

SUBJECT: Request approval of Green Bay Planning Group Master Plan

FOR: August 2014 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Tom Hauge, Wildlife Bureau Director and/or Yoyi Steele, Wildlife Planner

SUMMARY:

The Green Bay Planning Group (GBPG) Master Plan covers a collection of properties located along the west shore of Green Bay in Marinette, Oconto, and Brown counties. The plan area encompasses some 10,688 acres of state-owned lands, including all 11 units of the Green Bay West Shore Wildlife Area, the Bloch Oxbow State Natural Area, the Badger Gift Lands, and other scattered wildlife, fishery, and statewide public access parcels. The GBPG contains an ecologically significant assemblage of communities characteristic of the Great Lakes coastal zone, most notably extensive emergent wetlands, shrub swamps, lowland forests, and sandspits. These habitats host populations of many rare animals and plants and provide valuable fish spawning and migratory bird stopover habitat. The GBPG properties also are significant recreationally, as they are important providers of public recreation land in close proximity to several regional population centers, including the cities of Marinette, Peshtigo, Oconto, and Green Bay. This is especially true for the properties in Brown County, which has very little public land that is open to traditional outdoor activities such as hunting and trapping. These traditional pursuits are the primary recreational uses of the GBPG properties. Deer, waterfowl, and upland game hunting, wetland furbearer trapping, and fishing are particularly popular.

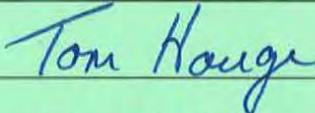
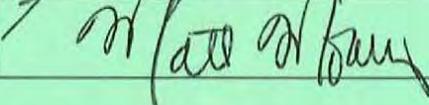
The Master Plan recognizes the significance of the plan area's location within the Great Lakes coastal zone and the importance of maintaining a connection between aquatic and terrestrial habitats. Land management focuses on maintenance and enhancement of existing habitats, aquatic resources, and rare species. Recreation management focuses on the traditional outdoor pursuits of hunting, fishing, and trapping, as well as other nature-based activities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, and paddling. The plan also recognizes the importance of working with external partners (e.g. other agencies, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners, etc.) to achieve common goals. New proposals include: 359 acres of project boundary contractions and 3,187 acres of expansions (981 acres already DNR-owned); improvements to an existing shooting range; expansion of an existing fish refuge to encompass a new pike spawning area; identifying and developing shore fishing opportunities and enhancing accessible hunting; exploring additional opportunities for activities such as wildlife viewing, nature interpretation, hiking, paddling, and cross-country skiing on several properties; and a snowmobile trail on the Peshtigo Harbor Unit.

Plan documents may be viewed at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/GreenBay/>

RECOMMENDATION: Board approval of the Master Plan per NR 44.04(3).

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):

- Background memo
- Public Comment Summary
- Type name of attachment or type N/A if not applicable
- Type name of attachment or type N/A if not applicable

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Bureau Director		6/30/14
Kurt Thiede, Administrator		7/2/14
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		7/16/14

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 23, 2014

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp

SUBJECT: Green Bay Planning Group Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

I recommend that the Natural Resources Board approve the Master Plan for the Green Bay Planning Group (GBPG). This plan outlines our land management and public use goals for Department-owned properties located along the west shore of Green Bay in Marinette, Oconto, and Brown counties. Electronic versions of all the Master Plan documents may be viewed online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/GreenBay/>

The GBPG project includes 12 named properties and various other state-owned parcels (Scattered Fishery Habitat; Statewide Wildlife Habitat; Statewide Public Access; and transferred DOT wetland mitigation). The Department initiated the master planning process for the GBPG with a public input process during the months of March and April, 2013. A public meeting was held on March 27, 2013 in Oconto at which the public was invited to provide input into the planning process and comment on preliminary planning documents. Comments from this public input process, the Regional and Property Analysis, and technical input from Department staff were among the considerations that guided the planning team in the development of the proposed plan.

Recommendations in the proposed plan collectively seek to enhance the experience of property users and increase the potential to sustainably manage wildlife populations. Proposed habitat management is intended to improve productivity of game and non-game species with an emphasis on maintaining and enhancing coastal wetlands and associated aquatic habitats. The recommended project boundary adjustments are intended to encompass lands already owned by the Department, improve the accessibility of the properties for citizens of all capabilities, improve the efficiency of our management efforts, and protect the properties from encroachment by incompatible land uses. Our approach builds upon existing partnerships with other agencies, private landowners, local governments, sporting groups and NGOs.

