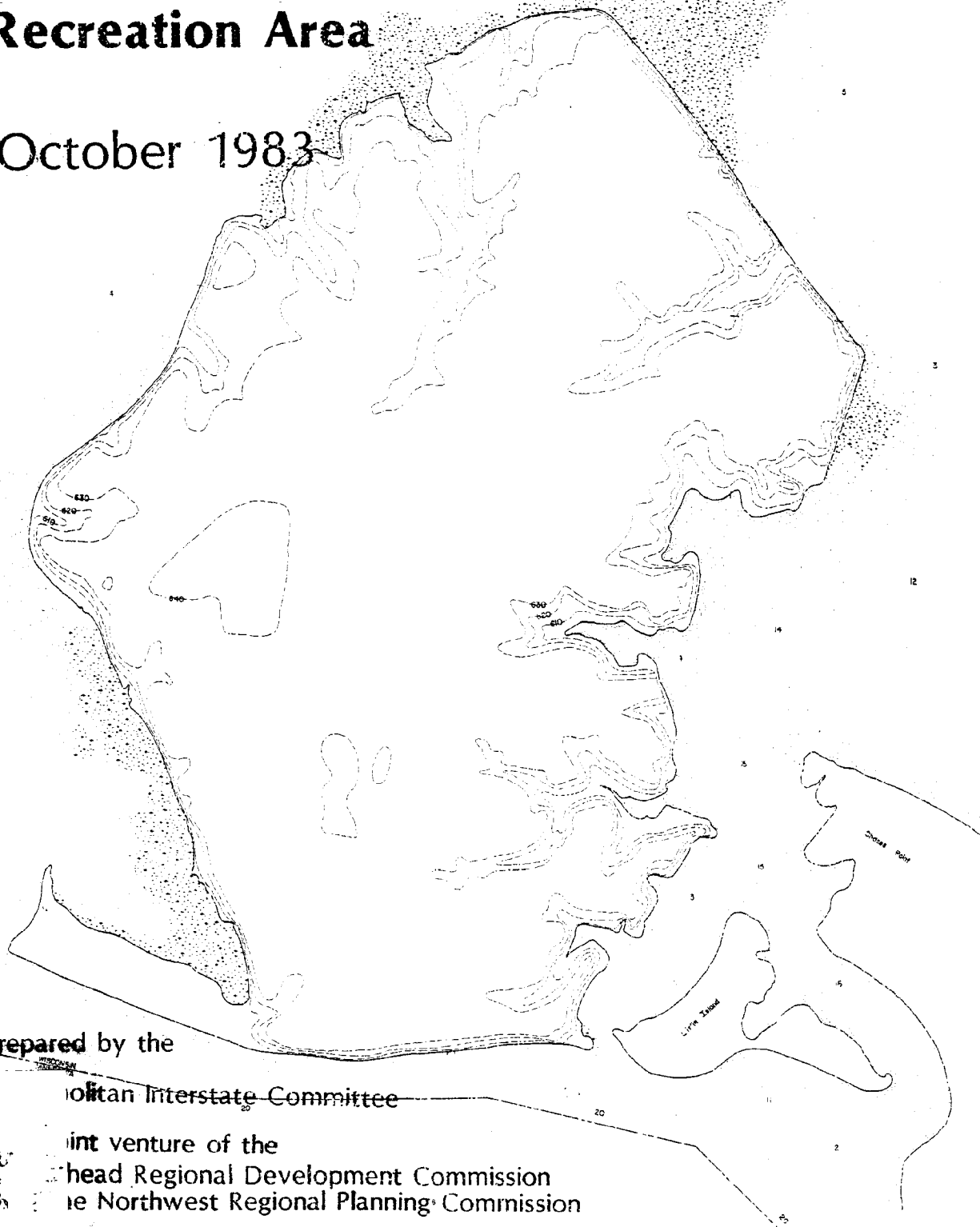


A Proposal for the Whiteside Island Recreation Area

October 1983



prepared by the

Metropolitan Interstate Committee

TD

931

.W54

1983

Joint venture of the

Head Regional Development Commission

the Northwest Regional Planning Commission

WHITESIDE ISLAND RECREATION PROJECT
PROPOSED USE PLAN

prepared by the
Metropolitan Interstate Committee ...
a joint venture of the Arrowhead Regional
Development Commission and the Northwest Regional
Planning Commission

This report was published with the assistance of the Wisconsin
Coastal Management Program, Bureau of Coastal Management, Wisconsin
Department of Administration, with financial assistance through the
Federal Coastal Zone Management Act as administered by the Office of
Coastal Zone Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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Intent of this Proposal

This report describes a proposed site plan for a multi-purpose recreational facility to be located on Whiteside Island in the St. Louis River. The report is designed as a proposal to the Cities of Superior and Duluth, and to the members of the Whiteside family who own the island.

Regarding the two cities, the proposal seeks to have the cities obtain control of the island, to designate it a joint park, to establish a development program, and to undertake the joint management of the facility. The emphasis on joint designation and management is important to the success of the project. Although the island is in wholly within Superior, the impact of the facility on the total harbor oriented recreation system falls equally upon both cities. Whiteside Island is an unique opportunity to stress the fact that despite the location of recreation facilities in two cities, there is but a single system providing services to all users of the harbor and river. The Whiteside Island project can be the first of many ties uniting this recreation and tourist system.

In regards to the Whiteside family, the proposal seeks their agreement in leasing, donating or selling the island to the two cities. The recommended approach is to have the family sign a long-term (up to 25 years) lease with the cities.

The impetus for the proposal came from the "Land Use and Management Plan for the Duluth-Superior Harbor" and the knowledge that the Whiteside family had recently offered the island to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for use as a state park. Prior to initiating the project, some members of the family were contacted to assess their likely reaction to a proposal of this nature. The response received at that time was that the family would wait until the proposal was made and then determine if it was acceptable. There was no indication that such a proposal seemed inappropriate.

The approach taken by this use plan for the island is to design a facility that has low capital and low maintenance costs. This approach is essential on several counts. Whiteside Island is not the highest ranking recreational project for either Superior or Duluth. Yet, because of the simple nature of the proposed development, it is a "do-able" project. Thus, its low cost and easy-to-implement design make it a project that can and should be done now, even ahead of other larger, more important efforts. In fact, the development of Whiteside Island will provide impetus to undertake some of these other projects, such as the Superior Municipal Forest, which can utilize the Whiteside facilities and attractive power.

Background

Whiteside Island, also known as Clough and Big Island, is the largest island in the St. Louis River estuary and is located within the City of Superior (see Map 1). Since the turn of the century, it has been owned wholly or in part by the Whiteside family which farmed it and used it as a summer retreat. The Whitesides quit their active use of the island in the mid-1930's but a caretaker remained with the old farmstead until the buildings burned to the ground in the 1950's.

