

NEWPORT STATE PARK MASTER PLAN VARIANCE

Variance Amendment

Property Name: Newport State Park

Plan Name: Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan

Date the Current Master Plan Approved: July 2018

Proposed Change to the Master Plan:

This proposed variance would make four changes to the equestrian use authorized for Newport State Park in the 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Master Plan:

- Increase the mileage of authorized equestrian trails from “4 to 6” miles to “up to 10 miles.”
- Allow equestrian trails to be sited throughout Management Area 2, not just the northern portion of this area.
- Allow equestrian use to be co-located on hiking and hiking/biking trails in Management Areas 1 and 2 where it will improve the efficiency of the trail network and will not substantially detract from existing uses.
- Allow the construction of a new parking lot to accommodate up to six vehicle-horse trailers, added toilet facilities, 4 to 6 hitching posts, and a mowed grassy area in a former gravel pit on Newport Lane.

NOTE: Management Area 1 consists of two units – (1) an area encircled by Management Area 2 and adjacent to the main entrance road and (2) a smaller section that includes the day-use area on Lake Michigan. Both units have a land management classification of Recreation Management Area – Type 4. In this variance document, references to “Management Area 1” just pertain to the section by the main entrance road. No changes to the day-use area on Lake Michigan are proposed.

Background

The 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan (2018 Plan) identified recreation opportunities that different property types are well suited to provide. State Parks and Forests were noted for their ability to support “Equestrian trails that either connect a network and/or are loop trails contained wholly in the property.” (page 116)

The 2018 Plan authorized 4 to 6 miles of new equestrian trails in Management Area 1 (Recreation Management Area – Type 4; 37 acres) and the northern portion of Management Area 2 (Recreation Management Area – Type 3; in total this management area encompasses 690 acres). These trails would be loop trails contained wholly in the property. After additional analysis at the request of local equestrians, the department has concluded that the area initially envisioned for equestrian trails would not provide high quality experiences, in either location or distance.

The proposed variance would allow the equestrian trails to be constructed throughout Management Areas 1 and 2 and would increase the authorized miles of equestrian trails to up to 10 miles. The park currently has 26 miles of hiking and hiking/biking trails; this variance would allow placing equestrian use on these trails in Management Areas 1 and 2 where it will improve the efficiency of the trail network and will not substantively detract from existing uses. The department expects this will occur in short stretches where options to construct equestrian trails are not feasible or practical. In total, the department expects co-locating equestrians with hikers and bikers to occur on less than 0.5 miles, out of the total of seven miles of hiking and hiking/biking trails in Areas 1 and 2. Places where equestrian use is co-located with existing hiking or hiking/biking trails will meet department guidelines and policies.

The existing master plan calls for the expansion of an existing parking area (Lot 4) to accommodate up to six vehicle/horse trailers, added toilet facilities, 4 to 6 hitching posts and a mowed grass area. To better align with the location of the new equestrian trails, this variance proposes to construct a new parking area and the added toilet facilities, 4 to 6 hitching posts and a mowed grass area in a former gravel pit about 0.7 miles to the south of the initially proposed parking area.

DRAFT

Approved: _____ **Date:** _____

Tim Cooke, Administrator - Division of Internal Services

Supporting Approvals

Date; _____

Steve Schmelzer, Director – Bureau of Parks and Recreation Management

Date; _____

Terry Bay, Director – Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Date; _____

Michael Bergum, District Supervisor

Date; _____

Eric Hyde, Property Supervisor

Variance Initiator: Eric Hyde, Northern Door County Unit Natural Resource Property Supervisor

Planner: John Pohlman, Property Planner

Supporting Information

Purpose and need for the plan change:

Newport State Park is included in the [Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan](#). The master plan contains language that confines where equestrian trails are authorized and which parking lot is to be used by equestrian riders in the following prescription:

