

## Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan Change

### **DRAFT Newport State Park Dark Sky Amphitheater Variance**

Variance  Amendment  Minor Plan Amendment  Other Plan Change

**Property Name:** Newport State Park

**Date the Current Master Plan Approved:** 2018

#### **Proposed Change to the Master Plan**

This variance would authorize new development in the day use area near Parking Lot 3, on the eastern side of Newport State Park along Newport Bay. The proposed development would be funded by local partners and include construction of a new 100-seat amphitheater, a storage shed, a low wall to block light pollution from the parking lot, an observation deck, and boardwalk and/or gravel/paved paths to connect new and existing facilities.

The proposed development also includes adding electricity to the site, preferably via installation of a solar array and battery. Primary use of the electricity would be to add electricity to the shelter for interpretive programming, lighting of foot paths at the end of evening events, and charging of equipment (e.g., tracked wheelchair). Provision of electricity to the existing picnic shelter was previously authorized in the original master plan but not implemented to date. This work would be completed with this project as well.

The Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan will be updated to authorize the new development. Specifically, the recreation prescriptions for Type 4 Recreational Use Settings on pg. 18 will be updated as indicated below (proposed new text is shown in *red italics*):

#### Recreation Prescriptions (Type 4 Recreational Use Setting Only)

- Add electrical service to the existing picnic shelter near Lot 3.
- *Working with partners, undertake the following:*
  - *Develop an amphitheater with seating for up to 100 attendees that is suitable for programming and use related to night-sky viewing, as well as other interpretive programming and special events.*
  - *Construct a storage shed suitable for the storage of park equipment, such as tracked wheelchair(s) and telescopes.*
  - *Develop universally accessible paths connecting new and existing facilities within the day use area, using paved, gravel or boardwalk surfacing. At a suitable location along the path include an observation platform overlooking the lake.*
  - *Install measures to block light intrusion from the parking lot into the day use area, such as a low wall made of stone.*
  - *Add electrical service (preferably solar) to the storage shed for use in park operations.*

Map 1 shows the general concept and approximate location of the proposed improvements.

**Background**

The Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan, approved in 2018, includes management for Newport State Park. As the only certified [Dark Sky Park](#) in the state, Newport State Park offers unique recreation and education opportunities for the public. With unobstructed views of the horizon and basic amenities, the day use area near Parking Lot 3 is the most popular site for night-sky viewing in the park. An active community of night-sky viewing enthusiasts frequent the site and it is a destination that attracts casual stargazers and professional astronomers. Park users bring and set up their own telescopes and the department also has several of its own telescopes that are used in educational programming and events at the site.

While most of the park has minimal development in accordance with its niche as a wilderness park, the day use area provides for more intensive use, with a picnic shelter, swimming beach, toilets and other amenities. The area serves as a trailhead to several of the park’s trails – including the universally accessible Fern/Europe Bay Loop. The park has a reservable tracked wheelchair, currently stored at the park shop, that is frequently used here.

Working with local partners, the department has identified the improvements detailed above that, if developed, would support these unique opportunities, as well as enhance recreational use of the site and surroundings. The proposed new development is aligned with the objectives established in the 2018 NLMC Regional Master Plan, including at the property and management area level.

**Approvals**

**APPROVED:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Tim Cooke, Administrator, Division of Internal Services* *Date*

**Supporting Approvals**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Steven Schmelzer, Bureau Director, Bureau of Parks and Recreation* *Date*

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*Erin Rieser, Section Manager, Property Planning Section* *Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Eric Hyde, Peninsula Unit Superintendent* *Date*

**Variance Initiator:** Eric Hyde, Peninsula Unit Superintendent

**Planner:** René Buys

## **Supporting Information**

### **Purpose and need for the plan change:**

The purpose of this variance is to authorize improvements that will enhance visitor experiences, highlight unique park features, expand universal access and support improved operational efficiency at this site within park. With master plan authorization, funding will be available from local partners for the department to complete the site planning and construction of the new facilities.

Newport State Park is included in the Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan and the proposed developments are within Management Area 1: Recreation Management Area – Type 4 Setting. To appropriately authorize development of the proposed facilities a new management prescription is required within the plan.

### **How the proposed plan change is supported by or is inconsistent with the property vision, goals and objectives or other plan provisions:**

The existing master plan has **three region-wide goals** that apply to the variance:

- Provide opportunities for high-quality nature-based recreational activities; such as wildlife viewing, scenic viewing, nature study, trail-based activities and paddling as compatible with the properties' capabilities, and regional habitat and recreation goals.
- Accommodate research and provide educational activities that are consistent with the primary management purposes of the properties and with user safety.
- Improve accessibility for mobility-impaired individuals where feasible.

*The proposed development is consistent with/supportive of these region-wide goals.*

The existing master plan has **one property-wide recreation management objective** for Newport State Park that applies to the variance:

- Maintain and enhance the wild character of the property to provide recreational experiences of solitude and remoteness while accommodating a range of low-impact, non-motorized recreational uses; particularly hiking, canoeing/kayaking, biking, snowshoeing, skiing and camping.

*The proposed development is located in a modern day use area that is authorized for and currently accommodates a range of recreational uses that fit within the park's niche. The proposed developments are consistent with/supportive of this property-wide recreation management objective.*

The existing master plan has **one recreation objective for Type 4 Recreational Use Settings** that applies to the variance:

- Provide a modern day use area for activities such as picnicking, boating, swimming as well as passive recreation activities.

*The proposed development is consistent with/supportive of this recreation objective. Per ch. NR 44.07 (7)(e)5.c Wis. Adm. Code, modern day use facilities are not limited and may include hard-surfaced trails, amphitheater, and a wide range of facility types.*

The existing master plan has **one management objective for Management Area 1: Recreation Management Area – Type 4 Setting** that applies to the variance:

- Provide and maintain attractive and safe grounds for intensive outdoor recreation activities.

