

## Peninsula State Park Eagle Tower, Eagle Terrace, and Eagle Panorama Parking – Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan Variance

Variance  Amendment

**Property Name:** Peninsula State Park

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

### Proposed Change to the Master Plan

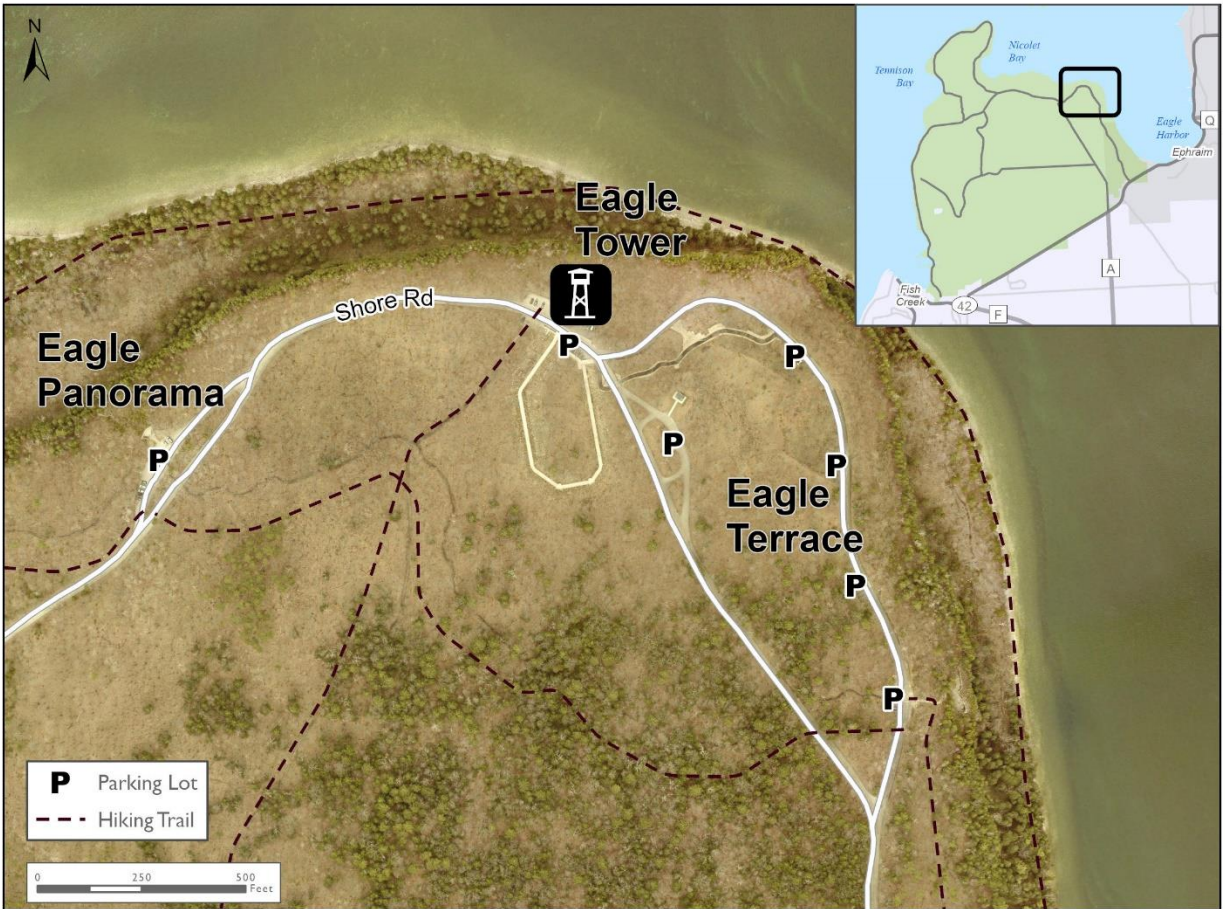
This variance would increase the amount of parking that may be developed to provide public access to Eagle Tower III, Eagle Terrace, and Eagle Panorama and provide flexibility on the quantity and location of the parking areas.

The Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan will be updated to reflect this proposed change. Specifically, Peninsula State Park's property-wide prescriptions (pages 31-32) will be updated as shown, (text proposed to be removed shown as struck through, proposed new text is shown in *red italics*):

- Add ~~20 to 30~~ *up to 100* new parking stalls, *which may include oversized vehicle parking, at to provide access to Eagle Tower, Eagle Terrace, and Eagle Panorama, as space allows. This may be accomplished by developing multiple parking areas based on space availability, site suitability, and user demands, removing/relocating existing parking areas, and by reconfiguring or rerouting roads. Safety features such as guard rails and pedestrian crossings may be added. Relocate the entrance kiosk as needed. Parking stalls may not be developed within state natural areas. Fully to moderately developed trails may be developed to connect parking areas to Eagle Tower III, Eagle Terrace, and Eagle Panorama.*
- Install an open-air shelter with electricity and a maximum capacity of 50 people at Eagle Terrace Day Use Area. ~~Add 10 to 25 parking stalls.~~ The shelter will have electrical service and therefore, the NR 44 classification will convert to modern.