The island has long been used for a wide variety of purposes by local residents on an informal basis, but no organized public or private use of the site has developed. Many plans have been tendered to the family by people interested in developing the island yet none were viable or acceptable by the Whitesides. As recently as two years ago, the Whiteside family itself offered the island to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for use as a state park. Citing budgetary restraints and a policy of not developing new parks, the WDNR did not accept the family's offer.

In 1978, the "Land Use and Management Plan for the Duluth-Superior Harbor," prepared by the Metropolitan Interstate Committee for Duluth and Superior, identified the island as an excellent location for some form of low intensity recreation use. This project is an attempt to implement the recommendations of the harbor plan by designing an acceptable public recreational use plan for the island.

Attention was focused on Whiteside Island for several reasons. First, there is a well established need to provide destinations for the increasing number of boaters using the harbor and the St. Louis River. In the absence of such sites, the harbor loses its appeal to residents and tourists alike. The harbor plan incorporates Whiteside Island into the overall recreational system of the harbor so as to provide a balanced, attractive resource to both residents and tourists.

Secondly, resting between the largely undeveloped upper river and the developed lower harbor, the island occupies a pivotal location. This unique position is underscored by the variety of views available from the island - traffic traveling along I-35 on Duluth's hillside, herons flying over marshes, ships serving distant docks, the new Arrowhead Bridge spanning the river, and boaters slipping under the shadows of tree lined shores.

Finally, Whiteside Island offers an unique opportunity to tie together the many existing and proposed recreational systems that lie along and near the river. Among the facilities that can be enhanced by appropriate recreational development on Whiteside Island are the Western Waterfront Trail, Superior Municipal Forest, Indian Point, Billings Park and the numerous boat landings lining both shores.

Site Description

Whiteside Island is approximately 520 acres in size (see Map 2). It is essentially a flat plateau with 30-40 foot steep slopes on all sides. Deep, relatively stable ravines cut far into the island on three sides. The soil is sandy red clay.

DULUTH-SUPERIOR

HARBOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

THE PEOPLES INTEREST COMMITTEE
FOR THE DULUTH-SUPERIOR HARBOR
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
DULUTH-SUPERIOR, MINNESOTA
NORTHSTAR REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

