

# Minnesota DNR News Release

## **Gov. Pawlenty announces plan to create a new state park on Lake Vermilion - Proposal would create first new major state park in (2007-07-17)**

Gov. Tim Pawlenty today announced a proposal to create a new 2,500-acre state park on Lake Vermilion in northern Minnesota. It would be Minnesota's first new major state park in almost 30 years.

"Minnesota is a great state in part because of our beautiful natural resources and the opportunity for our citizens to enjoy them," Governor Pawlenty said. "Protecting and enjoying those resources is a chance to do permanent good."

"This is a unique opportunity to create a next generation state park on one of Minnesota's most beautiful and undeveloped lakes. Today we are outlining a vision and asking local and legislative leaders to partner with us to make this a reality. A state park in this location would provide an 'up north, place at the lake experience' for all Minnesotans."

The land is currently owned by United States Steel. Following discussions with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Steel has provided a window of opportunity over the next year for the state to determine the feasibility and funding of the park. If created, the park would provide public access to Lake Vermilion - which includes 40,000 acres of water, 365 islands and 1200 miles of shoreline. Lake Vermilion is also adjacent to a portion of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and the Superior National Forest, considered by many to be one of the nation's premier wilderness areas.

As the state explores plans for a new park, U.S. Steel will continue to work on their existing development plan for the property. The plan is a proposed private development called the "Three Bays of Vermilion" including 150 home sites, roads and water/sewer services.

The proposed park would be situated on the eastern shores of Lake Vermilion adjacent to Soudan Underground Mine State Park. If this proposal receives the approval of the Minnesota Legislature, the two parks combined would provide over 10 miles of recreation shoreline (with the new park adding 4.9 miles) and 3,700 acres of public land for citizens to explore.

Funding for purchase of the land and creation of the park could come through bonding, use of a portion of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund or general fund money.

In early discussions with DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten and Minnesota State Park Director

Courtland Nelson, Governor Pawlenty has developed a vision for this proposed park to become “everyone’s lake place.”

“Water-based recreation is a tradition in Minnesota,” Commissioner Holsten said. “Minnesotans love our waters. This area will draw people from across the entire state. Five of the top ten tourist attractions in northeastern Minnesota are state parks, and this has the potential to become a sixth.”

Minnesota State Park Director Courtland Nelson stated that in addition to the opportunities afforded by the lake, he will be working with local resorters and citizens to develop a plan for a “state of the art park, offering the varied recreation experiences sought by today’s outdoor enthusiasts and developing the park in a sustainable manner to assure that the area will be used by generations to come.”

Minnesota’s state park system currently consists of 72 state park and recreation areas, eight waysides, one state trail and 54 state forest campgrounds and day use areas that total approximately 267,000 acres or about one half of 1 percent of Minnesota’s land base. About 8 million people visit Minnesota’s state parks each year with about 16 percent of those visitors coming from other states and countries. About one in every three Minnesotans visits a state park each year.

The Vermilion proposal would be the first new major state park established since Tettegouche State Park on the north shore of Lake Superior in 1979. Glendalough State Park near Battle Lake, which was established in 1991, was managed as a private game farm and corporate retreat for over 85 years prior to becoming a state park.

According to visitation estimates for the park, it would generate over a half million dollars in direct revenue from camping and tours and over \$8.5 million in visitor spending to the area.

“These kind of numbers demonstrate the sustainable tourism base that will provide jobs and economic activity for the area,” said State Park Director Nelson

Commissioner Holsten said he is very grateful for the opportunity to seek local and legislative approval to purchase the property and develop a major state park in the Lake Vermilion area. “U.S. Steel has generously provided a window of opportunity over the next year for DNR to seek agreement from legislators and local leaders to see if this project is viable and has merit,” Commissioner Holsten stated.