Work with partners to develop 4 to 6 miles of primitive to lightly developed equestrian trails east of Newport Lane, south of the Europe Bay State Natural Area and north of the Park Office. Improve Lot 4 to accommodate up to 6 vehicle/horse trailers. Add toilet facilities and 4 to 6 hitching posts and a mowed grass area near Lot 4. (page 18)

This description limits equestrian trails to Area 1 (Day Use Area – Recreation Management Area, Type 4) and the northern portion of Area 2 (Hiking and Primitive Camping Area – Recreation Management Area, Type 3). Local equestrians have informed the department that they believe a small portion of this part of the park would provide good quality trail riding, but most would not. A private inholding a ¼ mile to the south of Parking Lot 4 limits options to site a trail between the inholding and Europe Bay Woods State Natural Area. In addition, after more field visits, department staff determined that much of the area south of the inholding and north of the park office would be unsuitable for equestrian trails due to shallow bedrock and karst features.

The length of trails authorized in the master plan (4 to 6 miles) is likely to provide a long enough experience to draw horseback riders for a half-day or less of riding. The Department Design Standards Handbook (8605.1) indicates that at least seven miles (for a half-day experience) or at least 10 miles (for a full day of riding) of equestrian trails are needed to provide a satisfactory experience.

The proposed variance allows the construction of equestrian trails throughout Area 2, not just in the northern portion. In addition, the variance proposes to increase the miles of trails that may be constructed to up to 10 miles. This variance also proposes to construct a new parking area in a former gravel pit about 0.7 miles to the south of Parking Lot #4. This new lot would accommodate up to six vehicle-horse trailers and provide toilet facilities, 4 to 6 hitching posts and a mowed grass area.

This variance also proposes authorizing equestrian use on portions of existing hiking and hiking/biking trails in Areas 1 and 2 if they do not substantively impact existing uses. Places where equestrian use is co-located with existing hiking or hiking/biking trails will meet department guidelines and policies.

If the variance is approved, department staff would work with equestrians to identify appropriate trail alignments in Management Areas 1 and 2 that minimize impacts to existing hikers and bikers and provide enjoyable horseback riding experiences. Given the proposed location of the parking area, it is likely that new equestrian trails would not be located north of the inholding parcel.

The proposed changes do not affect the boundaries of any management area or any land management classifications as described in the master plan.

How the proposed plan change relates to the property's goals and objectives or other master plan provisions:

The existing master plan has two management objectives for the entire property related to the variance:

1. 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.
2. Expand recreational opportunities by adding equestrian trails.

The existing master plan has one management objective each for Management Areas 1 and 2:

1. Area 1: Provide and maintain attractive and safe grounds for intensive outdoor recreation activities.
2. Area 2: Maintain and enhance the natural appearing character of the management area to provide opportunities for solitude and remoteness.

The changes to the master plan proposed in this variance are consistent with the objectives as follows:

1. The expansion of equestrian uses is consistent with property objective #2.
2. Areas 1 and 2, both classified as Recreation Management Areas, have relatively higher densities of trails and infrastructure than elsewhere in the park and adding equestrian trails here is expected to increase use. However, this area of the park is not where most visitors go to experience solitude and remoteness. The proposed variance is not expected to prevent the park from providing visitors the opportunity for solitude and remoteness (property objective #1 and the Management Area 2 objective).
3. The expansion of equestrian uses is consistent with Management Area 1 objective.

The existing master plan does not have recreation-related prescriptions for Management Areas 1 and 2; it does have two management prescriptions for the entire property related to recreation:

1. Maintain existing facilities at current development levels to continue to provide existing recreation opportunities.
2. Work with partners to develop 4 to 6 miles of primitive to lightly developed equestrian trails east of Newport Lane, south of the Europe Bay State Natural Area and north of the Park Office. Improve Lot 4 to accommodate up to 6 vehicle/horse trailers. Add toilet facilities and 4 to 6 hitching posts and a mowed grass area near Lot 4.