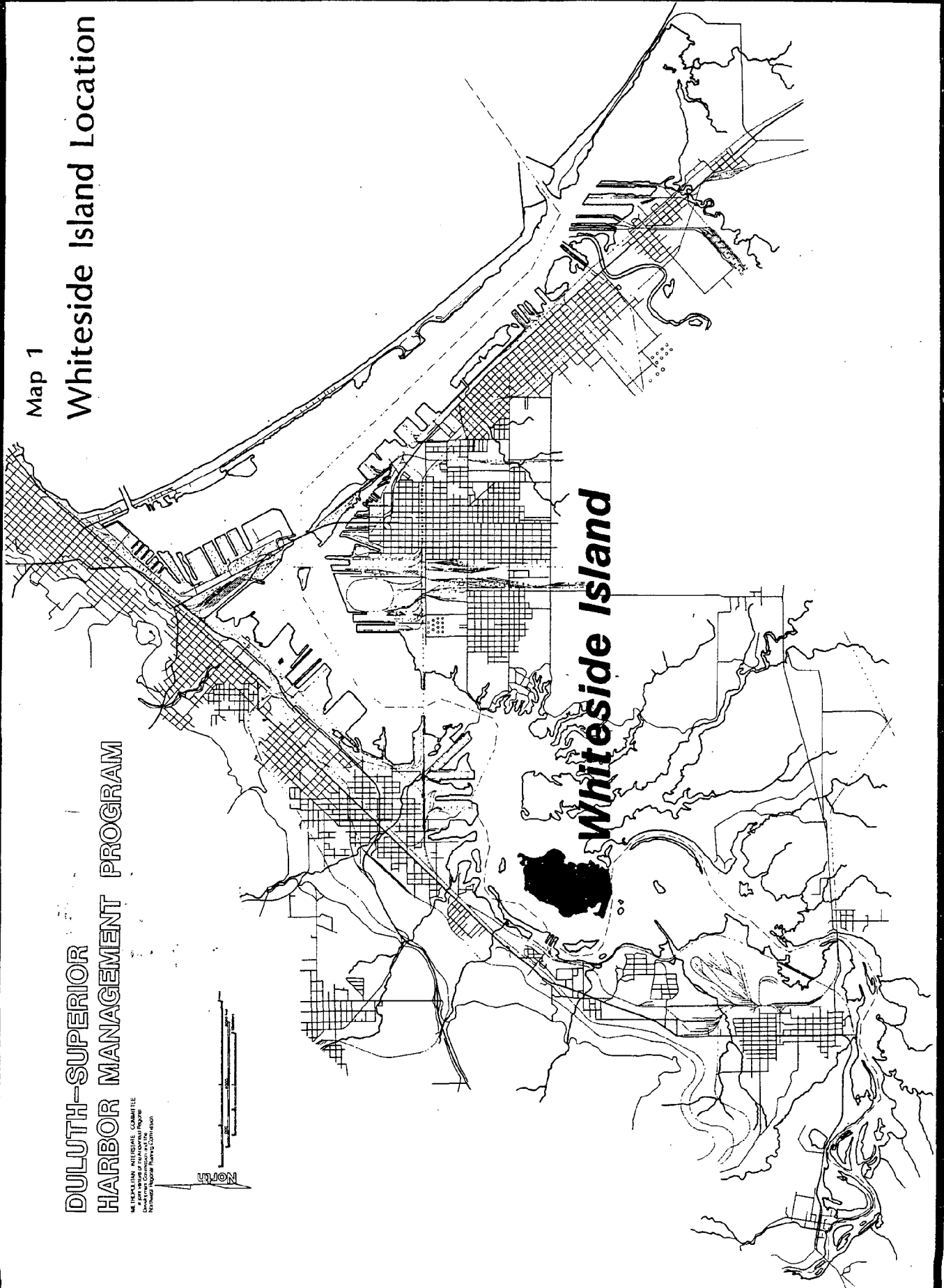
NORTH



Map 1

Whiteside Island Location

Whiteside Island



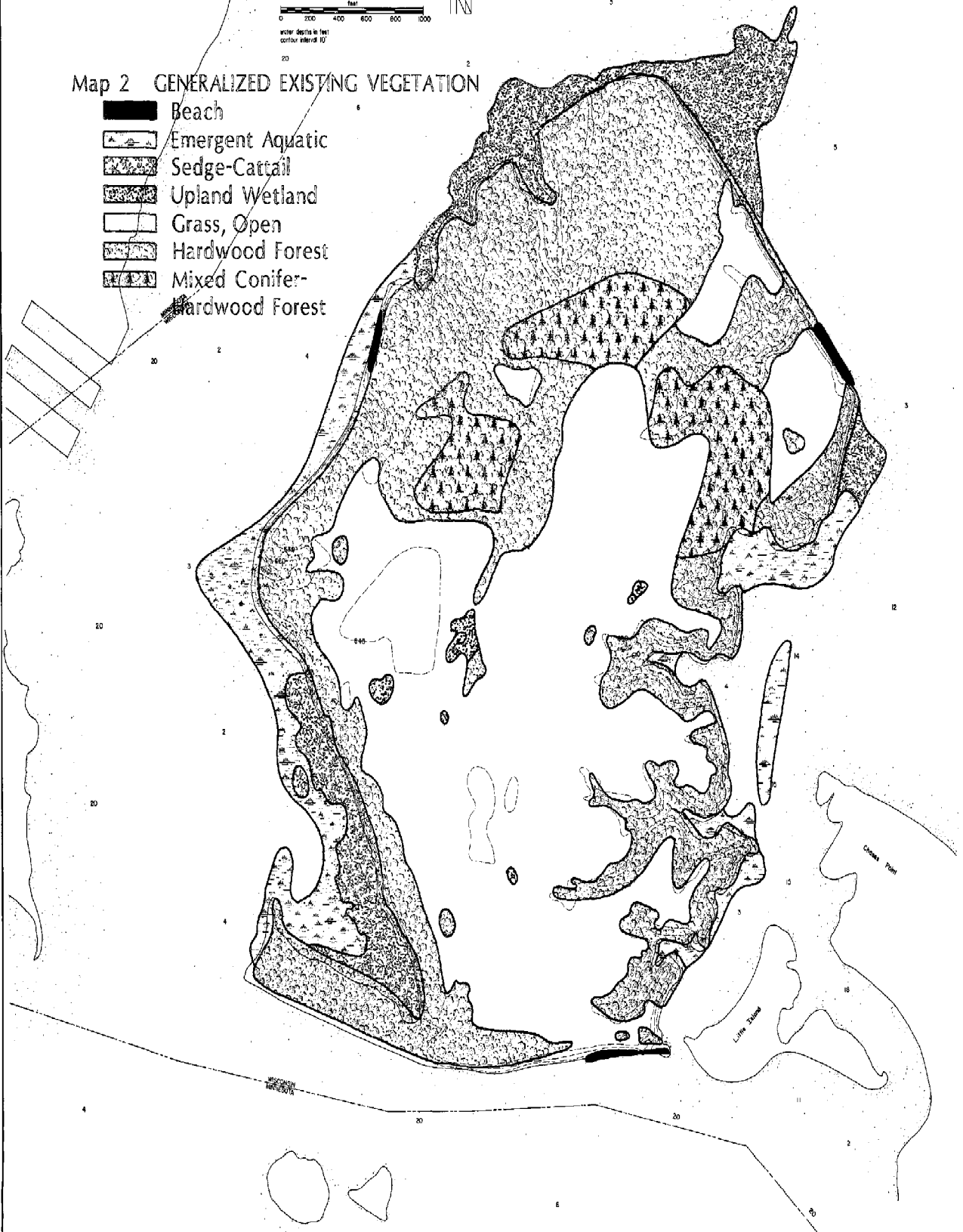
WHITESIDE ISLAND

0 200 400 600 800 1000
feet

water depths in feet
contour interval 10'

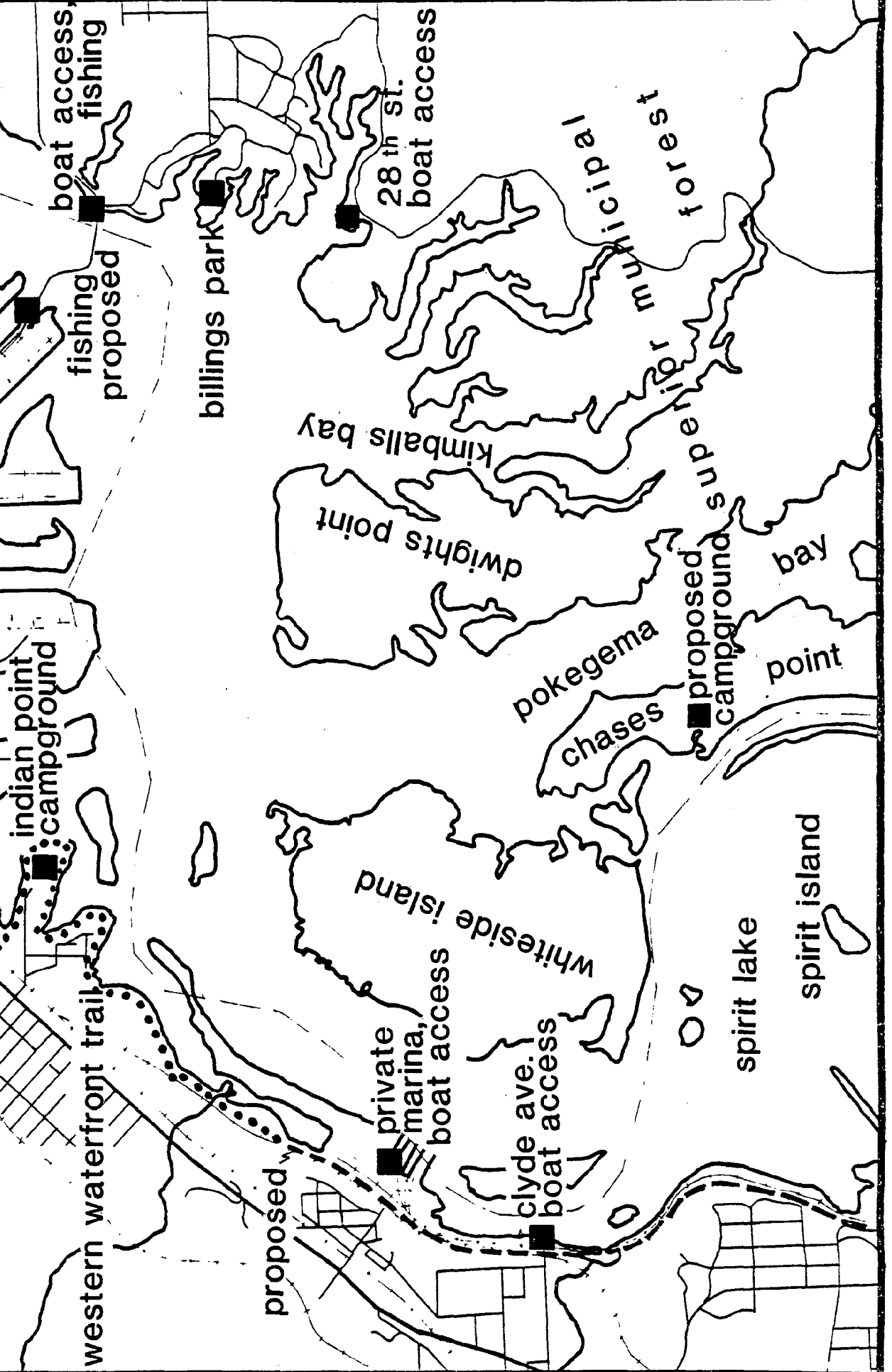
Map 2 GENERALIZED EXISTING VEGETATION

-  Beach
-  Emergent Aquatic
-  Sedge-Cattail
-  Upland Wetland
-  Grass, Open
-  Hardwood Forest
-  Mixed Conifer-
-  Hardwood Forest



