

# GREAT RIVER BLUFFS STATE PARK

## FACILITIES AND FEATURES

**Campgrounds:** Great River Bluffs State Park has a campground containing 31 campsites with picnic tables and fire rings.

The park's group camp is available for organized groups of up to 80 people (scouts, church groups, etc.) who wish to camp. A council ring and water is available. Schedule the use of this facility with the park manager.

A 5-site bicycle campground located off south-bound U.S. Highway 61/14 is available to cyclists riding along the Great River Road bicycle route.

**Picnic Grounds:** The park's 20 picnic tables are isolated from each other by trees and shrubs. The picnic grounds have tables, fire rings, and toilets.

**Trails:** State park trails provide visitors with the opportunity to explore and experience the natural and historic features of the park.

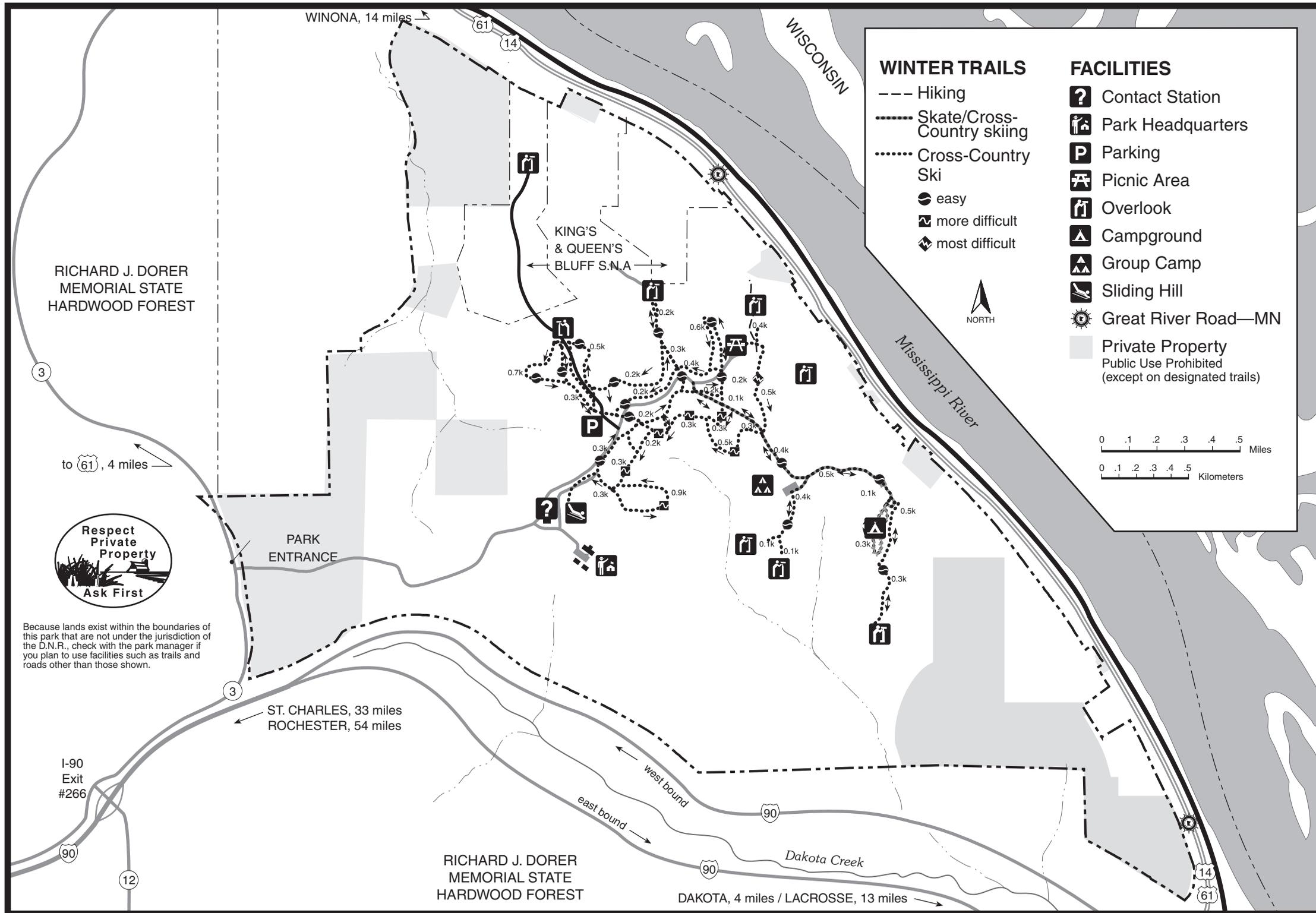
The park has 6.5 miles of hiking trails. Many of these trails, including the 1.25 mile self-guided "King's Bluff Nature Trail," provide scenic vistas of the Mississippi River Valley from trail overlooks. Take extreme care on hiking trails that lead to overlooks, or skirt steep slopes. Hold on to small children.