Management highlights of the proposed Master Plan include:

- Continued emphasis on management of coastal wetlands, both open and forested, including marshes, shrub swamps, lowland hardwoods, and riverine habitats.
- Maintenance and improvement of shallow wetlands, streams and other waterways, and a hydrologic connection to Green Bay to provide and enhance spawning and nursery habitat for native fish such as Northern pike.
- Protection of high-quality and regionally rare natural communities such as Sedge Meadow, Emergent Marsh, Floodplain Forest, Great Lakes Beach, and Northern Dry-mesic Forest that harbor rare species.
- Continued emphasis on traditional outdoor recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- Improved wildlife and fishery property accessibility for users with limited mobility.
- Continued and expanded collaborations with other agencies, private landowners, local governments, and conservation organizations on shared stewardship and management goals.
- Proposed boundary modifications of 359 acres of contractions and 3,187 acres of expansions, 981 acres of which are already in Department ownership.

The Department released the GBPG Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment for public review on January 13, 2014, with the comment period extending to February 28. A public meeting was held in Oconto on January 29 at which the public was invited to view informational displays and draft plan documents, hear a short presentation, ask questions during a formal question-and-answer session, speak one-on-one with Department staff, and provide their comments on the draft plan. Approximately 75 people attended the public meeting. The Department received both verbal and written comments, submitted before, during, and after the public meeting. Fifty-one written comments were received.

The majority of comments focused on specific issues. Several of these were merely requesting clarification or more detail. General feedback was mostly positive, indicating support of the overall plan direction from individuals, including landowners, and from external partner groups (The Nature Conservancy; the Ruffed Grouse Society). The Department offered responses to many of the comments submitted, both those expressed verbally during public meetings and those received in writing. Below is an overview of major comments received, grouped by general topic.

- **Resource management** comments included:
 - Concerns about fish passage barriers on the Pecor Point Unit.
 - Management concerns on the Long Tail Unit, including disruption of colonial nesting bird habitat due to recreational use, disruption of migratory waterfowl concentrations on Dead Horse Bay by recreational boating, and control of invasive species on Long Tail Point.
 - One comment opposing *Phragmites* control efforts and another comment in favor.
 - One comment expressing concern over the balance between natural resource protection and development for access and public use.
- **Recreation and public use management** comments included:
 - Support for proposed improvements to the Badger Gift Lands shooting range.
 - Concerns from neighboring landowners about hunting and access issues on the Charles Pond and Oconto Marsh Units.
 - Concerns from local government representatives about the location of a parking area on the Sensiba Unit that serves as overflow parking for a nearby county-operated boat landing.
 - Requests on several units or in general for non-motorized uses including cross-country skiing, hiking, paddling, biking, photography, bird-watching and other wildlife viewing, and swimming.
 - One request for a snowmobile trail on the Sensiba Unit.
 - A request to re-name the Little Tail and Tibbet-Suamico Units.
 - Both support for and opposition to the proposed snowmobile trail on the Peshtigo Harbor Unit.
- **Boundary modification** comments included:
 - General support for proposed boundary modifications.
 - Specific support for boundary modifications proposed for the Peshtigo Harbor, Oconto Marsh, Pecor Point, and Pensaukee Units.
 - A request that the DNR buy agricultural land along the west shore and convert it to a use that ends application of harmful soil amendments contributing to poor Green Bay water quality.
 - Concerns that additional acquisitions will result in a tax burden for local governments because PILT payments will be lower than what was paid prior to state acquisition and lower than if the parcel was developed.
 - A request from The Nature Conservancy that the DNR consider additional expansions to capture areas identified by TNC as having the highest value for wetland protection and restoration.

The attached public comment summary provides additional details, including responses to comments.

GREEN BAY PLANNING GROUP MASTER PLAN DRAFT MASTER PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS FOR DRAFT PLAN

The DNR released the Green Bay Planning Group (GBPG) Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment for public review on January 13, 2014, with the comment period extending to February 28. A public meeting was held in late January at which the public was invited to view informational displays and draft plan documents, hear a short presentation, ask questions during a formal question-and-answer session, speak one-on-one with Department staff, and provide their comments on the draft plan. Approximately 75 people attended the public meeting. The Department received verbal and written comments, submitted before, during, and after the public meeting. A total of 51 written comments were received. The public involvement timeline is summarized in the table below.