### Background

The Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan, approved in 2018, includes management for Peninsula State Park. Eagle Terrace, Eagle Panorama, and Eagle Tower are facilities/day use areas located on the northeast side of Peninsula State Park (Figure 1). Eagle Terrace includes picnic tables and a vault toilet and Eagle Panorama is a scenic overlook and trailhead. Both locations have a parking area with a capacity of roughly 20 vehicles each. In 2021, the current Eagle Tower was developed (the third iteration of a tower at this location). The tower is 60 feet high, with the top observation deck sitting 253 feet above Green Bay, providing outstanding views. There are 100 steps to climb to reach the top of the tower, or visitors can enjoy an 850-foot, fully-accessible ramp that winds above the tree line to the top of the tower. The angle of the accessible ramp never exceeds a five percent grade and visitors can take advantage of level spots and benches to rest along the way.

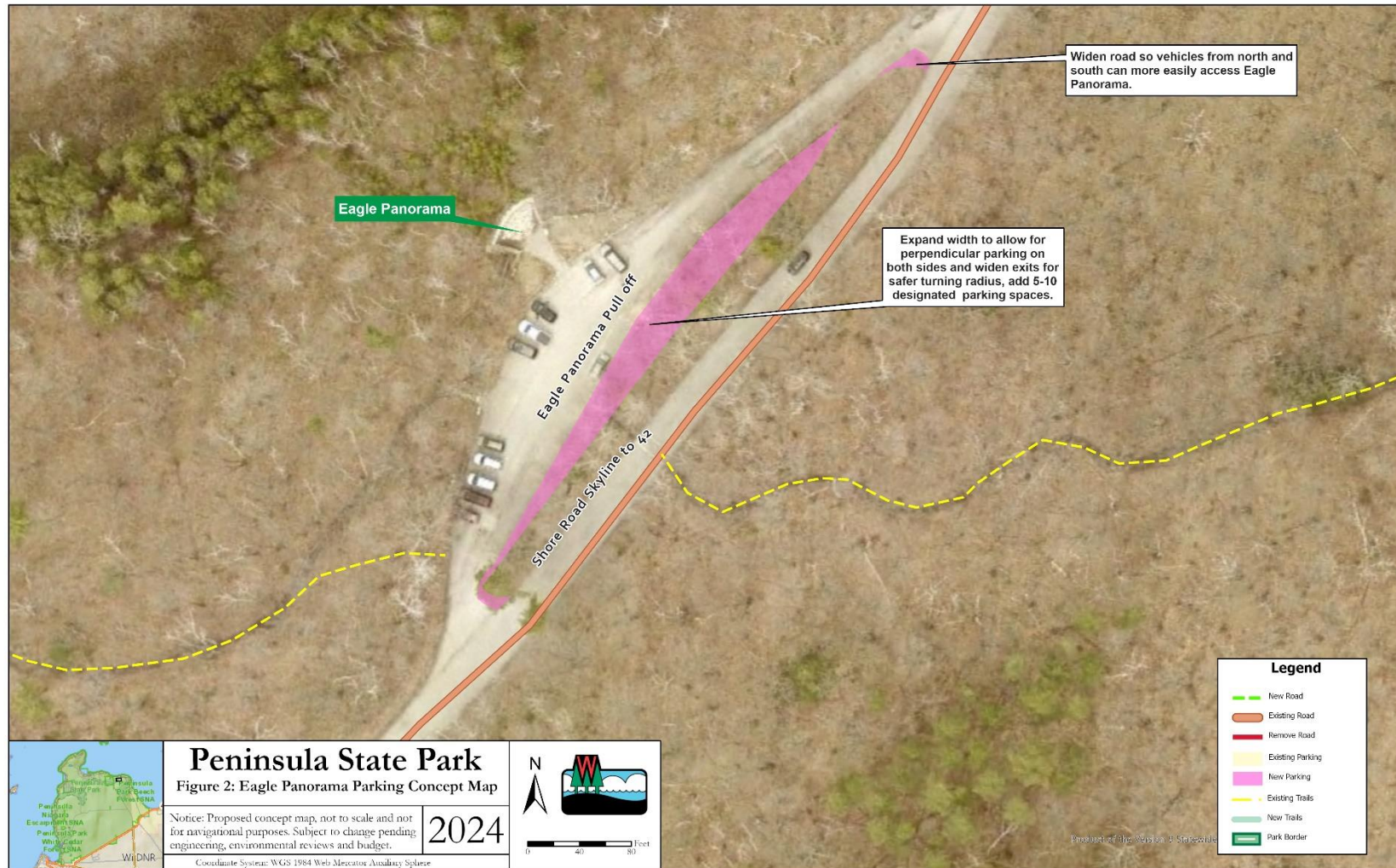


**Figure 1: Location of Eagle Tower, Eagle Terrace, and Eagle Panorama within Peninsula State Park**

This new development has attracted unprecedented crowds to this part of Peninsula State Park, exceeding current parking capacity and causing concern for visitor safety and natural resource protection due to issues including illegal parking, significant pedestrian traffic on roads, ground degradation, a lack of accessible parking stalls relative to demand, and potentially fewer visitors able to visit and enjoy these attractions than would like to.

Figures 2 and 3 are concept drawings of the changes proposed in the variance to address the noted issues and provide for enhanced visitor experiences and resource protection. **Please note that these are concept drawings only and are subject to change pending engineering, environmental reviews, and budgets.**

Figure 2: Concept Drawing Illustrating Proposed Changes at Eagle Panorama





## 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*

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*Michael Bergum, East Central District Parks Supervisor* *Date*

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*Eric Hyde, Peninsula Unit Superintendent* *Date*

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

**Planner:** Yoyi Steele

## **Supporting Information**

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

With the \$3.5 million investment and completion of Eagle Tower, the area of Peninsula State Park containing Eagle Terrace, Eagle Tower, and Eagle Panorama is experiencing unprecedented crowds. This has led to several issues including:

- Visitors illegally parking on the shoulder of Shore Road, which is a narrow, busy road, causing traffic backups and safety issues for emergency response vehicles. Illegal parking is also occurring on the grass in the terrace area.
- Eagle Terrace has turned into overflow grass parking which becomes muddy for visitors. This overflow parking is full starting from the tower's opening in May through peak fall colors in late October.
- Visitors are having to park in areas that are difficult to access and maneuver in (e.g., ditches, muddy spots), which is contrary to one of Eagle Tower's primary goals – to provide universally accessible recreation opportunities.
- There is a lack of universally accessible parking to accommodate the increasing numbers of mobility-impaired visitors wanting to visit the universally accessible Eagle Tower.
- There is increased pedestrian traffic on roads, causing safety concerns.
- The number of park visitors able to visit these attractions may be less than demand due to a lack of parking.