*The proposed development is consistent with/supportive of this management objective.*

**Anticipated primary benefits of the proposed plan change:**

The proposed plan change would:

- Improve and expand universal access to park facilities and recreational opportunities.
- Improve and expand unique night-sky viewing experiences and opportunities, including educational programming and events.
- Support efficient park operations by providing on-site storage and charging infrastructure for equipment used in park programming.

**Unavoidable adverse impacts:**

*Related to construction and site disturbance*

Construction of new facilities and expansion/modification of existing facilities, such as walking paths, typically entails vegetation clearing, grading and additional substrate. Some soil compaction and other disturbance may occur during these operations. New impervious surfaces may increase runoff, which has the potential to create erosion elsewhere. Construction activities may negatively affect the aesthetics of the park for visitors and disturb wildlife in the area, though these impacts are limited to the duration of construction.

The proposed development is within an existing day use area that includes a variety of modern amenities in a cleared area that is maintained for heavy use. The proposed developments are not expected to result in significant new disturbance and construction is expected to comply with all department standards, protocols, and applicable laws, including stormwater control and erosion statutes and requirements (NR 216.46, Wis. Admin. Code). During construction, the department strives to minimize soils exposed to erosion and follows best management practices for doing so. In sloped or otherwise vulnerable areas, the department installs armoring measures to reduce erosion potential and limit effects to soils from construction activities. Construction activities would be scheduled to avoid or minimize disruption to park use.

*Related to increased/changed use*

Improvement and expansion of facilities associated with popular activities at the park may increase use of the site overall and at certain times, relative to current levels of use. This may lead to instances where

there is insufficient parking available, increased site disturbance, increased litter and/or other issues typical of larger numbers of park users within a specific area.

The site is currently popular and well-trafficked, with daytime uses such as picnicking and swimming, as well as the night-sky viewing that makes Newport State Park a unique destination. The park currently hosts well-attended events at the site. Parking limitations in Lot 3 are not anticipated, and Lot 2 is close enough to offer additional parking, as needed. The proposed new paths are expected to concentrate traffic to developed paths, reducing dispersed walking throughout the site, resulting in less disturbance overall.

#### *Related to increased/changed sources of light and noise*

Provision of electricity to the site will increase the presence and use of electrified equipment and infrastructure. This may lead to more and/or louder sources of noise, as well as more and/or brighter sources of light relative to what is currently experienced at the site. For some users, these changes may be regarded as having a negative impact on their use of the site.

The purpose of developing electrical service in the area and providing electricity to the proposed storage shed is primarily to charge equipment stored on site, such as tracked/all-terrain wheelchairs. Any use of electricity by park staff must be in accordance with applicable property and management area objectives that uphold Newport State Park's niche as a wilderness park providing low-impact recreational opportunities.

The proposed development is not expected to result in any significant or permanent adverse impacts to the property.

#### **Summary of any alternatives considered:**

##### *No Action*

The no action alternative was also considered. Under this alternative, there would be no new facilities developed beyond what is currently prescribed for this property in the Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan.

##### *Location of New Paths*

An additional segment of path that would connect the parking lot directly with the proposed amphitheater was considered. The route was not selected to avoid impacting the sand dune complex that would need to be traversed. The preferred routing for new paths minimizes disruption to the sand dune and follows existing routes of travel.

##### *Headlight Screening*

Various options were considered for the type and height of installation to block light intrusion from Parking Lot 3. Taller options such as a live hedge or wooden fence were not preferred due to the potential obstruction of views of the lake.

**Compatibility with statutes, codes, and department policies:**

This variance has been written in compliance with all applicable statutes, codes, and department policies. The variance process has followed Ch. NR 44, Wis. Adm. Code requirements.

**Federal aid limitations:**

Newport State Park is Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program encumbered. The proposed development is consistent with the grant program terms and conditions.

**Public review process used:**

The draft variance will be shared on the department's web page for a 15-day public comment period. A press release will be issued and electronic notification of the proposal seeking public input will be sent to the Newport State Park, Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan, and Statewide Master Planning Gov-Delivery lists. Interested individuals may contact the department by phone or email as provided on the project webpage. This section represents the public involvement plan for this variance.

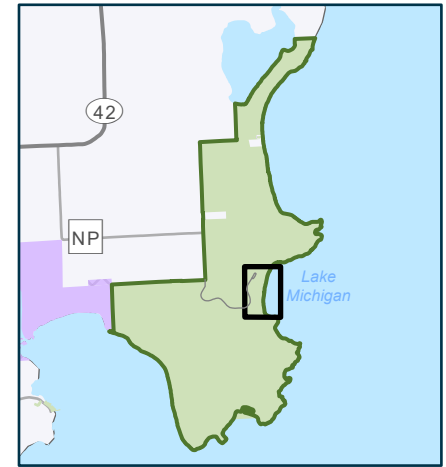
**Description of the support and/or opposition to the proposal:**

*This section will be updated with a summary of comments in support or opposition following the public comment period.*

# Newport State Park Dark Sky Amphitheater Variance

## CONCEPT MAP: APPROXIMATE SIZE AND LOCATION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

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### Proposed Development

- Amphitheater
- Gravel/Paved Path
- Boardwalk
- Observation Deck
- Screening Wall
- Storage Shed and Solar Array (location and size approximate)

This map is for informational purposes only and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering or surveying purposes. The user is solely responsible for verifying the accuracy of information before using for any purpose. By using this product for any purpose user agrees to be bound by all disclaimers found here: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/legal>.

