

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item**

SUBJECT: Request approval of Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties Master Plan (includes Crex Meadows, Fish L., Amsterdam Sloughs WAS)
FOR: January 2016 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Diane Brusoe, Property Planning Section Chief

SUMMARY:

The draft Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties master plan is a revision of several outdated master plans for 48,000 acres in Burnett County: 1) Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, 2) Fish Lake Wildlife Area and 3) Amsterdam Sloughs Wildlife Area.

Although wetlands cover > 50% of the properties, 90 miles of roads provide abundant public access. Waterfowl hunters come to these properties out of long-established family tradition. Thousands of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and sandhill cranes depend on this habitat. Oak/pine barrens habitat management provides countless recreational benefits from this rare ecotype in North America. Nearly every mammal in Wisconsin can be hunted or trapped here.

These properties are integral to providing an important recreational and economic benefit to the region. They are significant destinations for hunters, trappers and bird watchers who enjoy wetlands and barrens wildlife with magnificent landscape views. The Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center, supported by the Friends of Crex, has well over 14,000 annual visitors; however hundreds of thousands of visitors use these properties for wildlife-based recreation.

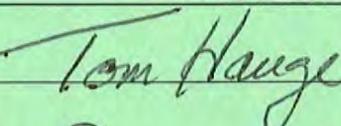
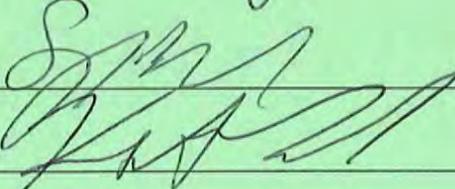
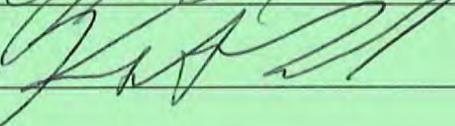
Real estate recommendations include project boundary and acquisition goal changes as described in the attached background memo and draft master plan. Overall the recommendations result in decreasing the project boundary acreage for each of the three properties. Crex Meadows seeks some internal boundary shifting and an acquisition goal increase of approximately 1,300 acres to allow the department to complete the project. In part, this will help to protect the border of its landmark: Phantom Flowage. Amsterdam Sloughs seeks a boundary shift to potentially acquire a new half-mile of road access. Decreases in the acquisition goals are requested for Fish Lake and Amsterdam Sloughs wildlife areas to equal the proposed decreases in project boundaries.

The plan references a partnership of collaborators in the region (Appendix D) whose proactive work will prevent further species/habitat decline and alleviate potential federal listing of several wildlife species. Tribal governments were engaged and public input occurred at two open house meetings that included public comment periods. Constructive feedback was received along with overall satisfaction with this plan. Four letters of support are attached.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties Master Plan per NR 44.04(3), Wis. Adm. Code, including project boundary and acquisition goal changes.

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

- Background memo
- Master plan documents may be viewed online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/> 'Glacial lake Grantsburg master plan'
- Crex Meadows Wildlife Area Self-Guided Auto Tour (visit: www.crexmeadows.org)

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Wildlife Management Bureau Director		12/14/15
Sanjay Olson, Land Division Administrator		12/20/15
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		1/6/16

cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 9, 2015

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp - Secretary, Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Draft Master Plan for the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties

The Department is recommending approval of a revised master plan for a combined group of properties that total 48,000 acres. Distinguished and frequented for their significant wetlands and oak/pine barrens, they are: 1) Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, 2) Fish Lake Wildlife Area, and 3) Amsterdam Sloughs Wildlife Area. The resulting draft Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties Master Plan describes how these wildlife areas will be managed with resulting recreational benefits for the public. Their location is best described as adjacent to the Village of Grantsburg in Burnett Co., in the St. Croix River watershed, and within the Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape.

The popularity of these properties is *international* in scope due to their spectacular unobstructed vistas, abundant recreation opportunities, and great diversity of wildlife and plant species. The public responded in great favor overall to the planning efforts and will be well-served by this master plan.