Whiteside Island Nearby Recreation Facilities

N
200 1000 4000
ft



Over half of the island consists of grassy open meadow, an obvious reminder of the Whitesides' earlier hay farming operations. The edges of this meadow are gradually being invaded by brush. A hardwood forest comprised primarily of birch and aspen fringe most of the island. Conifers mix with the hardwoods in several distinct sections of the north central parts of the island where the forest is most extensive and densest. Narrow sandy beaches are found along the south and northeast sides. Extensive sedge and cattail marshes are situated on the north and west sides and large beds of emergent aquatic plants are present on the west and east sides.

The St. Louis River channel provides a deep water access to the southeast corner. Additional boat access is available at shallower depths on the east side and at selected sites along the west side.

All that remains of the old farmstead are cracked foundations, partially covered sidewalks, and a few stretches of fencing. Outside of the occasional campsite, there is little evidence of any former or current use of the island.

Use Goals

The proposed use plan for Whiteside Island is guided by several goals concerning the type and style of development to occur. Under these goals, the island is to:

1. be available for use by the general public;
2. to complement existing and proposed recreational and tourist facilities in Superior and Duluth;
3. combine recreational development with an active concern for the natural resources on and adjacent to the island;
4. require the lowest possible cost for development and operation and maintenance;
5. focus on spring/summer/fall activities but provide potential for winter activities (transitional times of freezing and thawing of ice are dangerous and the thickness of winter time ice is unpredictable);
6. provide a destination and use area for the growing number of pleasure boaters on the river.

Site Plan

Map 3 displays the proposed use plan for Whiteside Island. As the map notes, most of the development has been concentrated into the southeast section. This focusing of activities greatly lowers development costs and facilitates day to day management. It also highlights the obvious scenic and historic features of the island. Key elements of the plan are:

A. Boat accesses

Four boat access sites are being proposed with the one at the southeast corner being the largest and most important. It is to extend to depths adequate to handle most large recreational boats using the harbor and river. The other sites will have shallower drafts and will be used to directly serve the adjacent picnic area and the individual campsites.

The main dock at the southeast corner will be of a floating design to reduce maintenance and replacement costs; the remaining three boat landings will consist of docks built on land parallel to the shore. Stairs built from large dimensioned treated timbers will be used to connect the accesses to the trails. The stairs will prevent adverse erosion along the steep clay banks found at each access site.

B. Historical interpretation

One of the most important features of the plan is the historical interpretation of the old Whiteside farmstead. The foundations and sidewalks will be cleared of debris and most, but not all, vegetation. Signs will provide information about the island, the Whitesides, the farm and the St. Louis River estuary. The signs will consist of aluminum plaques with pictures and text etched into them; they will be mounted on metal posts anchored in concrete.

C. Picnic area

Picnic facilities will be provided near the old farmstead. The initial site will be situated overlooking Spirit Lake. This site will be split into two areas in and around clearings and groves of trees. If future demand warrants, a second site may be developed on a point of land along the eastern channel. Facilities will include permanently mounted tables (steel frames with wooden benches and tops); grills on posts, fire pits, trash barrels and toilets. A well with a hand pump will be located in this area.