The proposed changes modify the prescriptions that implement the objectives in the following ways:

1. Increases the length of equestrian trails from 4 to 6 miles to up to 10 miles (Prescription #2).
2. Increases the area where equestrian trails may be located (Prescription #2).
3. Changes the location of the parking area for vehicles with horse trailers (Prescription #2).

The variance increases both the number of miles of equestrian trails and the area where they may be located; the department believes that these changes are consistent with the property's goals and objectives.

Anticipated primary benefits of the proposed plan change:

The proposed variance would increase the miles of authorized equestrian trails and allow the department to avoid the area with karst and shallow bedrock features. These changes would provide better experiences for horseback riders. Approval of this variance will allow the department to help satisfy the desire to create additional equestrian opportunities described in the Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan.

Additional anticipated benefits:

Creating a higher-quality equestrian use may result in more visitors to the park and increase park revenue.

Potential adverse impacts:

The department seeks to minimize conflicts between hikers/bicyclists and equestrians by ensuring appropriate signage and adequate sight lines. The department also seeks to ensure that trails are properly maintained. Where feasible, the department seeks to limit co-locating bicyclists and horseback riders, especially on trails where bikers travel at higher speeds (e.g., rail-trails). The trails in Newport State Park open to bicyclists are mostly surfaced with native materials and designed for slower speeds than rail-trails.

Some park visitors that hike or bicycle the trails in Area 2 may be negatively impacted by sharing portions of the trail network with equestrian riders. Despite the efforts to minimize negative interactions, some hikers and bikers may feel their experiences are diminished by sharing the trails with equestrians.

Construction of the equestrian trails will require tree cutting to create an approximately 8-foot-wide corridor. This will result in some fragmentation of the forest and is expected to lead to an increase in the spread of invasive plant species along these trails due to ground disturbance and increases in sunlight.

Additional brushing, tree cutting and mowing to widen existing hiking and hiking/biking trails where equestrian use is co-located may be necessary. From the department's experience, additional soil displacement may occur from equestrian traffic if use levels are high. An increase in use of these trails may also lead to an increased spread of invasive species. By restricting the extent of equestrian trails to the recreation management areas, these impacts will be limited to areas that currently see similar impact due to public hiking and biking use.

Given the disturbed conditions at the former gravel pit, use of this area as a parking lot is expected to have minimal impact to the resources of the park or its current users.

The public review period may raise additional environmental and social concerns which will be evaluated and included in the final version of the variance as appropriate.

Summary of any alternatives considered:

Park staff considered alternatives that would have placed equestrian trails elsewhere in the park including in the state natural area and other areas of the park with a Native Community Management Area land management classification. These alternatives would have high levels of impacts to the most ecologically sensitive areas of the park and would impact the solitude and remoteness of these areas.

Staff also considered not incorporating equestrian trails at the park at this point. This would not meet the desires of the local equestrian community and would not be consistent with the property's goals and objectives described in the master plan.

Compatibility with statutes, codes, and department policies:

This proposed variance has been prepared in compliance with Chapter NR 44 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code. The proposed change is compatible with all statutes, codes, and policies.

Federal aid limitations:

No federal aid limitations have been identified as impacting this change.

Public review process used:

This proposed variance will be posted on the department's Property Planning webpage for a 30-day public comment period. The webpage will contain the variance, background information, and a DNR staff contact person. Information about the variance will also be placed on the Newport State Park webpage.

The public will be informed of the public comment period through a variety of methods, including a press release and GovD notification to the Newport State Park and Statewide Master Planning GovD lists.

This section represents the public involvement plan for this variance.

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

This section will be completed following the close of the public comment period.