Chronology of Public Involvement.

Date	Contact
January 13, 2014	Draft master plan released to the public. Invitation to public meeting sent to stakeholder list via GovDelivery bulletin and regular mail. Planning documents made available on WDNR Web site.
January 14, 2014	Statewide WDNR news release sent out announcing public meeting.
January 16, 2014	Hard copies of draft master plan sent to WDNR Green Bay and Peshtigo Service Centers, and Peshtigo, Oconto, and Green Bay (Weyers-Hilliard Branch) public libraries.
January 29, 2014	Public meeting held at Oconto High School, Oconto, 6:00-8:00 pm.
February 28, 2014	End of public comment period.
April, 2014	Public comment summary posted on WDNR Web site.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT PLAN

The majority of verbal and written comments received on the draft master plan were focused on particular issues, largely related to recreation management and public use, resource management, or boundary modifications and acquisition. Several comments provided feedback on the format of the public meeting or had to do with topics not directly related to the draft plan. *Comments not requiring specific responses are summarized below, grouped by topic area.*

General Feedback

- Agreement with overall plan direction as summarized during public meeting presentation
- Impression, after attending both the March, 2013 public meeting [for plan initiation and Regional & Property Analysis], that the plan is proposing very little that is different in terms of management.

GBPG Master Plan: Draft Master Plan Public Comment Summary

- Other than the snowmobile trail proposal, the GBPG plan is great.
- I am strongly in favor of preserving the west shore of Green Bay, one of the largest relatively undeveloped areas within the Great Lakes. Expanding government protection would ensure that it remains undisturbed for generations.
- The plan is well written and does a good job overall of balancing resource protection, management, and public recreation.
- I support the overall land management objectives and prescriptions.
- The Master Plan team members developed a thorough and commendable draft plan. It highlights the regional and global significance of the natural resources found on Green Bay's west shore and the ecological and recreational importance of DNR's protected lands. The Nature Conservancy values our partnership with the Department, especially in working together in this landscape to conserve the biodiversity of Green Bay. We look forward to seeing the final plan and continuing to work together to protect the lands and waters that make Wisconsin special.
- The Ruffed Grouse Society looks forward to continuing our cooperative relationship with the WI DNR regarding the properties highlighted in this Draft Master Plan.

General Resource Management

- **Refuges for migrating waterfowl:** DNR should create refuges on the bay for migrating waterfowl so they can't be disturbed.
- **Migratory bird stopover:** The importance of the Green Bay West Shore Wildlife Area as important stopover habitat for migratory bird species needs additional emphasis.
- **Early-successional habitat:** The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) has supported alder thicket management for woodcock and other species through funding and equipment. RGS recommends continuing management for this and other young forest types (e.g., aspen, oak) and expanding it to other sites and offers help and assistance if needed. RGS supports the Young Forest Initiative demonstration area on the Peshtigo Harbor Unit and suggests that an informational brochure be developed to describe the practices that are occurring on this tract.

General Recreation and Public Use

- **Access/resource protection balance:** There is a need to balance public access with keeping land in a natural setting, but development should be light: limit number and extent of boardwalks; roads and parking areas are necessary but try to keep them away from private property boundaries where conflicts with inconsiderate users of public land can impact the quality of living near a natural setting; do not develop any trails.
- **Request for silent sports:** Interest in developing additional opportunities for hiking, biking, paddling, birding, and photography. The area has tremendous potential for outstanding birding. Increasing opportunity for these activities would make the area a destination for tourism.
- **Support for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses:** Due to their location along Green Bay and relative close proximity to large population centers, these areas provide excellent recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts, both consumptive and non-consumptive. Ruffed Grouse Society members spend many

hours recreating on these areas each year. Many individuals use the Peshtigo Harbor lands close to town for hunting-dog training and exercise both in the spring prior to the spring/summer closure period and again in summer and early fall, a practice we hope will continue. We also support maintaining areas as walk-in only areas for the hunters or wildlife viewers who desire this condition.