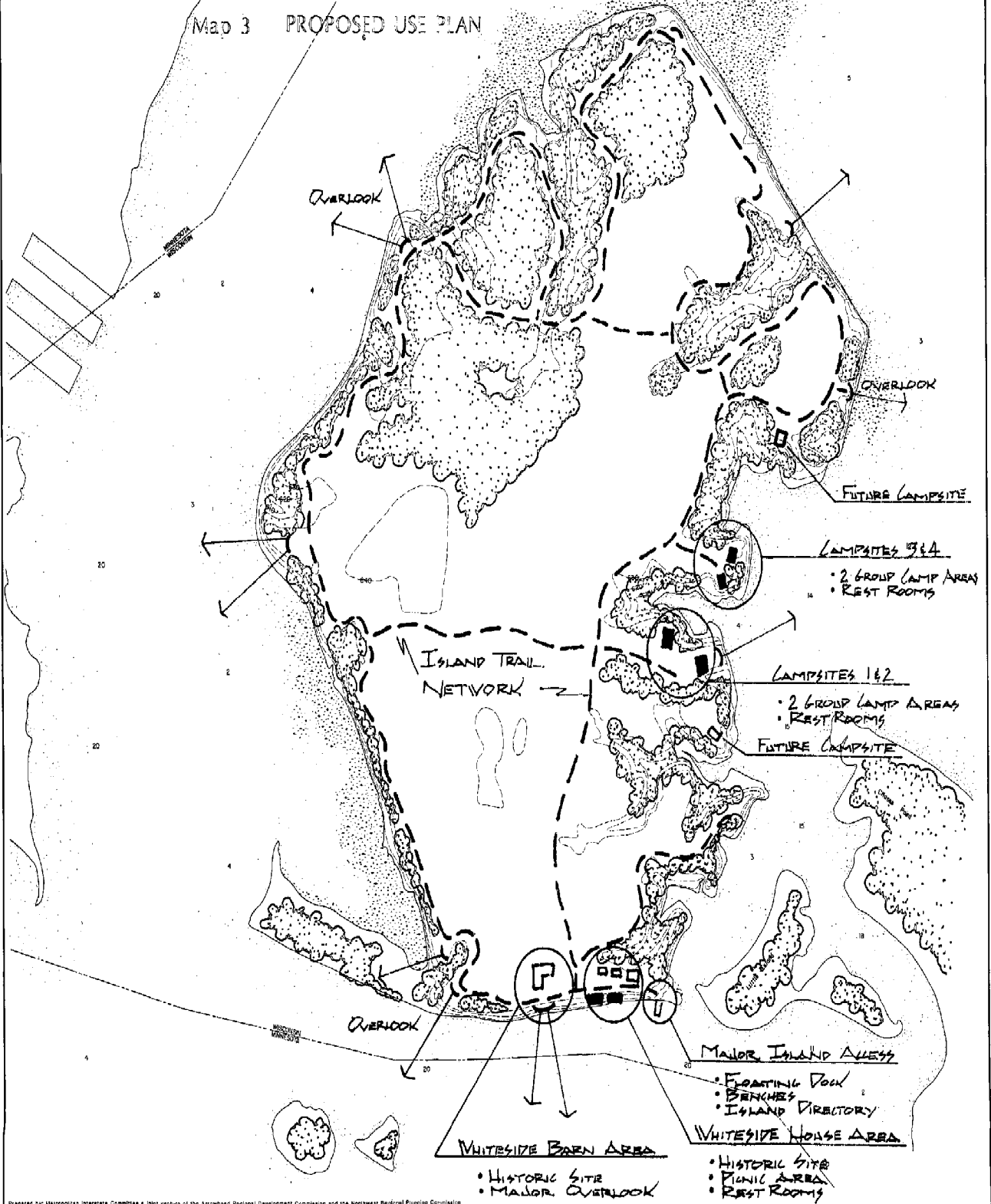
D. Trails

An extensive system of trails will encircle the island. As mapped, there is almost 5 miles of trails (it should be noted that the trail locations on the map are only approximate; actual layouts will be determined at the time of construction). The trails will be easy to negotiate as there are few changes in elevation; trails will be routed around ravines to avoid erosion although one loop will run

WHITESIDE ISLAND

0 200 400 600 800 1000
feet
water depths in feet
contour interval 10'

Map 3 PROPOSED USE PLAN



the length of one ravine. Spurs will run to overlooks, campsites, picnic areas and boat accesses. The trails will be cleared and seeded with clover; maintenance will likely be minimal as use should keep the trails useable. The trails will be designed with both hikers and skiers¹ in mind. Although the trails should be easily followed, some form of marking, most likely signs wired onto trees, will be used.

E. Overlooks

Resting and viewing overlooks will be placed at various sites along the trail network. Each overlook will be cleared and have a rough bench. They will be located so as to provide views of marshes, the Duluth hills, the uppermost reaches of the harbor, and the scenic shore and large bays of the Superior Municipal Forest.

F. Campsites

Primitive campsites will initially be developed at two locations (increased demand may require the development of other sites now identified as "future"). Each site will consist of two separate areas each cleared to accommodate up to three tents (total of 12 tents for the two sites). Each area of three tents will be equipped with a fire pit, permanent table and a trash barrel. A toilet will be provided for each site. There will be no fees charged for camping. Campers can obtain water from the well located at the main picnic area.

