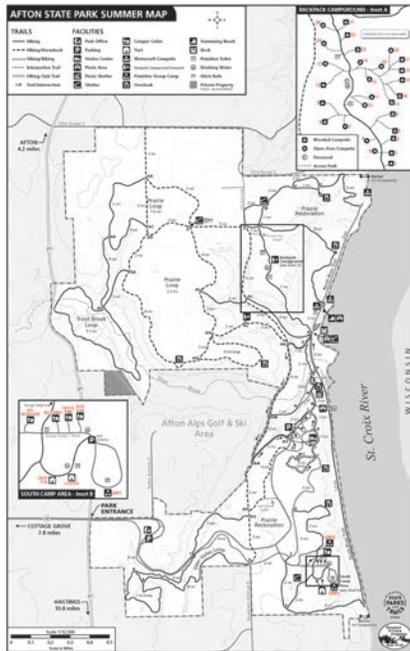


Map provided by Afton State Park



The trails all begin at the impressive Visitor Center. The opportunities to see wildlife will be numerous. I have seen deer, turkeys, raccoons, as well as many species of birds. There are also badgers and different species of the fox to view for the lucky ones who can.

There are 27 campgrounds available year-round at the park, with four camper cabins, two yurts, and one site that is only accessible by a canoe or kayak. I camped in a walk-in site that I booked online. It was a bit of a strenuous hike with all my gear on, with the final march to the campground being over a mile up a hill. My site was beautiful and remote. The sounds of nature there was really something to experience. I purchased firewood at the park and cooked both dinner and breakfast over a fire. Supplies are also available on-site, in case you forgot to bring something essential. My site wasn't far from the beach where I relaxed and did some swimming.

Another popular activity is biking. Afton provides four miles of paved bike trails in the summer and even has a mile groomed in the winter for the increasingly popular winter biking. An annual must-do activity for me is the cross-country skiing. There are twelve miles of groomed trails in the winter, with two and a half being beginner trails to help you get acclimated. The other trails are for intermediate to advanced skill levels. All the trails are mapped very well. There are some thrilling parts of the advanced trails that wind downhill alongside tall trees and an incredible view of the river.

So, get out and experience a state park during your time at CSP. It is very soothing for the soul, as well as very good exercise. There are many studies that have been done that show the importance of getting out in nature occasionally to help balance oneself. Afton is very fun with friends or by yourself. Visitor passes are available at the entrance as well as the opportunity to buy a year-long pass that will work at any State Park. †

Controversial Giant Telescope to be Built on Hawaiian Volcano

BY ZACK MOELLER

THE BUILDING PERMIT for what will be the largest telescope in the Northern Hemisphere has been approved by the Supreme Court of Hawaii. The telescope, known as the Thirty Meter Telescope is set to be built on the volcano Mauna Kea, which rises over 33,000 feet from the sea floor, on Big Island.

The building permit comes after years of hotly debated hearings and litigations. Hawaiian activists have opposed the building of the new telescope, claiming that telescopes built on Mauna Kea over the last several decades have polluted the mountain. The activists have also claimed that telescope construction has interfered with cultural and religious practices of the native people who consider Mauna Kea “ceded land” of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

On the flip side of the argument, the Thirty Meter Telescope would be the key to unlocking answers of what lies beyond our galaxy. “Mauna Kea is the flagship of American and international astronomy,” said Doug Simons, the director of the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope on Mauna Kea. The dormant volcano is a vital location home to a dozen telescopes already that have helped advance important discoveries of the universe. According to Dennis Overby of The New York Times, “The [new] telescope will be built by an international collaboration called the TMT International Observatory.”

The group is led in collaboration by the University of California and the California Institute of Technology, but also include Japan, China, India, and Canada. The total estimated cost of the telescope comes in at out of this world 2 billion dollars and would have an eye sharper and more powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope. The telescope which is planned to be finished by 2024 is designed to incorporate a new technology called adaptive optics, which can take the twinkle out of starlight by adjusting telescope mirrors, some of which are larger than tennis courts, to compensate for atmospheric turbulence.

A spokeswoman from the TMT collaboration said no immediate plans were made for the mountaintop, and that it would take some time to coordinate with the mayor and the state. The observatory issued a statement from Henry Yang, the chairman of its board of governors and chancellor of the University of California – Santa Barbara. “We remain committed to being good stewards on the mountain and inclusive of the Hawaiian community,” said Yang. It is important that the process is done correctly and in a respectful manner as there are only a few places on Earth that are dark, dry, and calm enough to be fit for a billion-dollar telescope. †

Photography provided by Fine Art America: People exercising their right to protest the telescope