Presently there are 8.7 miles of marked and groomed cross-country ski trails. Snowmobiling and horseback riding are not allowed in the park. The park has a winter sliding hill.

While timber rattlesnakes live in the park, they are not numerous and offer little or no threat to park visitors. If one should be encountered on the trail, leave it alone. Do not attempt to capture or kill it. All wildlife in state parks is protected by state law.

## VISITOR FAVORITES

- Mississippi River overlooks
- Fall colors
- Cross-country skiing
- Picking blackberries





## GREAT RIVER BLUFFS STATE PARK

(formerly O.L. Kipp State Park)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Great River Bluffs State Park  
43605 Kipp Drive  
Winona, MN 55987  
(507) 643-6849

Department of Natural Resources  
Information Center  
500 Lafayette Road  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)  
1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

[mndnr.gov/parks](http://mndnr.gov/parks)

**GREAT RIVER BLUFFS STATE PARK** is located about 20 miles southeast of Winona at the junction of U.S. Highway 61 and Interstate 90. Entrance to the park is off I-90 at County Road 12. Winona County Highway 12 ends on the north side of I-90. Take Winona County Highway 3 (Apple Blossom Drive) to the park entrance. State highway map index: O-20.

The park was originally named after Orrin Lansing Kipp, former Assistant Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Highways who helped establish the Minnesota Trunk Highway System. The park is part of the Apple

Blossom Drive, one of two scenic drives in the state specially designated by the Minnesota legislature. (The other is along the North Shore above Duluth.)

The creation of the park in 1976 on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River Valley grew from a need for better access to the bluffland area of southeastern Minnesota. The park's 3,000 acres lie within the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest.

Classified as a "Natural State Park," the park emphasizes protection, perpetuation, and restoration of natural resources. Development is limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and values being preserved.

**GEOLOGY:** Great River Bluffs State Park lies in Minnesota's "driftless area." This area represents a small region in the Upper Midwest that was not covered by glaciers at any time during the last million years. Hence, no drift or glacial debris—rocks, boulders, gravel, soil—was deposited. The region includes parts of Winona and Houston counties in Minnesota, and extends into areas of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa.

Glaciers made Minnesota what it is today. These ice sheets, up to two-miles thick, made lakes, filled in valleys, created hills, and moved millions of tons of rock and soil. Most of the bluffland area of southeastern Minnesota displays no glacial drift from any of four major glaciers. Since glaciers covered most of Minnesota during the last million years, the driftless area shows what Minnesota was like in pre-glacial times.

Even though the driftless area was not covered by glaciers, it was affected by them. Meltwater from glaciers to the west rushed downstream to the east and emptied into the already swollen Mississippi River. The meltwater increased the erosive power of the Mississippi. These rushing waters carved through hundreds of feet of sandstone and limestone that are exposed today in the cliffs.

The driftless area was also affected by a blanket of loess—windblown dust from glacial outwash and alluvial plains. This deposit, 50 feet deep in some places, makes up the soil upon which the farmers in southeastern Minnesota depend. (Since this soil is easily eroded and because of the steep slopes found within Great River Bluffs State Park, visitors should stay on marked trails.) Ancient seas, glaciers, wind and water created what we see today in Great River Bluffs State Park: half-dome bluffs with sheer rock cliffs, steep valley walls, rolling uplands, and flat

floodplains. In 1683, an explorer, Father Louis Hennepin, gazed up at the bluffs and noted that the Mississippi "runs between the two chains of mountains...that wind with the river."

**HISTORY:** After the last glacier, early Native Americans built mounds on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. They used some mounds as graves, but the purpose of others has yet to be determined. Most mounds are dome-shaped; others are effigies, or images of objects, usually animals.

The mounds were built by different peoples over thousands of years. Each was built with precision and symmetry. Tools were probably wooden spades, stone hoes, and reed baskets. In some cases, soil within the mounds came from the valley floor.

Of the many burial and effigy mounds once located within and adjacent to park boundaries, none remain today. Those known to exist were lost to highway and housing construction.

When the settlers came, much of the upland and floodplain of the park was plowed for crops. The slope of the upland and the character of the soil caused erosion. Check dams were put in, but even so, many fields had to be abandoned.