Background

The area is a remnant of a vast glacial lake formed as the Wisconsin glacier blocked the St. Croix River. As the ice dam melted, it left behind shallow lakes and extensive marshes; these are some of the largest sedge marshes in the upper Midwest and provide critical open habitat for area-sensitive species. Crex Carpet Company (1912) owned and harvested sedges from this area for the carpet/furniture industry until bankruptcy (market changed to linoleum floors, plus Great Depression). Federal financing helped the state purchase tax delinquent lands to restore wetlands and uplands for public wildlife areas. An impressive diversity of birds (many rare) exists due to the abundance of large, high-quality wetland habitats for which these properties are managed. Connection to open upland grasslands and barrens makes this one of the premiere open landscapes in the entire state for birds.

Significance of Properties

These properties are integral to a growing ecotourism corridor from the Twin Cities, MN to Bayfield, WI, providing an important recreational and economic benefit to the region. They are *significant* wildlife area destinations for bird watchers, hunters and trappers that enjoy wetlands and barrens wildlife, with magnificent landscape views. With over 1.7 million residents participating, Wisconsin has the second most bird watchers in the United States. Approximately 75% of visitors come to view wildlife while at least 25% hunt, trap, and harvest wild rice, mushrooms, sage, and berries.

The Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center, supported in part by the Friends of Crex, has well over 14,000 annual visitors; a mere subset of the *hundreds of thousands* of visitors who use these properties. As the largest wildlife friends group, they established an endowment fund to provide

perpetual funding to support education and management, including LTE positions, supplies and land purchases.

Wetlands cover > 50% of the properties, however, 90 miles of roads provide abundant access. Waterfowl hunters come here following long-established family tradition. Thousands of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and sandhill cranes depend on this habitat. The adjacent oak/pine barrens management, of which prescribed fire and forestry practices are critical, provides great species diversity from this rare ecotype in North America. Nearly every mammal in Wisconsin can be hunted or trapped here. This fire-adapted system is dominated by grasses, shrubs (blueberries), and wildflowers among low-growing trees with scattered large trees.

Real Estate Recommendations

Proposed real estate modifications result in a net acreage reduction to each of the three project boundaries. Crex Meadows seeks some internal boundary shifting that includes: boundary contractions following land transfers with Governor Knowles State Forest and land trades with Burnett County Forest, and boundary expansions in other locations to protect Phantom Lake Flowage wildlife habitat, viewsheds and to improve public access. However, the current acquisition goal for Crex Meadows does not allow for completion of the project. To resolve this, the department is requesting an increase in acquisition goal to allow us to acquire the remaining acreage within the project boundary and complete the project. Decreases in acquisition goal are requested for Fish Lake and Amsterdam Sloughs wildlife areas to equal the proposed decreases in project boundaries. Refer to Maps C-5, D-5 and E-5.

Overview of Real Estate Recommendations for the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties:

	Crex Meadows WA	Amsterdam Sloughs WA	Fish Lake WA
DNR Managed Land	28,553 acres	5,052 acres	13, 649 acres
Project Boundary	32,921 acres	7,610 acres	14,115 acres
Proposed Project Boundary	32,397 acres	5,483 acres	14,075 acres
<i>Changes in project boundary</i>	<i>(524 acres)</i>	<i>(2,127 acres)</i>	<i>(40 acres)</i>
Acquisition Goal	31,094 acres	7,233 acres	14,124 acres
Proposed Acquisition Goal	32,397 acres	5,483 acres	14,075 acres
<i>Changes in acquisition goal</i>	<i>1,303 acres</i>	<i>(1750 acres)</i>	<i>(49 acres)</i>

Outreach

A regional partnership approach for barrens management is referenced in Appendix D, to encourage the innovative work in the region to prevent further species/habitat decline and alleviate potential federal listing of several wildlife species. The oak/pine barrens on these properties provide a rare, geographically restricted and globally imperiled habitat. Wisconsin has the most significant opportunity in North America to preserve, restore, and manage large-scale barrens communities. Conservation of this Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape habitat is vitally important to preserving its abundant diversity of flora and fauna.

Tribal governments and the public were involved via the DNR tribal liaison, and two public open house meetings held at critical times during plan development. The public demonstrated engagement via their attendance, supportive comments, letters, emails, and expressed overall satisfaction with this plan.

Chapter four of this master plan, in combination with chapters two, three and five, collectively constitutes an Environmental Analysis for this master plan. This meets the requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act and Chapter NR 150 of Wisconsin Administrative Code. No significant adverse environmental impacts are anticipated.

