Landscapes of Recreation

A couple hurtle downhill, gripping their toboggan; smartly dressed skaters lean into a turn nearby. Completing this map tableau and also illustrating just why everyone should “Come to Minnesotaland,” a skier goes airborne. His outstretched arms suggest order in this winter dreamscape, as well as pure joy. The seasons change, and another map trumpets Minnesota as “The Nation’s Summer Playground” and the land of “Ten Thousand Lakes.” Emphasizing these humble points, a carload of visitors arrive dockside, welcomed by towering trees, friends, and a waiting boat.

Farming, logging, mining, and manufacturing framed Minnesota’s reputation 150 years ago. This landscape of production transformed to include a landscape of consumption, brought about by improved transportation methods, growing income, and more leisure time. Maps marked this cultural shift and today their familiar message still applies: “Minnesota, where dreams come true.”

Minnesota is one of the very few states where a person can travel from one of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas into roadless wilderness, complete with a growing population of timber wolves, moose, and deer, in about five hours.

— David Lanegran, geographer and author

To Everybody Seeking Happiness—We have a good time for all of you in Minnesota, whatever your inclination.

— Governor Floyd B. Olson (1931–36), from a “letter” contained in the map Minnesota Invites You to Live, Work, Play in the Playground of 10,000 Lakes, about 1933
Mapping the Modern Landscape: Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

A powerful and rapidly growing part of everyday life, GIS is a computer-based mapping tool. It solves real-world problems and opens any issue or activity with a geographic component, allowing us to visualize, understand, question, and interpret data in literally hundreds of layers. The future of GIS presents both an opportunity and a dilemma: as geospatial expert Peter Batty says, we’ll have “the ability to know where everything is—and what is happening—all the time.”

With Google Earth we can go anywhere in the world—or we can stay close to home, where GIS technology has a long history of leadership. The University of Minnesota developed one of the world’s first GIS with two landmark projects in the 1960s. It was during that era that University student Jack Dangermond became interested in computers and the “fascinating notion that we could use models to explain how things worked.” Dangermond went on to become a founding father of GIS and one of the technological world’s most influential people.

From state agencies to private organizations and individuals, Minnesota’s GIS community remains in the forefront of GIS development. As the foundation of a variety of tools that help us to engage our world and make decisions in real time, GIS has only one barrier—the limits of our imagination.

Interacting with a GIS means investigating the world on the fly, changing the information used, the geography analyzed, and the questions posed. It means working directly with geography more like the way you live your life—moment by moment.

—Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI)

Remember where you fell off your bike, or where you had your first kiss? Your walk this morning and the birds you saw? These experiences are in some way tied to “place”; they can be mapped. Because of GIS, we’re all discoverers now, we’re all explorers, we’re all engaged in our own personal mapping experiences. Whatever is important to you, you can go out there and map it.

—Lesley Kadish, GIS and Digital Map Curator, Minnesota Historical Society

2008

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