Additionally, this area of the park is seeing increased trolley and bus traffic, including more buses with mobility impaired visitors. Currently there is no parking for oversized vehicles in these areas.

The purpose of this variance is to increase parking capacity to meet user demands, thus alleviating the issues outlined above.

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

The proposed variance is consistent with the Northern Lake Michigan Coastal wide goals, a Peninsula State Park objective, and the area's Recreation Management Area Type 4 land management classification (ch. NR 44.06(4), Wis. Admin. Code) in the 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan.

Region-wide goals supportive of this proposed variance include:

- 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.
- Improve accessibility for mobility-impaired individuals where feasible.

Property objective supportive of this proposed variance:

- Provide areas for camping and day uses by maintaining and upgrading existing facilities.

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

This change will accommodate the high visitor demand in this portion of the property, alleviating illegal parking, pedestrian traffic on roads, ground degradation, and a lack of accessible parking stalls, and will improve visitor safety and experiences.

**Unavoidable adverse impacts:**

New parking area and road construction, and to a lesser extent new trail construction, typically requires vegetation clearing, extensive grading, and additional substrate. Soil compaction may also occur. 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.

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 occur between late fall and late spring, when most of the campgrounds are closed, property visitation is lower, and wildlife are less active. Use of new and existing roads and trails is not expected to impact soils any more than current use of similar facilities. The proposed developments are therefore not expected to result in any significant or permanent adverse impacts to the property.

**Summary of any alternatives considered:**

The no action alternative was also considered. Under this alternative, management for Peninsula State Park would continue as described in the 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan. This would result in the continuation of the public use problems and safety concerns outlined above.

**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:**

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

**Public review process used:**

The proposed variance was released for public review and comment on January 24, 2024 with the public

comment period extending through February 8. The proposed variance was shared on the department's web page, a press release issued, and electronic notification of the proposal seeking public input sent to the Peninsula State Park, Eagle Tower, Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan, and Statewide Master Planning Gov-Delivery lists. After initial public feedback indicated a need for additional information about the proposed changes, the department updated the variance with the concept drawings on pages 3 and 4. The updated variance will be shared on the department's webpage with another public comment period extending 30 days after release. Another news release will be issued and electronic notification sent to the same 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:**

Initial input during the first comment period (January 24 to February 8) revealed a need for more specifics about the scope and nature of the proposed changes in order for the public to effectively provide feedback. The department updated the variance to provide this additional information and released the updated variance for a second public comment period.

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