Newport State Park

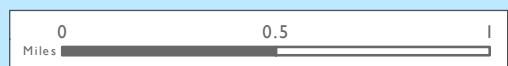
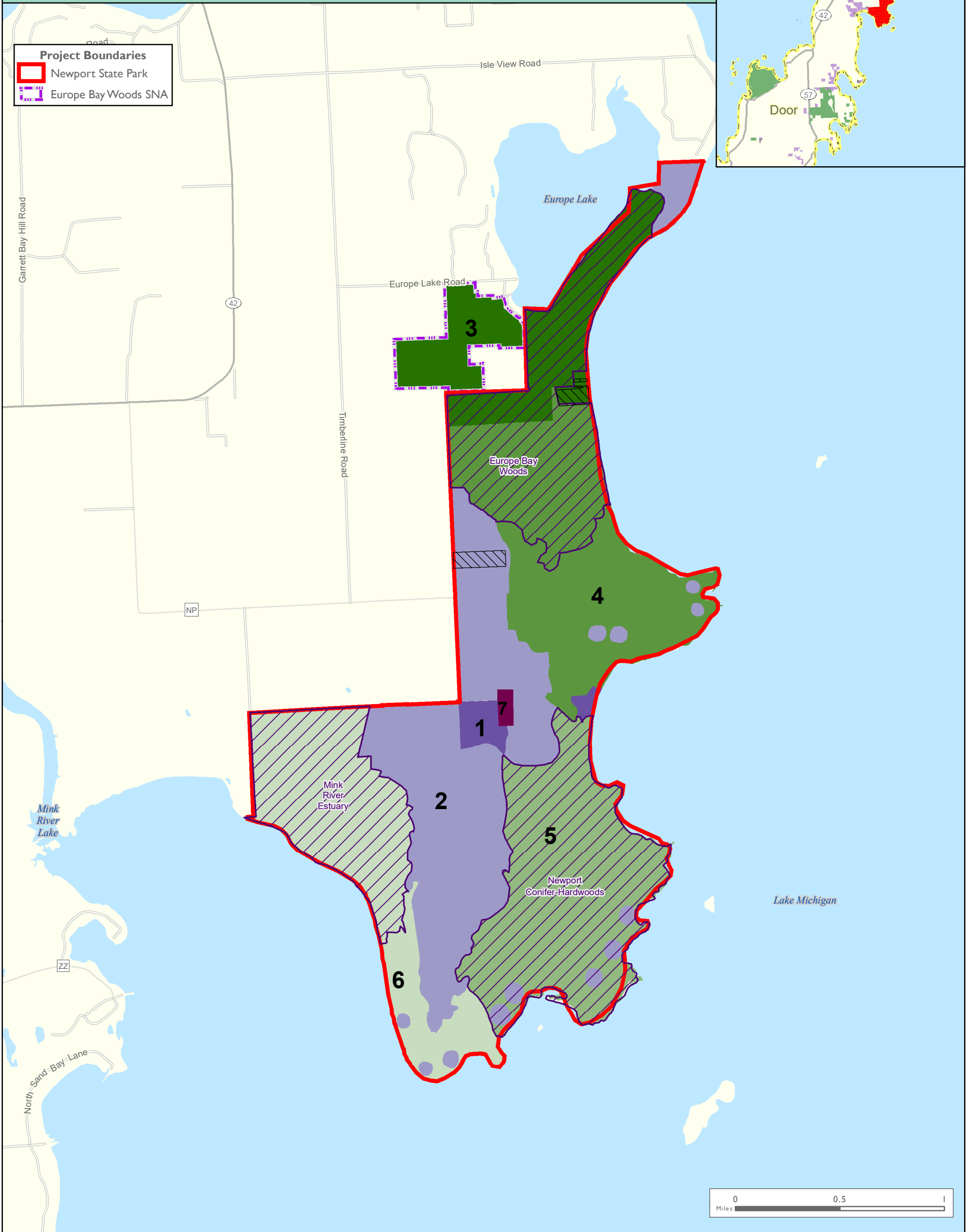
LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

NORTHERN LAKE MICHIGAN COASTAL ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE



Project Boundaries

- Newport State Park
- Europe Bay Woods SNA



<p>Native Community Management Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area 3: Europe Bay Woods Area 4: Newport Woods and Cliffs Area 5: Newport Conifer and Hardwoods Area 6: Mink River Estuary 	<p>Recreation Management Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area 1: Recreation Management Area-Type 4 Area 2: Recreation Management Area-Type 3 	<p>Special Management Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area 7: Special Management Area State Natural Area Not DNR Managed Land
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WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL RESOURCES

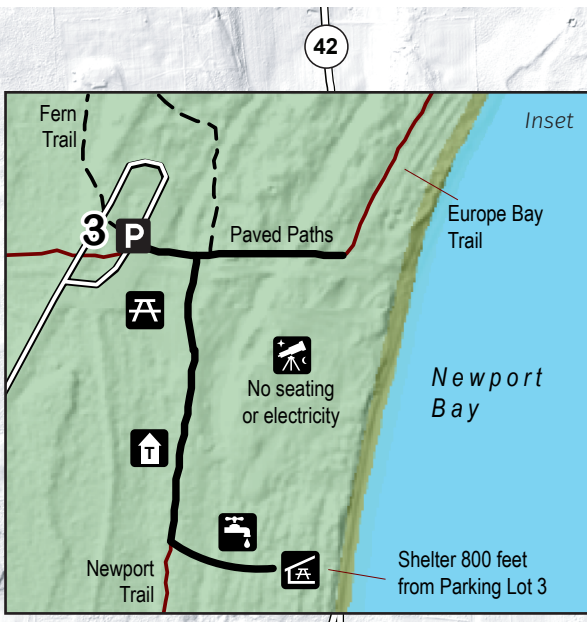
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MAP K-4

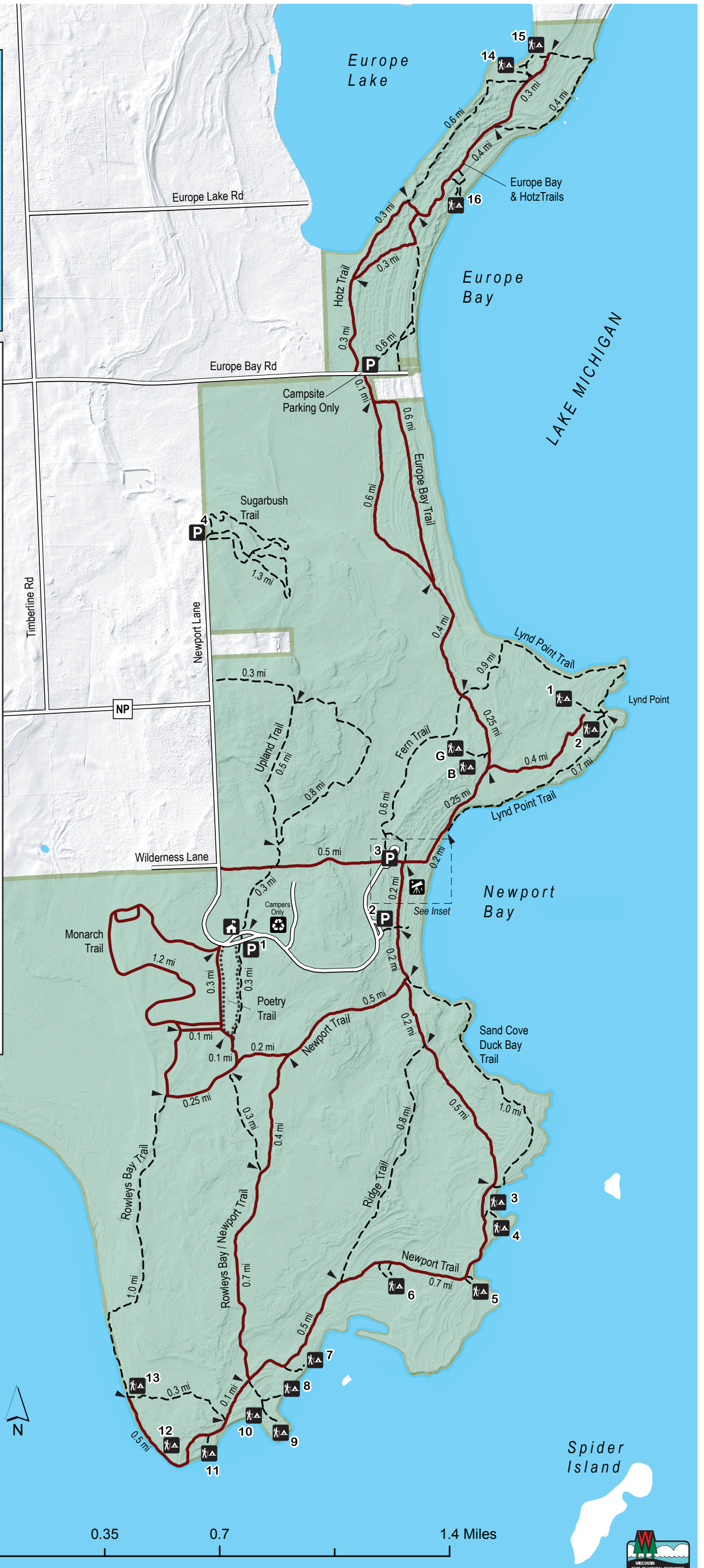
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NEWPORT STATE PARK