- **Badger Gift Lands:**
 - Shooting range improvements should be a priority.
 - Supportive of Special Management Area for maintaining/improving the shooting range.
 - Pleased to see the Badger Gift Lands designated as Habitat Management Area and attached to Peshtigo Harbor for management purposes.
- **Peshtigo Harbor**
 - Interpretive signs along the Woods Road Ski Trail are in disrepair and need to be replaced.
 - Parking areas/vehicle turn-arounds at the end of Pond Road, Johnson Road, and both ends of Woods Road need to be expanded to accommodate several additional vehicles.
- **Oconto Marsh:**
 - Requests for wildlife watching; interpretive signs; parking lot improvements; benches; disabled access that minimizes habitat destruction.
 - Request for advertising to surrounding communities about bird-watching and hiking opportunities available at Oconto Marsh; also, signage.
- **Charles Pond:** Clarification on public access.
- **Sensiba:** Request for cross-country ski trails.

General Boundary Modifications and Acquisition

- **Comments in favor of proposed boundary modifications:**
 - Go for it!
 - I am delighted to see west shore coastal habitat being protected and the more land included under such management, the better.
 - I am very supportive of this.
 - The Ruffed Grouse Society supports reasonable boundary expansions in these areas that would help address property goals and objectives. However, land expansions should also consider the costs of owning and maintaining these properties.
- **Purchase of agricultural land:** While understanding the restrictions DNR places on buying agricultural land, most of the ag land on the west shore is drained wetland that never fulfilled the potential of productive farmland. Land currently maintained in agriculture is low-quality and requires significant soil amendments to produce decent crops. The DNR should seek to acquire land along the west shore that is currently in agriculture whenever such land becomes available, and convert those acres to a use that stabilizes the soil and ends the application of harmful soil amendments that contribute to the pollution load now adversely affecting Green Bay water quality.
- **Approval of the Peshtigo Harbor proposed boundary modifications:**

- I am pleased to see the Badger Gift Lands attached to Peshtigo Harbor for management.
- The Nature Conservancy fully supports the boundary expansion to encompass lands that could buffer and expand the forest at the Bloch Oxbow SNA.
- **Approval of the Oconto Marsh proposed boundary modification:** The west shore of Green Bay is extremely important for migratory birds; the less fracturing of land, the better for wildlife.
- **Acquisition request:** Submission of a proposal for the DNR to consider buying the Oconto Marsh golf course.
- **Approval of Pecor Point proposed boundary modification:** Neighboring landowner approves of proposed boundary expansion to encompass the Sikma DOT mitigation site and Beaver Meadow spawning marsh to increase management efficiency and long-term water management for Northern pike spawning.
- **Approval of Pensaukee proposed boundary modification:** Landowner within the proposed boundary contraction area for the Pensaukee Unit favors the proposal because of poor public access potential in the contraction area.

Comments requiring specific responses are listed below, grouped by topic.

General Resource Management

- **Forest management on Bloch Oxbow SNA:** One comment expressed concern with setting aside the entire Bloch Oxbow SNA as an ecological reference area. The author supports protecting unique forest resources on this property (and notes that the nearby Peshtigo Harbor Lacustrine Forest SNA also offers protection for unique forest types) but would like to see portions of it, including bottomland hardwood, swamp hardwood, and oak types, authorized for modified timber management.

Response: Management of the Bloch Oxbow SNA will generally be passive and will allow natural processes to proceed. It is recognized that the composition of forest stands may change under this management scenario. The plan contains provisions that allow for active management under certain conditions.

- **Drainage on “Muck Road”:** This refers to an old drainage ditch along N. Park Avenue Road on the Oconto Marsh Unit. One comment indicated that DNR should dredge this ditch so that water would drain more quickly from neighboring private lands.

Response: The DNR does not typically clear out old constructed drainage ditches on this landscape, which is naturally wet and poorly draining, unless they present a barrier to fish passage. Fish surveys conducted on this unit have not identified fish passage barriers, so there are no plans to dredge this ditch.

- **Fish passage barriers on Pecor Point:** One comment stated that a ditch along the west side of Dittman Lane is filled in and not connected to the Beaver Meadow Creek spawning marsh nor to ditches on the other side of CTH S and north of Pecor Point Lane. This ditch should be cleaned out and maintained so that fish can move

along it and have access to other ditches and wetlands. Also, two culverts on Hugo Lane are too small and/or damaged to allow fish to pass.