RECOMMENDATION: The department recommends Natural Resources Board approval of the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties Master Plan

Glacial Lake Grantsburg Properties Master Plan highlights include:

1. Partnership examples (p 10)
(Friends of Crex; Village of Grantsburg; Northwest WI Concentrated Employment Program; Burnett County Forestry)
2. Vision & Goals (p 14)
(Oak/pine barrens with abundant hunting, trapping, gathering, wildlife viewing, scenic vistas, outdoor classroom wildlife skills, education/conservation programs)
3. Habitat & Recreation Objectives/Prescriptions (p 18-29)
(Enhanced opportunities for hunting, trapping, wildlife watching and other recreational uses)
4. Road Management Plan & Public Vehicle Access (p 30-31; Appendix F; and maps C-2, D-2, E-2)
(~90 miles township, county, & DNR maintained access)
5. Real Estate Action Items (p 37; maps C-5, D-5, E-5)
(Boundary adjustments to protect Phantom Flowage, improve recreation access, and increase forestry and wildlife management program efficiency. Net boundary reduction.)
6. Management Area Objectives/Prescriptions (p 39-53; maps C-4, D-4, E-4)
7. Estimated New Development Costs. Table 4-1 (p 87)
(May be pursued in partnership with Friends of Crex)
8. Public Involvement Summary & Comments on Draft Plan (Chapter 6)
9. Appendix D: Crex-Namekagon Barrens Partnership Corridor (map F)
(Encourages continuation of the proactive management in the region)
10. Appendix E: Events, Workshops, Courses at Crex Meadows Wildlife Education & Visitor Center
11. Appendix F: Existing and Planned Recreation Management Infrastructure
(Just the big stuff; additional work described within general recreation prescriptions)
12. Crex Meadows Self-Guided Auto Tour (attached; or visit www.crexmeadows.org)

Community Involvement and Partnerships:

The Friends of Crex, Inc. established in 1984, is a dedicated volunteer group who serve as an informational resource for visitors and area landowners, with a vision of preserving the ecological integrity of the GLG properties. It is a non-profit corporation that provides volunteer and financial assistance needed to support the wildlife education program and management goals of these properties. For more information, visit www.crexmeadows.org.

The Village of Grantsburg is adjacent to Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. As part of Grantsburg's recent revitalization process, Crex Meadows is recognized as one of the main assets and attractions of the community. The tag line "Start Here" is being used by the Grantsburg Revitalization Organization to highlight visitors' opportunities to explore these wildlife areas and other abundant natural resources the region has to offer.