NEWPORT STATE PARK TRAILS

- **Monarch Trail Loop (1.75 mi)** – Passes through open meadows with aspen, birch, juniper and conifers reclaiming 100-year-old farmland.
- **Poetry Trail (0.6 mi)** – Poems are on 10 permanent stanchions along parts of the Rowleys Bay and Monarch Trails. Available year-round and exhibits change quarterly.
- **Rowleys Bay Trail Loop (4 mi)** – Sections of boreal forest and old pine plantations. Along Rowleys Bay, the trail skirts rock ledges and cool cedar woods.
- **Newport Trail Loop (3.5 mi)** – Transition forest following old logging roads. Goes through remnants of boreal forest more typical of Canada than Wisconsin.
- **Ridge Trail (1 mi)** – A rocky, hike-only trail that intersects Newport Trail and follows an old shoreline.
- **Sand Cove and Duck Bay Trail (1 mi)** – Branches off the Newport Trail and weaves along sandy bays near the lakeshore.
- **Upland Trail Loop (2 mi)** – A self-guided nature trail with stations along the trail to identify trees, flowers and wildlife.
- **Fern/Europe Bay Trail Loop (1.2 mi)** – Accessible to people with disabilities, this wide, flat trail is geared to those with mobility, hearing and visual impairments. Check out a Discovery Pen at the park office to use on the interpretive signs along the trail which are filled with auditory and tactile messages about history, landscape, plants and wildlife.
- **Lynd Trail Point Loop (2.5 mi)** – Branches from the Europe Bay Trail and follows the rugged, rocky shoreline with beautiful lake views and vistas.
- **Europe Bay Trail Loop (7 mi)** – Follows the path of old logging roads. Long ridges of ancient sand dunes parallel the beaches. The trail crosses Europe Bay Road and continues to the north end of the park.
- **Hotz Trail Loop (2-3 mi)** – Follows a sand ridge on the east side of Europe Lake. Rolling sand dunes offer several vantage points to see Europe Lake and Lake Michigan.
- **Sugarbush Trail (1.3 mi)** – Used for maple sugaring from the 1900s to the 1980s, this trail also illustrates the oldest inland post-glacial shoreline within the park.



	Off-road Biking & Hiking Trail
	Hiking Trail
	Poetry Trail
	Distance Indicator (miles)
	State Park
	Park Office
	Parking Lot
	Backpack Campsite
	Night Sky Viewing Area
	Shelter Building
	Picnic Area
	Vault Toilet
	Recycling/Garbage (campers only)