In the early 1960s, the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, purchased much of the land that now makes up the park. At that time, plantations of red and white pine, green ash, and walnut were started. In 1971, when public demand for park land along the Mississippi River increased, the land was transferred to the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation. In the spring of 1976, the park was opened.

**VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE:** Vegetation determines wildlife. A diversity of plants means diversity of animals.

Plants in an area are determined by climate, by microclimate, and by soil. Great River Bluffs State Park has a variety of microclimates each with its own set of conditions (degree of slope, direction of slope, amount of sun, rain, wind, etc.). Each microclimate favors different vegetation.

The most unique plant community within the park is the "goat prairie," so named because the slope is so great that only goats could graze it. With slopes of 40 to 50 degrees facing south to southwest, these prairies are natural solar collectors; they receive as much direct sunlight as any place in Minnesota. But the continual freezing and thawing cycle from night to day during winter chokes the roots of woody plants

and makes it impossible for them to become established.

A distinctive plant community found in the park is a native stand of northern white cedar. Common to northeastern Minnesota, the white cedars in the park remain as a reminder of glacial times when the climate of southeastern Minnesota was cool and wet.

Hardwood trees in the park include red, white, and pin oak, shagbark hickory, basswood, sugar maple, green ash, and black walnut. Remnant plantations of red and white pine still remain from plantings started in the 1960s before the park was created.

The hardwood forest provides habitat for a variety of wildlife, from the opossum and spotted skunk to the indigo bunting, ruffed grouse, and wild turkey.

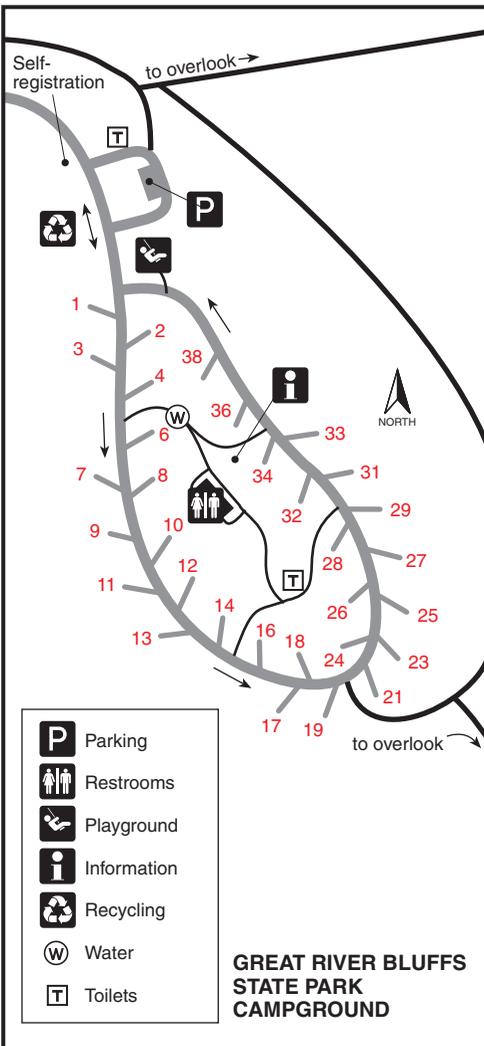
Small mammals, rabbits, mice, and ground squirrels are common in the 20 patches of prairie in the park. These areas make good hunting grounds for the park's predators: red-tailed hawks, great horned owls, and red fox. In winter, golden and bald eagles come to the area. Also on the prairie are two uncommon species of wildlife: a lizard, the six-lined racer; and a prairie bird, the bobolink.

In the park are 35 mammal species, 17 reptile and amphibian species, and well over 100 kinds of birds.

### SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK...

State parks were established to preserve natural and aesthetic features and to help meet the diverse recreational and educational needs of park visitors. All visitors have an obligation to preserve these features. Please observe rules designed to keep our parks clean and to protect plants and wildlife.

- Minnesota law requires park permits on all motor vehicles entering a state park. Permits can be purchased at all state parks.
- The park is closed to entry, except for registered campers, from 10:00 P.M. until 8:00 A.M. of the following morning. Loud noises or other disturbances in the campgrounds are prohibited after 10:00 P.M.
- Respect animals and plants that live in the park. Please do not pick plants, disturb animals, dig trenches, or scavenge dead wood.
- Pets are prohibited from the park unless restrained on a leash six feet or less in length. Pets may not enter buildings.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and



- arrows, and all other weapons are prohibited in the park.
- Motor bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on designated roads—not on park trails.

*This information is available in alternative format upon request.*

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