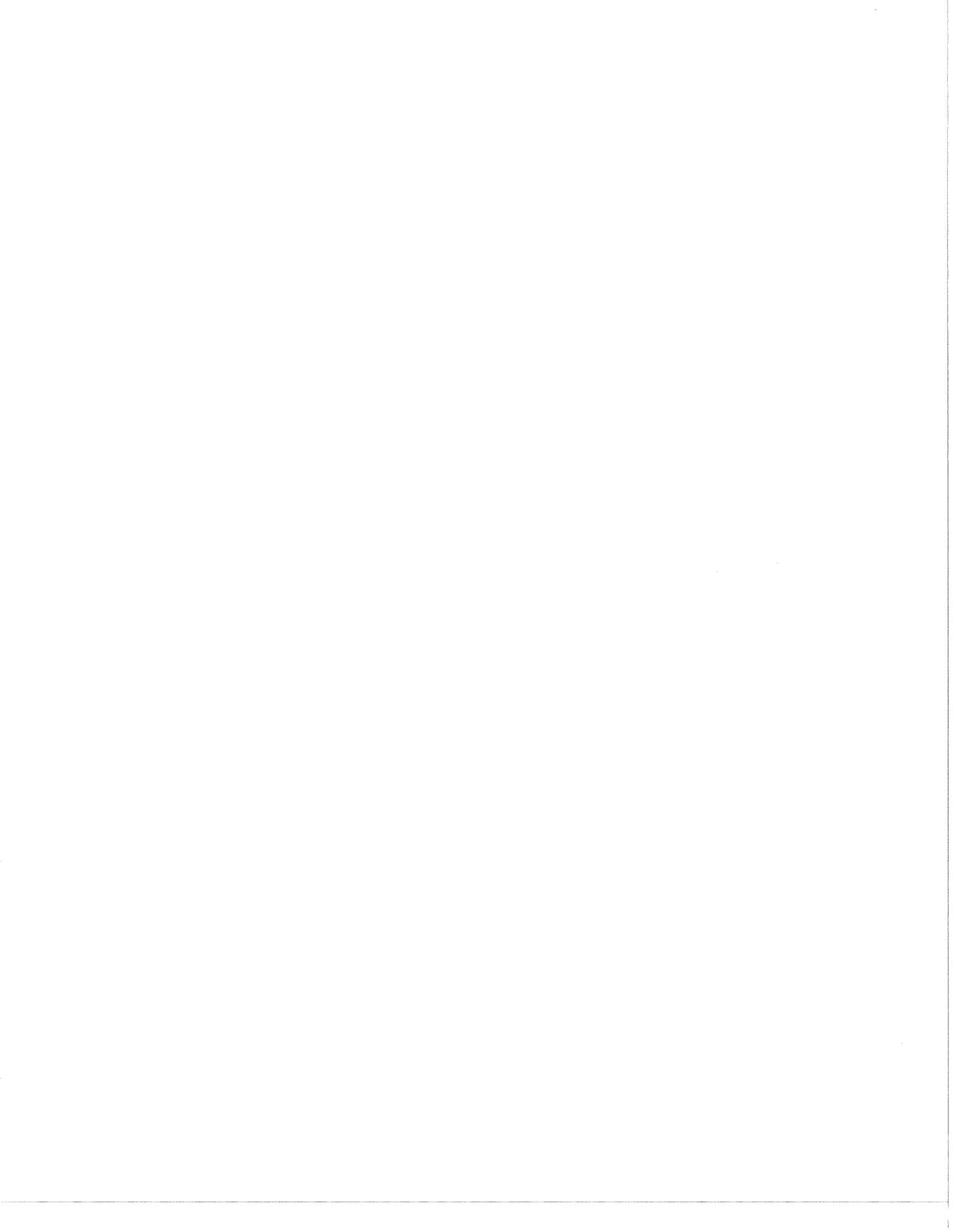
The Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program, Inc (CEP) administers the **Crex Meadows Youth Conservation Camp**, an eight-week summer program of two-week sessions. This unique and popular program provides regional high school students a chance to earn science or elective

credits towards graduation, while learning skills (trail maintenance, seed harvesting, bird banding, plant inventory) and earning a minimum wage working with DNR staff and CEP crew leaders. The program aims to build sustainable communities, while supporting education and the environment. For more information, visit www.nwcep.org.

Burnett County Forestry and the Crex-Namekagon Barrens Partners are allied in an innovative project intended to incorporate priorities of the Burnett County Forest Fifteen Year Plan, the Northwest Sands Landscape Level Management Plan, DNR Wildlife Action Plan, Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan, NW Sands Habitat Corridor Plan, and DNR Land Legacy Report. Collaboration is intended to offset dwindling wildlife populations, benefit outdoor recreationists, better address established conservation goals, enhance local partnerships, and support the local timber industry. (See Appendix D)

Partners collaborate to use forest management practices that create ecologically-based stepping stones of oak/pine barrens habitat to link wildlife habitat from Crex Meadows Wildlife Area to Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. Working together, the goal is to improve wildlife species abundance and diversity representative of barrens habitats, by connecting the remaining habitat fragments that are otherwise too small to support long-term species survival.

These proactive steps may prevent future federal management actions for species recovery. While management at Crex supports barrens wildlife such as sharp-tailed grouse and upland sandpiper, their spiraling population decline is likely caused by deteriorating habitat quantity and quality on surrounding lands, with the result being an inability of these lands to provide demographic or genetic support for the Crex subpopulation. Reconnecting sharp-tailed grouse subpopulations to insure their presence into the future requires their movement between areas to allow genetic exchange. The sharp-tailed grouse is an umbrella species. Management practices that ensure their survival will also conserve the full range of wildlife species associated with the barrens ecological landscape, including American woodcock, golden-winged warblers and whip-poor-wills, and possibly prevent federal listing of these species that are experiencing a significant population decline.