Response: DNR Fisheries and Wildlife staff will investigate barriers to fish passage in this area; at this time we are not aware of any, as documented in a recent connectivity study. Fish access to Beaver Meadow Creek spawning marsh and north/west of CTH S from the bay are via different routes; each is believed to be functioning. Regarding the culverts on Hugo Lane, previous field surveys by Fisheries staff indicated that these culverts were passable by fish. Additionally, the Department recently became aware that the Town intends to replace culverts in this area. Department staff will assist in the proper placement of these structures.

- **Phragmites control:** Two comments raised concerns over *Phragmites*. One comment expressed concern with *Phragmites* control efforts and with the herbicide being used to treat it. *Phragmites* is here and established now, and it provides wildlife habitat. It should not be treated. Another comment expressed support for invasives control, especially for *Phragmites*, but indicated concern that large areas of untreated *Phragmites* or even areas treated with herbicide but left standing could represent a wildfire hazard.

Response: Invasive species are a threat to quality native wildlife habitat and ecological integrity. Control of invasive species is and will remain an integral part of management on the west shore. DNR will follow all regulatory and public noticing requirements when conducting invasives treatments. All management options are considered in native habitat restoration efforts. Specifically regarding wildfire hazard mitigation, control methods often include mowing or shearing of standing dead canes after treatment. In addition to facilitating future treatment, this might reduce the danger of wildfire.

General Recreation and Public Use

- **Hunting/access issues, Oconto Marsh and Charles Pond Unit:** Several comments expressed concern from neighboring landowners with hunting and access-related issues on these two units. One comment indicated that rifles should not be allowed for deer hunting on Oconto Marsh. One comment indicated that public access should not be allowed on Charles Pond because it is too fragile and access is currently poor. Another comment expressed concerns with hunting in the northwest corner of the property.

Response: Regarding the use of rifles for deer hunting, the safety record for shotguns and rifles is similar. State law allows deer hunting with rifles statewide. Regarding public access and hunting on Charles Pond and all the properties in the Green Bay Planning Group, these properties were acquired to provide wildlife and fish habitat and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities, primarily for (though not limited to) hunting, fishing, and trapping. DNR will continue to make these properties available for all the uses for which they were acquired and to improve access as is possible. Discharge of firearms within 100 yards of a building devoted

to human occupancy is illegal. Maintenance of proper property signage, both on public and private lands, can also help address this issue.

- **‘Heise’ property, Pecor Point:** This refers to a recently acquired parcel in the northeast portion of the Pecor Point Unit. One comment inquired what the plans are for this parcel and indicated a wish to see non-motorized access for ice fishing, canoes and kayaks.

Response: This parcel is a mix of open coastal wetland and lowland brush. It is classified as a Habitat Management Area and will be managed according to the prescriptions appropriate to those cover types. This specific parcel does not touch any roads and there are no plans to develop any access other than walk-in access at this time. Pecor Point Lane is just to the south of this parcel and is currently being used for non-motorized access.

- **Parking area on Sikma mitigation site, Pecor Point Unit:** One comment requested that the parking area on the Sikma DOT mitigation site adjacent to the Pecor Point Unit be expanded for wildlife watching, as the current situation is unsafe.

Response: The Sikma site is currently owned by DOT. Any changes to the parking area along CTH S would be their decision. However, DOT has expressed interest in transferring this property to DNR. In that event, DNR will explore ways to improve access to that parcel for public recreation.

- **Request for a snowmobile trail on Sensiba:** One comment requested a snowmobile trail that would provide access to Green Bay.

Response: The DNR is already accommodating snowmobile traffic on Green Bay from the Cat Island chain off the Peats Lake Unit. Near Sensiba, access to the bay may be possible from the Suamico River or from the Village of Suamico park east of Sensiba, off Sunset Beach Lane.

- **Request to rename the Little Tail and Tibbet-Suamico Units:** One comment requested that DNR rename these two units. The names are confusing to the public because they imply public ownership of privately-owned lands and therefore subject the public to prosecution for criminal trespass. Instead of confusing Wisconsin citizens, the plan should change the Unit names to ones that promote easy identification of location and access. The Little Tail name should be changed to Brown Road Unit or Northeast Suamico Unit. The Tibbett-Suamico Unit should be changed to Tibbett - Little Suamico Unit.