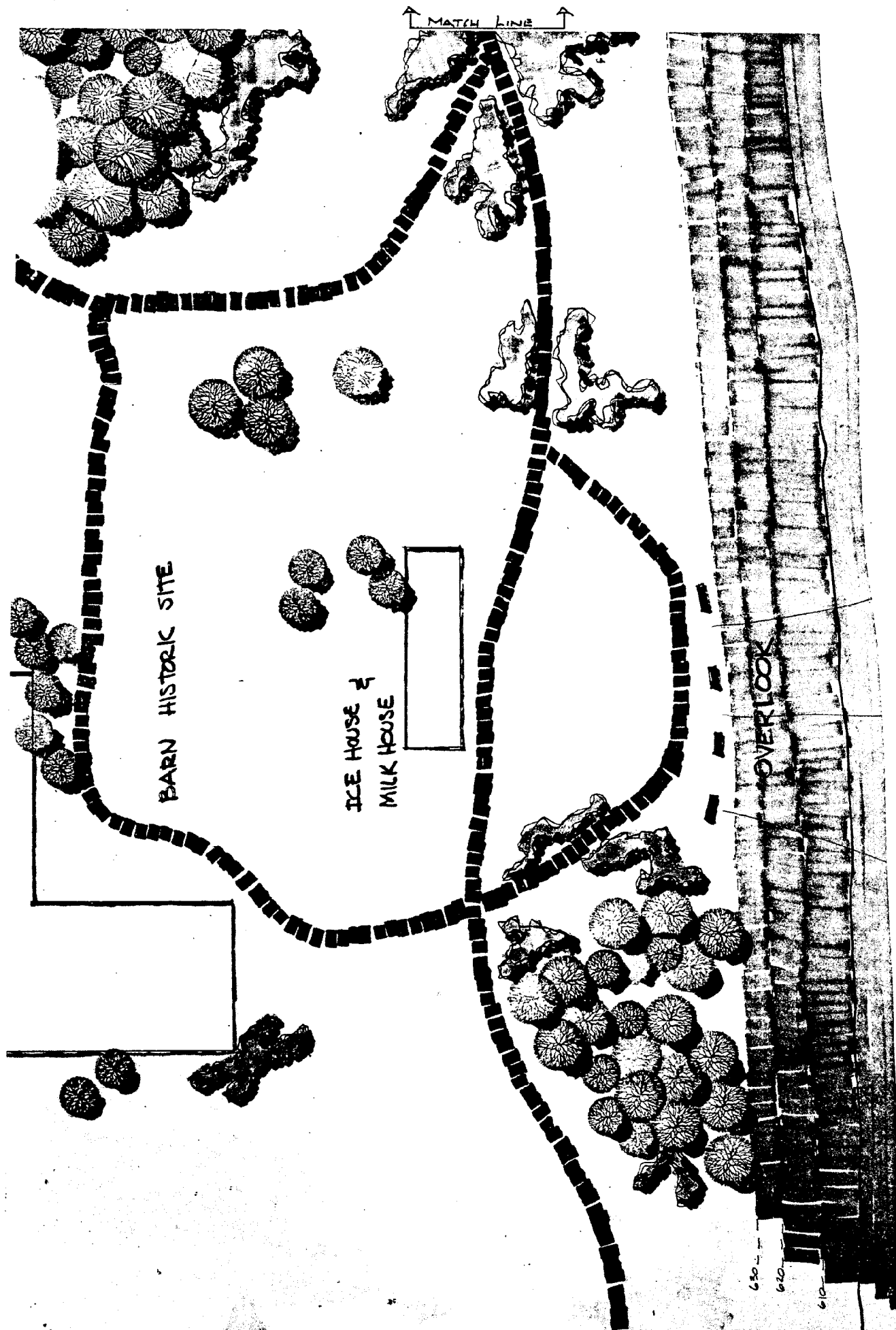
G. Natural resources management

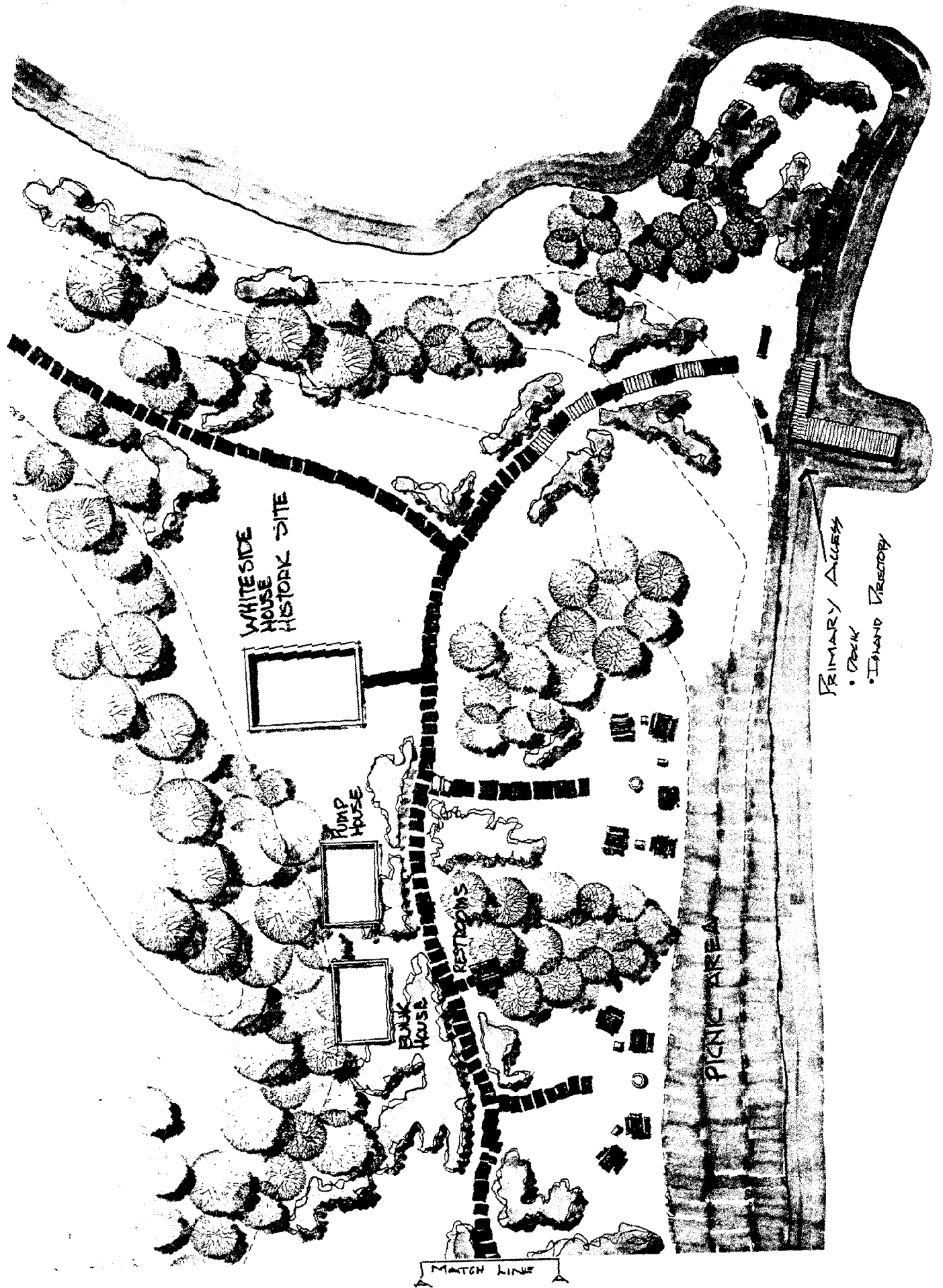
Initial management will be primarily passive in nature with the primary element being the proper design and location of the recreational facilities. Potential active management components include planting of trees, and game and non-game habitat enhancement. Management concerns include protecting the wetlands and adjacent upland areas, preventing erosion, and maintaining the present forest. The wetlands are particularly important since they are used by migratory and breeding waterfowl. In addition, the wetlands and the adjacent shallow water areas are important as spawning grounds for such game fish as northern pike.

H. Access to the island

Because this park will be on an island, there will be little means by which to control access to it. In particular, day users such as picnickers and hikers can use any number of boat landings in Superior and Duluth to reach the island. Overnight campers, on the

¹Cross country skiing will not be encouraged as it requires users to cross the frozen river. Since it is difficult and expensive to monitor ice conditions and the cities do not wish to assume the liability in the event of tragedy, skiing will be allowed but not promoted.





WHITE SIDE
HOUSE
HISTORIC SITE

Kiosk
House

BUNK
HOUSE

RESTROOMS

PICNIC AREA

MATCH LINE

PRIMARY ACCESS
• POLE
• ISLAND VICTORY

other hand, will be somewhat more selective in their choice of access point, primarily out of consideration for the security of their automobiles. The plan recommends that the Indian Point campground and other private access operators be contacted regarding the island and the use of their landings (at rates set by the operators) for boat access to it.

As was noted, drinking water will be provided at a well to be drilled near the main picnic area. There is an old well on the island, but it has been filled with debris and there is no information on its depth and soundness. The new well will be roughly 400 feet deep, will have a four inch casing and will have a hand pump. The old well will be officially abandoned.

In the event that for any reason the new well cannot be drilled, potable water will have to be brought to the island by campers and picnickers.

It may be necessary to place buoys to mark the small boat channel leading to the island on the north and east sides. This channel is narrow and difficult to follow. Although it is recommended that boaters use the deeper channel on the south side, many boaters will want to approach the island from the north as it is a far shorter trip for those coming from further downstream.

Despite several fine swimming areas, swimming will not be encouraged at the island. Because the island will be a city park, any swimming beaches would require life guards and neither city is in a financial position to support this expense.

Development Schedule

Most of the proposed development will be constructed at the onset with some additional facilities to be built later if and when demand warrants. The initial phase of construction will include the picnic areas, historical interpretation of the farm, the boat dock, the two main campsites, and the trails and overlooks on the southern half of the island. Future development would expand the trails and overlooks and add campsites as demand requires and funds allow.