Village of Grantsburg

316 South Brad Street Grantsburg, Wisconsin 54840
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Phone: 715.463.2405 Fax: 715.463.5555
Webpage: www.grantsburgwi.com

November 11, 2015

Laurie Ross, Board Liaison
Office of Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Dear Ms. Ross:

As a neighbor to Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, the Village of Grantsburg supports the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Master Plan.

We recognize the contribution these wildlife areas make to the local economy and natural resources of the area. The natural resources found here play an important role in drawing visitors to the area and making our community a better place to live. The Village Board endorses the master plan and the boundary changes in the area around the Grantsburg Airport and Phantom Flowage.

If you have questions, please contact the Village Office at 715-463-2405.

Sincerely,

Glenn Rolloff
Village President



Workforce Development Specialists

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
422 3rd St. W, Suite 200
P.O. Box 616
Ashland, WI 54806

715.682.9141 PHONE
715.682.9181 FAX
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October 22, 2015

Laurie J. Ross, Board Liaison
Office of the Secretary, Wisconsin DNR

Dear Ms. Ross,

I am writing to express support for the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area's Glacial Lake Grantsburg Master Plan. As a proud partner of the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area's staff and programming we recognize their plan is favorable to not only the wildlife area, but also the community in general.

This support also encompasses a change to the boundaries of Crex, as it pertains to the lands around the Grantsburg Airport and south of the Phantom Lake Flowage.

If the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources would like additional information or comments about our support of this plan I can be reached at bgingras@nwcep.org or 715-682-9141.

Sincerely,

Bradford Gingras
Executive Director
CEP, Inc.

822 Moonbeam Road West
Hudson, WI 54016
715 497 4434
jmwaddell@baldwin-telecom.net

Laurie J. Ross, Board Liaison
Office of Secretary, Wisconsin DNR

Dear Ms. Ross:

I wish to give my support for the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Master Plan that is to be taken up by the Natural Resources Board in the near future. This plan has been crafted by DNR staff with input from Friends of Crex volunteers like me. Those who work at Crex Meadows are the people most knowledgeable about managing the area. Therefore, I support the hard work they have done in putting together the specifics for managing Glacial Lake Grantsburg, and I agree with their plan. My support includes increasing the boundary of Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, in particular the area around the airport and south of Phantom Flowage. This measure is important for the ongoing preservation of the wildlife that use Phantom Flowage.

Thank you for considering my remarks.

Jean Marie Waddell

October 28, 2015

Laurie J. Ross, Board Liaison
Office of the Secretary, Wisconsin DNR
PO Box 7921
Madison WI 53707-7921

Dear NRB members,

As a local citizen who makes my living from manufacturing in NW Wisconsin, I support the updated Crex Master Plan, including the boundary change (land around the airport and south of Phantom Flowage) and (especially!) the Crex-Namekagon Barrens Partnership Corridor. I feel:

1. The forest and barrens must be actively managed for wildlife (nature doing it by itself is no longer feasible due to human encroachment)
2. The DNR and their partners are well qualified to provide this management
3. Innovative forestry practices are key to this management
4. This management will have a positive increase in jobs for the area (logging, trucking, tourism)
5. Improved habitat = more tourist dollars spent in this area for wildlife related activities (hunting in particular)

I work for a fortune 200 worldwide company. Our facilities in NW Wisconsin (Grantsburg and Chetek) employ over 375 local people. I am the Division Manufacturing Engineering Manager, with staff reporting to me from multiple states. My budget for manufacturing equipment is multi-million dollars per year. I know how business works and I also know how important hunting and other outdoor activities are to so many of our employees, including myself (in 1998, I moved to Grantsburg from the Twin Cities just to be able to live in this area). The Plan can be a win-win situation!

Also, from the standpoint of my membership in the organizations listed below, I am also in favor of the Crex Master Plan and boundary change -- let me know how I can help!

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cole, P.E.
Wisconsin Sharptail Grouse Society B.O.D.
Crex Meadows Ducks Unlimited Committee Chair
Wisconsin Trappers Association member and Trapper Ed. Instructor
Wisconsin DNR Wingshooting certified instructor
Friends of Crex member and B.O.D.
Friends of Namekagon Barrens member
Ruffed Grouse Society member
Pheasants Forever member