Response: The names of these two units are consistent with the naming convention used for other units within the Green Bay West Shore Wildlife Area and, indeed, for many other DNR-owned lands. Property names often are based on geographically distinct, recognizable, and commonly and/or publically-referred-to local landscape features or areas. These are general references only and do not claim nor intend to

portray public ownership or public access. The Department is willing to consider a separate more locally-targeted process to gather public input on the issue of re-naming of units.

- **Beach/swimming area:** Request that a *Phragmites*-infested shoreline area be cleared for a beach or swimming area. This is a resource that is greatly lacking on the west shore; the only such area I'm aware of is on Long Tail island and that is only accessible by boat and possibly too close to effluent from Fox River. There are suitable areas between Suamico and Oconto but they have been overrun with invasive grasses and lack public access.

Response: There is a swimming beach available at City Park, a City of Oconto park, located just south of Oconto at 5182 CTH N. Swimming access is also available at the Village of Suamico park on Sunset Beach Lane adjacent to the Sensiba Unit.

- **Non-consumptive uses:** One comment asked how properties could be used by those who are not hunters or anglers. Another comment encouraged the DNR to consider the increasing popularity of some of the non-consumptive uses referred to as a "secondary recreational focus" in the draft plan (e.g., bird-watching), to look at future recreational use trends, and to consider how GBPG recreational management goals can meet current as well as future needs.

Response: The GBPG properties are open to many non-consumptive uses. Some examples include hiking, paddling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, berry-picking, and wildlife viewing. DNR considered current as well as future recreational trends in the development of the master plan (refer to the Regional and Property Analysis (WDNR 2013)). In recognition of the increasing popularity of activities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, and cross-country skiing, the plan calls for providing additional opportunities for these activities on several properties, including the Badger Gift Lands, Peshtigo Harbor, Oconto Marsh, Sensiba, and Long Tail.

Peshtigo Harbor Snowmobile Trail

- Numerous comments were received regarding the proposed snowmobile trail on the Peshtigo Harbor Unit. Comments in favor of the trail stated that: a connection to Green Bay would enhance access to and enjoyment of existing trail networks in Marinette and Oconto counties; this trail is the best way to access Green Bay because other options (town roads, private land) do not offer ideal conditions and present safety concerns; the trail would contribute to winter tourism and the local economy; it would not represent any additional cost to the state, as the local snowmobile club would be responsible for all costs associated with establishing and maintaining the trail; it would only be used during adequate snow conditions; it would have minimal habitat impacts because it would traverse such a small portion of a very large property and would use an existing service road; it would overlap only a very small portion of the Woods Road Ski Trail and that these existing users could use the trail cooperatively with snowmobilers such that conflicts would not

arise; grooming of the trail would make it more attractive for other users; non-motorized trail users also have the Hemlock Curve Trail.

Comments opposing the proposed trail expressed the following concerns: overlapping an existing ski trail is not a good idea – the machines will take over and skiers will lose out; snowmobile clubs are seeking to expand into too many places; snowmobiles would conflict with skiing, snowshoeing, and bird watching use of the Woods Road Ski Trail; the noise and gas pollution will disrupt the peace and serenity of Peshtigo Harbor; snowmobiles should not be allowed in areas where there are wetlands; a snowmobile trail is not compatible with maintaining the integrity of the shore zone; snowmobiling is not a traditional outdoor activity; access to Green Bay is available elsewhere (county parks; private land). One comment suggested that the trail be extended south along private lands to either Drys Road or Spitzmacher Road before entering the Peshtigo Harbor property in order to avoid overlapping with the Woods Road Ski Trail.

Response: A Peshtigo Harbor snowmobile trail has been approved for inclusion in the master plan. In evaluating this request, DNR considered the following: the trail will traverse a very small portion of this large property; snowmobilers and other winter trail users (skiers, snowshoers, etc.) successfully co-exist on trails throughout the state; a snowmobile trail that is appropriately sited, maintained, and used should not conflict with other existing uses of the property; the balance of comments received on this topic was in favor of the trail. DNR also considered recent statutory language (23.116(3), Wisconsin Statutes) that directs the Department to evaluate motorized access on all DNR lands. DNR will work with the local snowmobile club to establish a trail agreement that addresses establishment and maintenance responsibilities, routing and safety concerns, etc.

