



BUFFALO RIVER STATE PARK

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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 Glyndon, MN 56547-0352
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 Department of Natural Resources
 Information Center
 500 Lafayette Road
 St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

296-6157 (Metro Area)
 1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

TDD (Telecommunications
 Device for Deaf)
 296-5484 (Metro Area)
 1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

DNR Web Site: www.dnr.state.mn.us
 State Parks page: www.mnstateparks.info

BUFFALO RIVER STATE PARK is located 4.5 miles east of Glyndon, Minnesota or 14 miles east of Moorhead, Minnesota. Entrance to the park is from U.S. Highway 10. Highway map index B-10.

The park was established by the Minnesota State Legislature in 1937 and covered 242 acres. Since then it has been enlarged to 1,200 acres. Although most of the park's visitors partake of the swimming and picnicking facilities, an increasing number are discovering the value of the access it provides to the natural world, by way of campgrounds, trails, and interpretive programs. Of particular interest are prairie areas and the native river-bottom forest.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: The first explorers in the Red River Valley encountered a sea of grass stretching to the horizon, interrupted only by meandering river-bottom forests. Buffalo River State Park preserves a remnant of that early landscape—both prairie and woods.

The prairie within the park and the adjoining state scientific and natural area is judged to be one of the finest and largest remaining prairie tracts in Minnesota. Over 250 species of wildflowers and grasses can be found, including some plants now rare in Minnesota.

The Buffalo River bisects the park and is bordered by a river-bottom forest of elm, ash, cottonwood, oak and basswood. A picnic area, swimming pond and campground are located just inside the shade of the forest. Trails lead along the river or out into the prairie. The park provides visitors with outdoor recreational opportunities such as camping, picknicking, swimming, hiking and cross-country skiing in the natural setting of wood and prairie. An active resource management program maintains and perpetuates the presettlement quality of both the prairie and riverine forest communities.

GEOLOGY: Agassiz is a well-known word in the Red River Valley. It refers to the massive Glacial Lake Agassiz which covered the valley eight to ten thousand years ago. The rise and fall of this ancient lake formed the dominant landscape features within the park.

This glacial lake was named after Louis Agassiz, a renowned geologist and first prominent advocate who stated that land ice, or glaciers, advanced and receded over the land. He is sometimes referred to as the "father of glacial geology."

As the last glaciers retreated north, meltwaters drained south until the receding ice reached the Red River Valley. Here, the slope of the land dictates drainage to the north. But retreating ice (in some places up to a half-mile thick) blocked the meltwaters from flowing north. The result was the enormous glacial lake.

Slowly, the ice blockage melted and Lake Agassiz began draining. It left behind a fertile, level lake-bottom landscape interrupted by prominent gravel ridges or beach lines. One of these ridges (Campbell Beach) can be observed in Buffalo River State Park. Look for the rise in elevation along the eastern edge of the park.

WILDLIFE: The prairie areas within the park and scientific and natural area are not just for the wildflower enthusiast.

In the spring, the hovering flight and bubbling song of the bobolink bring the prairie alive. Prairie chickens, upland sandpipers, marbled godwits and uncommon prairie birds can also be seen and heard. Red fox, badger, coyote, prairie toads, white-tailed deer and jackrabbits are also a part of the grassland community. For the keen observer, the rare Dakota skipper butterfly, the plains pocket mouse, and the northern grasshopper mouse are present.

A trail excursion through the woods bordering the Buffalo River is also time well spent for the wildlife watcher. Hikers encounter deer frequently, especially in winter. Beaver are common and their dams can be seen along the river. Even moose have been observed moving through the area! The forest bird life contrasts sharply with prairie animals. Four species of woodpeckers, the great crested flycatcher, phoebe, numerous warblers, vireos and orioles are just a few found throughout the hardwood forest.

In all, over 200 species of birds and 40 species of mammals are present in the park during the year. Take time to look around. You may be delightfully surprised at what you find.

