

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

Sherburne County recently completed a master plan to guide County staff and elected officials in the acquisition of a 430-acre parcel to create a regionally significant park on more than a mile of undeveloped shoreline on Big Elk Lake. The land is currently owned by the family of Howard Weise, whose desire was to have the property preserved for public use.

## PROTECTING, RESTORING, AND CELEBRATING SACRED LAND

Currently a farmstead, this land has a long history that makes the site meaningful to both Dakota and Ojibwe people, whose ancestors still rest overlooking the lake.

**A 2020 Phase 1 Archeological Survey recorded finding 840 prehistoric artifacts on 140 acres of the site, and recommended that the parcel be considered as part of a “larger cultural district significant to Native Americans over the past several thousand years.”**

Acquiring, making public, restoring, and protecting this land begins a process of healing that recognizes the significance of this former village, burial grounds, and cultural site to those who have called Mni Sota Makoce (the land where the waters reflect the clouds) their homeland for thousands of years.

Working with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers from the Upper and Lower Sioux, Prairie Island, Mdewakanton Sioux and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to program and offer interpretation on the site’s historical and contemporary significance to Minnesota’s indigenous people will give voice to groups that have been disenfranchised of their rights to land that remains sacred. Sherburne County is committed to active partnership with interested tribes to explore ways to respectfully steward the land in order to offer meaningful experiences for visitors while preserving the site’s sensitive cultural resources.

While much of the land has moderate biodiversity significance, large swaths of former agricultural fields must be restored. Also in need of care are several historically significant structures, identified as potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, including two vacation cottages formerly used by author Sinclair Lewis.

# MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Communication and collaboration between Sherburne County, the family members who are current owners of the property, and tribal representatives has been ongoing during the planning process in order to come to understanding and agreement about shared values and next steps forward for this significant landscape.

While there is consensus about the property becoming public parkland, all parties acknowledge that development must take place with the utmost care and respect for the land. In that spirit, one of the first gatherings will include a healing ceremony on the site, where both Dakota and Ojibwe representatives can come together to commemorate the history and significance of this place. This event and future collaboration will establish a framework for respectful stewardship of the land as a natural resources park, a place where ancestral burial grounds are honored, and where Dakota and Ojibwe stories can be told and remembered.

## PROJECT BENEFITS & NEEDS

- » The proposed park offers an opportunity for indigenous cultural interpretation between the Twin Cities Metro and Mille Lacs, which is currently lacking.
- » There is a gap in regional park and trail facilities in Sherburne County, as there is only one regionally-designated park or trail facility, Woodland Trails Park, which is owned and operated by the City of Elk River.
- » The property offers tremendous opportunities for natural resource area protection, interpretation of cultural resources, and access to outdoor recreation, including rolling fields, woodlands, wetlands, portions of the Elk River and Lilly Creek, and over one mile of shore along Big Elk Lake.
- » The property would nearly double the amount of county parkland in Sherburne County and add recreational amenities desired throughout the region.

## PROJECT CONTACTS

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## RESTORING LAND, CONNECTING CULTURES at a new SHERBURNE COUNTY PARK



BUDGET AND PHASING (2021 DOLLARS)

PHASE	TOTAL COST
Initial Acquisition (year 0)	\$2,375,000
Phase 1 (years 1-5)	\$908,010
Phase 2 (years 5-10)	\$5,574,096
Phase 3 (years 10+)	\$3,752,798
TOTAL IMPROVEMENTS	\$10,234,904



Regional Context



Honoring tribal values will be prioritized through programming & interpretation

FUNDING STATUS

- » \$5M Federal Appropriation Request (pending)
- » \$500,000 DNR Natural and Scenic Area grant (awarded)
- » \$1.25M Greater Minnesota Parks and Trail Commission's Legislative Recommendation (pending – currently Ranked #1)
- » Local funding commitment by the County Board



Rendering of proposed park development from Big Elk Lake (looking north)