Sensiba Unit Infrastructure

- **Overflow parking area:** Comments from two local government representatives expressed dissatisfaction over the location of the overflow parking area on Sunset Beach Road which serves a nearby county-owned boat landing. The overflow parking area is too far away and people have to walk along the edge of road to get back and forth to this parking area. The DNR should provide additional parking directly across the street from the boat landing by filling in a small amount of wetland there. Wetlands are already being destroyed in the Sensiba dike reconstruction project. The DNR should meet with the Village of Suamico to discuss these issues.

Response: The DNR is taking steps to improve the Sunset Beach Road parking area in order to mutually benefit neighboring landowners and public access to both the DNR land and the county/village facilities. A new path has been constructed to link the DNR parking area and Village of Suamico facilities. With this new path, people no longer have to walk along the road. There are also plans to add a footbridge from the dike top/path to shorten this route. The DNR does not intend to construct a parking area across from the boat landing due to wetland filling concerns. Pre-

existing dikes were recently redesigned to restore water and fish management ability, among other ecologically-based intentions. As stated in the master plan, the DNR currently is working and will continue to work with the Village of Suamico and with Brown County on parking configuration and acceptable use issues for the Sunset Beach Road parking area and on developing additional recreational opportunities on the Sensiba Unit.

- **Main dike:** One comment stated that the main dike at Sensiba, constructed in 1959, was poorly engineered. It cut the marsh off from natural water flows and destroyed fish spawning habitat. Later, it was armored with rip-rap. What is being done to fix this dike?

Response: A main dike extending from the north end of Sunset Beach Lane for approximately 1/10th mile was constructed with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers consent and with sound ecological wetland management intentions. As stated in the master plan, in the Sensiba property description, the main dike has had to be repaired over the years due to breeches and flood damage caused by high Lake Michigan water levels in the late 1970s and 1980s. The current more extensive wetland restoration and dike reconstruction project is addressing issues of hydrology, water flow, and fish spawning habitat. All work ever conducted at Sensiba has been properly permitted and approved. The current project included collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy.

Management of Long Tail Point

- One comment expressed various concerns with management and public use on and around Long Tail Point on the Long Tail Unit. One concern is with recreational uses on the shore/beaches on the eastern side of Long Tail Point, including foot traffic and dogs, which have disrupted colonial nesting birds such as common and Forster's terns. The DNR should set aside certain areas as no-disturbance areas during the nesting season, as they do at Whitefish Dunes State Park, and preferably fence them off but at the least use signage and enforce them. Another concern is motorboat use on Dead Horse Bay during spring waterfowl migration. Dead Horse Bay often becomes ice-free sooner than other parts of Green Bay because of its shallow depth and dark bottom and is protected from storms by the orientation of Long Tail Point. Because of this, waterfowl congregate in large numbers to take advantage of relatively calm, ice-free waters. However, boaters can also use this area earlier and earlier in the spring and high-speed personal watercraft completely disrupt the rafts of waterfowl. DNR should designate Dead Horse Bay as a migrating waterfowl refuge with a "slow no wake" designation except for a prescribed channel. This would separate waterfowl from watercraft. DNR should be able to get their boats in the water as early as the recreational boaters do in order to enforce this. A third concern is with habitat management on Long Tail Point. Burning and aerial spraying to control invasive species have killed many trees that had become established, including a cottonwood that had an active eagle nest near the old lighthouse. The DNR should let natural succession proceed.

Response: The Department will consider these recommendations. There may be opportunities to protect sensitive bird use/nesting areas. The DNR does have Administrative Code authority (NR 15.03(2)) to establish no-entry wildlife refuge areas in lower Green Bay by posting them but has not pursued this option due to lack of public support. In addition, law enforcement ability is limited in this remote location and the DNR has had difficulty retaining educational signage in other similar areas. Regarding Dead Horse Bay, the DNR currently has no authority to control or manage access. ‘Slow no wake’ zones can be established only by local municipalities, not by the DNR. In addition, Green Bay is a federal waterway and any changes in boat traffic would have to be approved by federal authorities. Regarding vegetation management on Long Tail Point, the DNR generally is in favor of natural succession in native community management. However, non-native invasive species disrupt normal successional pathways and threaten native habitats. These threats can occur rapidly and be very costly and difficult or impossible to contain if not addressed with aggressive, persistent control efforts. All management actions are conducted after public review, permitting, and under well-managed conditions. Fire is indeed one of nature’s management tools. Some trees have died on the Point but others have persisted. Bald eagles nested successfully on Long Tail Point in 2012 and if the current nest tree has been lost, it is not unlikely that the pair will build in one of the other trees available.

