

WMMPB Working Committee

Key Points Regarding Hill Annex Mine State Park

Senate File 1769, House File 1699

Hill Annex Mine State Park is special and unique in the state park system. The park is also unique and special in the state of Minnesota. The park is a one-of-a-kind asset, preserving aspects of 50 to 75 years of important Minnesota social, technical, and economic history. It also contains previously unknown earth history, including new and unique fossil treasures that are under active scientific study. Every day during tourist season, cars with both Minnesota and out of state license plates drive to the park for the experience - many of them only to be seen two minutes later driving away because the park gates are locked due to the very limited days and hours of operation. This is a loss of park revenue. Also, not fully operating the park does not present a good Minnesota image, as tourists come to see the park, only to go away disappointed.

Objectives:

- The Hill Annex Mine State Park should continue as a state park until such time as firm commitments have been made to resume active mining at the site
- Active mining will remain the primary long term objective for the park property with the park being a good interim use for the property; there are no firm permits or plans for active mining
- The MN DNR Parks and Trails Division should continue to operate the park

Specific actions needed for the park:

- The park operation should be restored to operating from at least mid May through mid September on a seven day per week basis
- The park should be funded for full operation and for adequate maintenance and repairs by the state for at least four more years beyond June 30, 2019
- The park should be legislatively released from state requirements that the park pay high amounts for certain park-related fees or assessments such as building rental and maintenance, equipment and vehicle maintenance, land lease/rental payments, and such other payments. These payments may generally apply to other state parks or to other state non-park assets but are problematic or inconsistent with this specific park. This financial restructuring is needed whether the park is operated by DNR or whether it eventually transitions to being operated by a different entity.

- Park marketing efforts should be expanded to improve the park's ability to return to the higher visitor counts that were once realized; this would include issues such as better signage and preservation, and improvement of key park assets such as equipment in the pit, maintenance shop areas, and security
- A joint park-local advisory group should be formed - WMMPB, Cities of Calumet and Marble, DNR including park staff, Itasca County, maybe IRRR - and actively function to review and monitor park activities and needs, to coordinate significant actions involving the park, and to develop ideas and concepts that could result in a more sustainable park.
- Pit water poses a significant medium and long term threat to the park but is also a growing threat outside the park; the water issue is not caused by the park, is not limited to the park, and should be addressed with the park concerns in mind but separately from the park - there is already draft legislation (SF 1042, HF 663) for that purpose.

SF 1769 and HF 1699 are major steps toward the objective:

- 1. Funds would be appropriated specifically to operate the park for the next four years in a manner consistent with the founding purposes;**
- 2. Revenue generated by the park would remain with and be used by the park;**
- 3. An advisory group, including DNR and local communities, would guide the park toward a better and more sustainable long term future including with funds appropriated for this purpose and to assist DNR with park operations;**
- 4. Certain changes would be made to the way certain financial allocations are made to better prepare the park for either state or alternative management;**
- 5. The property and facilities would continue to be used as a state park until such time as mining operations are ready to resume.**

We strongly suggest passage of this legislation.