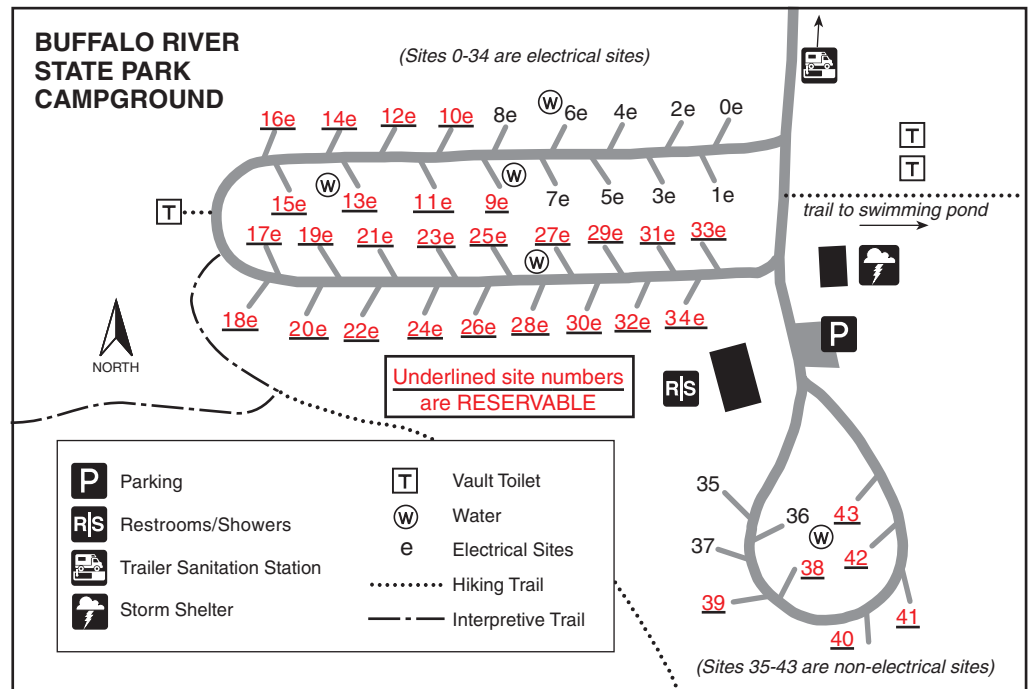
HISTORY: A southern tributary of the Buffalo River was known by the Ojibway Indians as *Pijijitwzbi*, meaning "buffalo river." Bison were always found wintering in the area. Settlers erroneously called the whole river Buffalo River.

Occasionally, visitors discover bison skulls and bones eroded from the banks of the Buffalo River. These and other artifacts provide evidence of a former era, a time of prehistoric Indians and bison.

The Minnesota Historical Society suggests that there is considerable potential for archaeological sites in the park. Beach ridges, which served as travel corridors for prehistoric Indians are sites of possible significance.

In the 1820s the land was scouted by whites in search of farmland, and the deep, fertile prairie sods were recognized as prime. The prairie was known to support abundant game; and it was also known that the Indians depended upon that game, especially the bison, for their survival. Through the combination of violent conflicts, the decimation of the buffalo, land-cession treaties and forced evacuation of the Indians, the area was opened for white settlement. This area was ceded, by the Chippewa, to the United States in the treaty of 1855. By this time, an active fur trade was going on by way of the Pembina Trail, which linked St. Paul with the Hudson Bay Company trading posts at Pembina, and later, Georgetown. Ox carts loaded with furs and trade goods passed along the Campbell Ridge with regularity.

In 1864 the Northern Pacific Railroad was chartered by Congress and granted over three million acres in Minnesota for the construction of a route that was to link the Great Lakes with Puget Sound. Many struggling homesteaders supported themselves at first by working on the railbed. The railroad provided access to the area for more homesteaders, the first of whom arrived on the Buffalo River around 1870. In order to make the grade easier for heavily-laden trains, the gradient had to be decreased. In 1906, work was begun to build the massive embankment on the park's northern border. This was a huge project costing nearly three million dollars, taking about 17,140 man-days of work, raising the railbed to be a prominent physical feature of the area and altering the channel of the Buffalo River at various points along its course.



Probably the first settler to establish himself on this land was J. H. Smyser, a West Point graduate, former Union Army captain in the Civil War, and heir to an Eastern steel fortune. In 1875, he purchased much of the land that is now in the park for the purpose of breeding cattle and horses. Built in the same year was his home, a mansion, the interior of which was decorated with handcrafted mahogany woodwork. In this home, Mr. Smyser and his wife were known to entertain their guests lavishly. The land has passed through several hands, including, by 1925, W.H. Davy, a former mayor of Moorhead. The house burned to the ground in 1959.

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM: Each summer, a park naturalist is on hand to lead hikers, show films and slides and conduct evening programs on the park's natural and cultural history. Visitors interested in the park's geology, wildlife, history and plants should check at the registration station and the information boards located in the campground and picnic area. Self-guiding trails, interpretive brochures and signs point out interesting natural features of the park.

SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK. . .

- The park belongs to all Minnesotans. Please treat it with respect and help us to protect it by following the rules.
- The park is open year-round. On a daily basis, the park gate is closed from 10:00 P.M. to 8:00 A.M. the following morning except for registered campers.
- Camp only in designated locations.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and arrows, and all other weapons is prohibited in state parks.

- Pets must be restrained on a leash no longer than six feet. Pets are not allowed in park buildings.
- Park in designated areas only.
- Motor bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on park roads, not on trails.
- Enjoy park wildlife and plants but please respect them. Do not pick or dig up plants, disturb or feed animals, or scavenge dead wood.
- Build fires only in designated locations—fire rings or fireplaces. Wood is available for purchase from park staff. Portable stoves or grills are permitted.
- Daily or annual permits are required for all vehicles entering a state park. They may be purchased at the park headquarters or the Information Center in St. Paul (see "FOR MORE INFORMATION" to left).

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This information is available in alternative format upon request.

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