Public Access/Resource Protection Balance

- One comment expressed concern that development for increased public access can lead to degradation of natural resources and values of public land, citing examples such as littering/dumping on public lands along roads or in parking areas, and asked how the master plan was addressing this.

Response: The DNR recognizes the need to balance development and resource protection and strives to achieve this balance on the lands it manages. Each master planning effort examines and analyzes both the ecological and recreational contexts of the properties it covers. The planning process considers characteristics such as presence of rare species, habitats, or features, management opportunities, current public uses, current and future recreational trends, location of regional population centers, and development potential, in order to determine the best ecological and recreational “niche” for the properties and strike that balance between natural resource protection/management and human enjoyment.

Plan Implementation

- One comment inquired whether this master plan came about because there is some new/special funding source to pay for it.

Response: Development of master plans for DNR lands is required by state law. Plan implementation depends on staffing and funding allocations that are set by a process outside of the master plan. Capital and operational funding for the DNR is established by the state legislature. Funds for land acquisition, resource management, and recreational development can come from a variety of federal, state,

and private sources. Fiscal-year baseline budget allotments generally cover the standard annual management costs of each property addressed by this plan. The master plan establishes a management direction for the properties and clarifies the resource and recreational management activities to be pursued, allowing available funding sources to be targeted more efficiently for implementation and collaborations pursued with appropriate partners in order to achieve shared goals.

Boundary Modifications

- **Private property concerns:** Various comments were seeking clarification on what it means for a private parcel to be within a project boundary and expressed concerns over how proposed expansions would affect private landowners, including disliking seeing lines drawn around private property on a map and fearing condemnation or infringement of private property rights.

Response: As stated in the master plan and during the public meeting presentation, the DNR purchases land only from willing sellers. Being within a project boundary means only that the DNR may be interested in buying a property should the owner ever choose to sell it. The DNR may view the property as having added ecological value on a landscape scale because of its proximity to current public ownership. Being within a project boundary does not change or limit private property rights; does not change existing zoning or allowable uses of a property; does not limit how an owner can use or manage their property; does not provide access to a private parcel; and does not affect who an owner can sell their property to.

- **Payments in lieu of taxes (PILT):** Several comments indicated concerns with or opposition to proposed boundary expansions and potential new acquisitions because of PILT payments. These comments expressed the opinion that public lands are a tax burden for townships because the DNR pays a lower rate of taxes on a parcel than what was paid prior to the state acquiring it (e.g., former agricultural land) and that PILT payments are much lower than what a township would receive had the parcel been developed.

Response: The issue of PILT payments falls outside of the master planning process and of this particular master plan. More information on how these payments are calculated is available on the DNR Website at <http://dnr.wi.gov>, keyword search "PILT".

- **Request for additional expansions:** While the plan focuses on maintaining and enhancing current landholdings with minimal boundary expansions, The Nature Conservancy encourages the DNR to reconsider incorporating additional land protection opportunities. With input from many conservation partners including DNR, The Nature Conservancy developed an online mapping tool for Green Bay that identifies the highest valued wetland protection and restoration opportunities, along with associated upland habitat. Many of those priorities are not included in the draft plan. We encourage DNR staff to utilize this tool and add some of these important areas to the GBPG project boundary. The boundary expansion should be

strategic and reflect ecological needs and opportunities. It should also consider this plan is meant to cover GBPG actions for the next 15-20 years.

Response: The DNR recognizes that many opportunities exist for wetland protection and restoration, and very much appreciates the work that already has been done through past partnerships. Expanding collaborations with partners, stakeholders, and landowners can help meet shared resource management and recreational goals through management agreements, working lands initiatives, and other creative leveraging of resources. The current focus for expansions is on the most critical or logical adjacent parcels that best help to advance the Department's local, regional, or statewide recreational and resource management priorities.