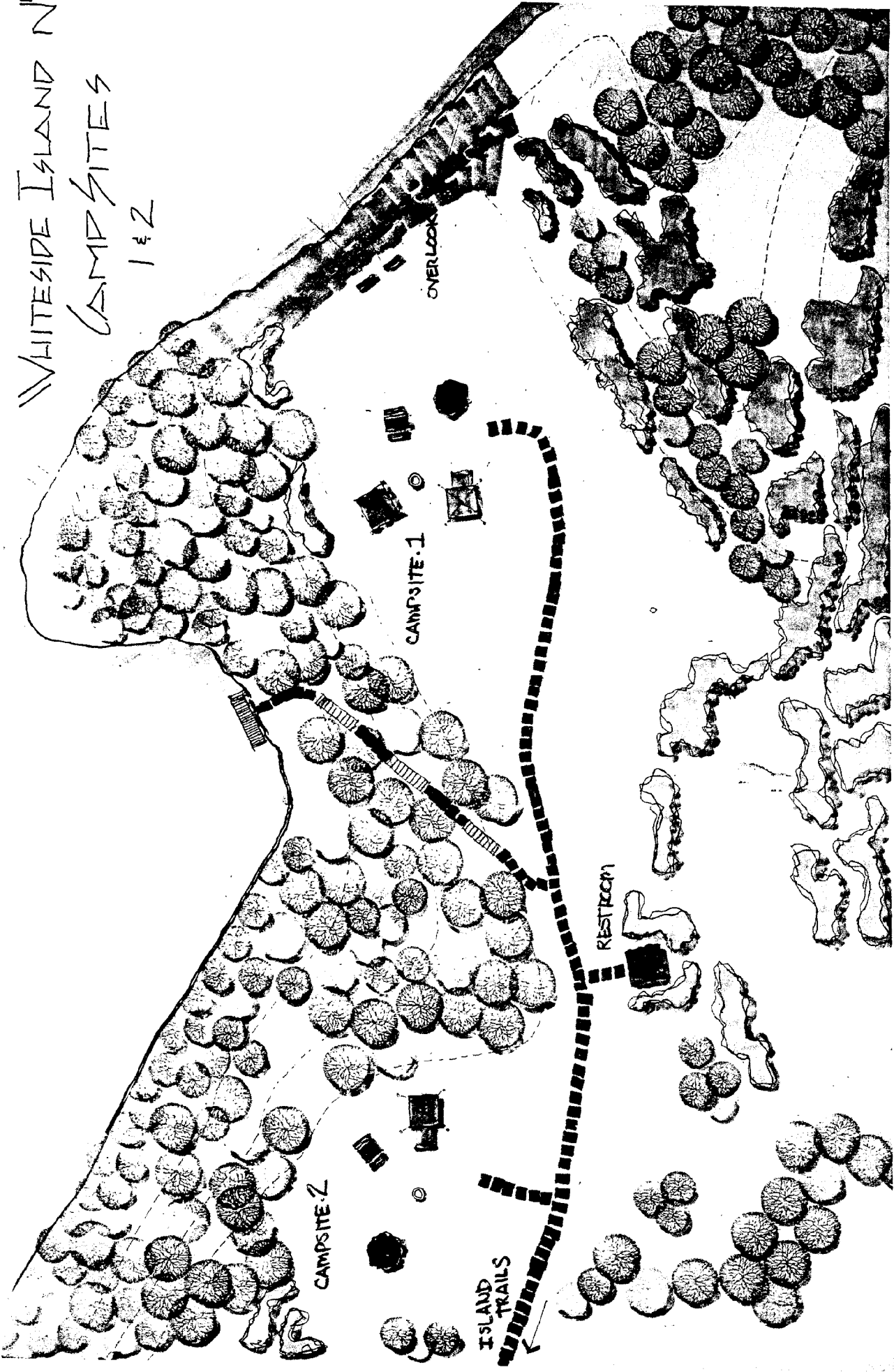
Management

It is proposed that the island be designated by both Superior and Duluth as a jointly managed park. This would be accomplished by the two cities signing a joint powers agreement regarding development and management of the site. Such a designation would underscore each city's desire to improve the recreational system of the harbor and to cooperate with the other on key development issues.

It is recommended that the land remain in private ownership, but that a long-term lease be negotiated permitting the two cities to develop and manage the park. The precise nature of the jointly shared management responsibility will be decided at a later date by the cities, but it is recommended that the general format contain the following features:

- a. the Superior Park Department be designated the lead agent

WHITESIDE ISLAND N
CAMP SITES
1 & 2



- b. specific management and maintenance tasks be delegated to each city
- c. that costs be shared equally.

It is proposed that actual day-to-day oversight of the island be contracted out to a third party. Currently, the University of Minnesota manages the Indian Point Campground for the City of Duluth; under their agreement, UMD runs the campground covering all expenses with camping fees. The proposal suggests that this agreement be expanded to cover Whiteside Island. However, since there will be no campsite fees, the cities will have to pay the full cost of management.

UMD's management responsibilities would include: collecting garbage from trash containers, cleaning up trails and sites, monitoring camping activities, making minor repairs to tables and other pieces of equipment, and the like. The cities will be responsible for setting and removing the floating dock each spring and fall.

UMD will manage the island from beginning of the fishing season (roughly the last weekend in April) to Labor Day as per the wording in the current Indian Point contract. For the remainder of the ice-free season, the two Cities would oversee the island on a reduced schedule, probably only once a week. No supervision is proposed for the winter.

UMD uses its Indian Point Campground contract to provide training in recreation management for students. This concept will be carried over to the Whiteside Island project. Thus, UMD will prepare a brochure about the island and will, from time to time, survey users of the island and gather other pertinent information. This information will be used to better promote the island and the entire recreational system of Superior and Duluth.

