter and restroom, and an accessible trail. Since 1980, the Mines of Spain State Recreation Area has grown to 1,439 acres.

MINES OF SPAIN STATE RECREATION AREAS - EXISTING FACILITIES

Mines of Spain Existing Facilities	Quantity	Existing Facilities	Quantity
Nature Center (E.B. Lyons)	1	Canoe Access	1
Observation Platform	1	Restroom - Year-round	3
Observation Blind	1	Trails	18+ miles
Shelter	1		

Table (above): Mines of Spain State Recreation Area’s Existing Facilities

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF MINES OF SPAIN STATE RECREATION AREA

The over-riding goal of the Mines of Spain State Recreation Area's recreation use plan is to enhance visitor outdoor recreation and educational experiences by improving Mines of Spain facilities. This will promote visitor mental and physical health; encourage family time and making memories in the outdoors, while protecting natural resources for the future; create awareness and appreciation of the park's unique resources; and, generate economic activity in the region.

A comprehensive master plan for the Mines of Spain was prepared in 1991 with three goals that remain consistent with the 2015 recreation use plan: 1) protect, enhance and interpret the site's unique, rare, and significant cultural and natural resources in order to ensure their future, as well as increase visitor understanding and appreciation, 2) provide traditional recreation facilities compatible with the resources, and 3) undertake comprehensive resource management.

OBJECTIVES:

CATFISH CREEK ACCESS— ENCOURAGE WATER-BASED RECREATION AND INTERPRETATION BY PROVIDING BASIC FACILITIES AT THE ONLY AREA WATER ACCESS POINT

This site is popular for: canoe and kayak access to both the creek and the Mississippi River; shoreline fishing; and aquatic-focused interpretive program efforts.

ISSUE:

- The site lacks adequate parking, restrooms, and accessible shoreline fishing spots.

PROPOSAL:

- Add picnic shelter for day use and outdoor classroom interpretive programs, year-round restroom, and paved accessible fishing trail/walkway.

JULIEN DUBUQUE MONUMENT – ENHANCE THIS LANDMARK ATTRACTION FOR QUALITY VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND THE CITY OF DUBUQUE'S RIVERSCAPE

The dramatic 117 year-old monument is a popular tourist destination because of its historical significance as the burial place of the city's namesake as well as for its spectacular views.

ISSUE:

- Currently this location provides only a rudimentary plaza with a chain link barrier to prevent visitors from proceeding down the severely steep terrain.

PROPOSAL:

- Provide safe multi-level viewing platforms that complement the monument architecture and blend into the existing bluff landscape.



Image (above): Modern "Design Guide" shelter

FARMSTEAD PICNIC AREA – CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA AS THE PRIMARY PICNIC FACILITY IN THE PARK

ISSUE:

- Although the picnic road was constructed in 1989, day-use facilities have yet to be constructed, as was envisioned in the park master plan.

PROPOSALS:

- Provide traditional picnic facilities such as a shelter and year-round restroom.
- Construct an interpretive kiosk for park information and orientation.
- Add a "nature-themed" playground that includes climbing rocks, log/tree trunks, sand, vine tunnels, and tall grasses.

HORSE SHOE BLUFF – ENHANCE VISITOR ACCESS AND INTERPRETATION OF THIS UNIQUE GEOLOGIC FORMATION

Current quarry area facilities include a marsh walk and wildlife viewing blind, trail system, and viewing deck.

ISSUE:

- The area does not provide a walkway or orientation on the quarry floor.

PROPOSALS:

- Add interpretive panels at the top viewing deck and quarry floor.
- Provide a paved accessible walkway on the quarry floor level.
- Improve existing marsh walk.

PARK ORIENTAION AND INTERPRETATION – INCREASE WAY-FINDING AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUE:

- In a park filled with natural and cultural resources, there are locations where signage would provide interpretive and educational information.

PROPOSALS:

- Add a four-sided interpretive kiosk to tell the natural resource story and provide park facility and trail information at the Catfish Creek Access.
- Add trail orientation signage at various locations.



Image (above): Bluff at Mines of Spain State Recreation Area

SOUTH PARK ENTRANCE – PROVIDE A STAGING AREA TO THE SOUTHERN-MOST TRAILS

ISSUE:

- The southern entrance lacks appropriate facilities necessary for trailhead use.

PROPOSAL:

- Provide a shelter to be used for year-round activities, a year-round restroom and kiosk for visitor orientation and interpretation.



Image (above): Julien Dubuque Monument at Mines of Spain

RECREATION USE PLAN

Implementation of the Mines of Spain Use Plan will help ensure that this classic Iowa state park remains a premier outdoor destination in the future. It has been prepared with the input of park staff. Future input will be sought from park visitors/ regional stakeholders as well. This will act as a detailed and practical blueprint for future action. All improvements will be completed with due regard for Mines of Spain State Park's unique natural resources and great scenic qualities.

The completion of a recreation use plan for each park will help determine the most effective allocation of funds on a project-by-project basis for the Iowa state park system as a whole. Mines of Spain's plan recommendations will be accomplished as necessary funding becomes available from ongoing sources as well as through partnering opportunities which may arise.

**MINES OF SPAIN STATE RECREATION AREA
RECREATION USE PLANS
PROJECT PRIORITIES**

High Priority (1)	Cost Estimate
Add year-round restroom - Canoe Access	\$37,000
Add kayak launch and dock - Canoe Access	TBD
Add shelter - Canoe Access Area	\$125,000
Add 4-sided interpretive kiosk - Canoe Access	\$30,000
Add paved accessible fishing trail – Canoe Access	TBD
Add interpretive panels - Horse Shoe Bluff Area	\$4,000
Add paved, ADA walkway on quarry floor - Horse Shoe Bluff Area	TBD
Medium Priority (2)	
Add shelter - South Park Entrance	\$125,000
Add year-round restroom - S. Park Entrance	\$37,000
Add 4-sided interpretive kiosk - S. Park Entrance	\$30,000
Multi-level viewing platforms - Julien Dubuque Monument	TBD
Replace year-round restroom – E.B. Lyons	\$110,000
Low Priority (3)	
Add shelter and year-round restroom - Farmstead Picnic Area	\$162,000
Add 4-sided interpretive kiosk – Farmstead Picnic Area	\$30,000
Improve marsh walkway – Horse Shoe Bluff Area	TBD
Add drinking water – Horse Shoe Bluff Area	TBD
Add drinking water – Farmstead Picnic Area	TBD
Add drinking water – Catfish Creek Access Area	TBD

Table (above): Mines of Spain State Recreation Area Project Priorities



Image (above): Canoers at Mines of Spain State Recreation Area



Image (above): Scenic view from trail at Mines of Spain State Recreation Area



Image (above): Panoramic view of Mississippi River from Mines of Spain State Recreation Area

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MINES OF SPAIN