Issues

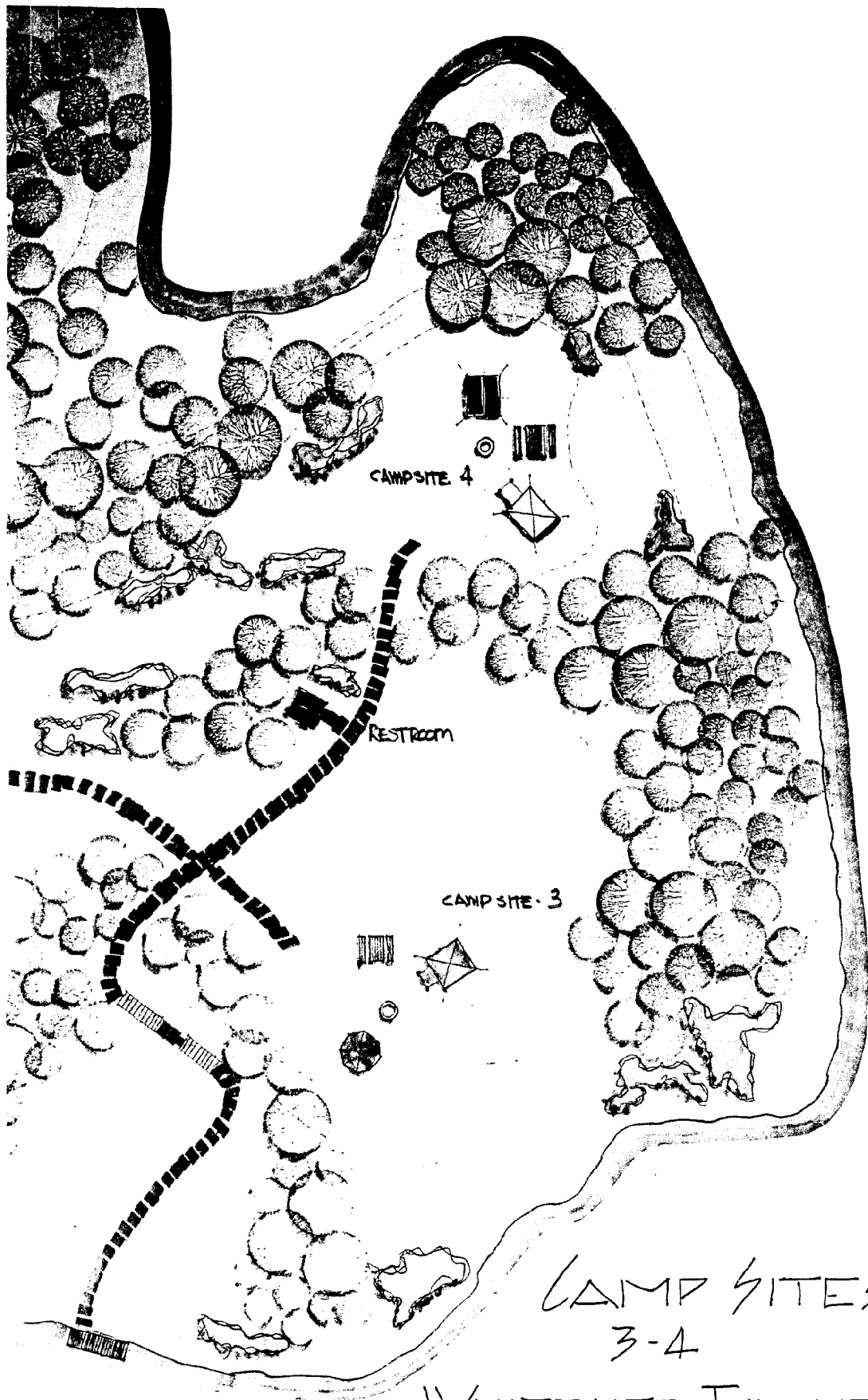
There are several issues concerning the development and management of the island which require special consideration. They are:

1. Toilets

Toilets are a prerequisite for camping and picnicking on the island. However, the relative inaccessibility of the sites, the red clay soil, and the lack of running water, pose severe limitations on the provision of acceptable toilets. Several options have been considered (pit toilets, peat pit toilets, toilets with removable 30 gallon holding tanks) with the preferred choice being pit toilets lined with peat. This type of toilet is being used in wilderness areas and is proving to be highly acceptable. Alternatively, cement vault pit toilets can be constructed. While these vaults could be pumped out once they are full, it is recommended that the old ones be sealed and new ones built.

2. Fishing

At present, the waters of the St. Louis River on the south, west, north and northeast sides of the island are designated interstate



CAMP SITES
3-4
WHITESIDE ISLAND N

waters where both Minnesota and Wisconsin residents may fish with their respective licenses. However, the Wisconsin DNR has labeled that portion of the river the water on the east side of the island as being solely Wisconsin waters thereby forcing Minnesota anglers to acquire a Wisconsin non-resident license in order to fish there. It is the contention of the MIC that these last waters are actually part of the St. Louis River and that anglers from both states should be allowed to fish there with their respective resident licenses. This position should be adopted in order to maximize the attraction and useability of the island.

A second fishing issue concerns the ability of holders of Minnesota resident licenses to fish interstate waters while standing on Wisconsin shoreland. Current regulations forbid this type of fishing. Obviously, since Whiteside island is entirely in Wisconsin, no Minnesota resident could fish from the docks and shores without acquiring a non-resident Wisconsin license. Again, enforcement of this rule would greatly limit the appeal of the island. The proposal suggests that Wisconsin adopt special rules for the island (and preferably, have both states amend their rules in this regard for the entire estuary).

The above recommendations seem to be in accord with recent efforts by Minnesota and Wisconsin to cooperate on issues pertaining to other border waters such as the Mississippi River.

3. Hunting and trapping

Current Superior law permits hunting and trapping on the island. Hunting appears to be primarily for ducks with some grouse hunting. Although deer use the island, deer hunting does not appear to be a major activity there. While the hunting and the peak non-hunting recreational seasons do not greatly overlap, there is still some potential for problems for both users. This proposal recommends that trapping and duck hunting be allowed in the wetlands around the island but that all forms of hunting and trapping be forbidden on the island itself.

4. Firewood

Providing firewood is important to the encouragement of camping and picnicking on the island while protecting the existing forest. Several options, none of which has been fully explored, are: a) provide slabwood and other wood on the mainland at selected access points; b) haul firewood to sites on the island; c) manage the island's forest to provide a supply of wood. The proposal recommends that a combination of 'a' and 'b' be used.

APPENDIX A
DEVELOPMENT COSTS

Initial Development

This budget does not cover the entire proposal. Only a portion of the trails are included (essentially the southern half of the island) and the future campsites are not included. It does not include benches for the overlooks; these will be made from trees on the island or available free from other municipal projects.

Item	Unit Cost	Number	Cost
Historical signs	200	6	\$ 1,200
Picnic areas			
tables	240	6	1,440
fire rings	80	3	240
grills	195	5	975
site preparation			2,000
toilet	2,000	1	2,000
Boat dock	25/sq.ft.	1 - 40' x 6'	6,000
Campsites (2)			
tables	240	4	960
fire rings	80	4	320
site preparation	(part of picnic area site cost)		
toilets	2,000	2	6,000
boat accesses	200	2	400
Trails			
steps (oak timbers)	6	100	600
preparation			2,000
seeding	.10/ft.	10,000	1,000
Well			
4" casing	12/ft.	450	5,400
pump	475	1	475
mobilization			2,000
TOTAL			\$33,010

APPENDIX B
ESTIMATED ANNUAL MANAGEMENT COST

This budget is based upon the existing contract between UMD and the City of Duluth for the Indian Point Campground. In addition to the costs outlined below, the cities would be required to use existing city staff to watch the island during the time period not covered by the UMD contract. At this time, it is assumed that the cities can handle this minor time demand with existing staff at no added cost except for gasoline for a boat.

The UMD costs would be added onto the existing contract for the Indian Point Campground. While Duluth would remain responsible for all costs for that facility, Duluth and Superior would share the costs for the island. It should be noted that UMD utilizes the "work study" program for hiring its laborers. Under this program, UMD pays only 30% of the cost while the federal government pays the remaining 70%.

Salaries

Director (10% of time; 5.5 months; \$1,100/mo.)	\$ 605
Fringes @ 23%	140

Laborers (2 for 4 hrs/day, 31 days, 5 months, @ 30% of \$6.00/hr)	2,232
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Subtotal	2,977
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Direct Costs

Boat and gas	250
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Repairs	500
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Trash bags, misc.	250
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Brochures, reports	175
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Subtotal	1,175
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TOTAL	\$4,152
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