

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

SUBJECT: Request approval to initiate the master planning process for the Totogatic Wildlife Area.

FOR: October 2016 Board meeting

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

SUMMARY:

The master planning process will focus on the Totogatic Wildlife Area located in Sawyer and Washburn counties. The department owns and operates a large dam (Wozny Dam) in Washburn County that creates a 1,200-acre flowage primarily in Sawyer County. This dam is on the Totogatic River, which was designated a Wild River in 2009 approximately 500 feet below this structure. This flowage is 100% within the project boundary of the Totogatic Wildlife Area. A 600-foot dike and 70-foot dam were constructed in 1953. The Dam was not designed to be a public bridge; yet this structure serves as a river crossing for public vehicles and serves as a major ATV/snowmobile route. There are dam safety directives to repair the dam; consultant cost estimates for this repair are approximately \$500K. Rebuilding the dam is estimated at \$1.3 million and removal of the dam and river restoration is estimated at \$300K. A gradual, partial drawdown of the flowage was initiated in 2014 and 2015 to reduce the safety risks associated with this aging structure.

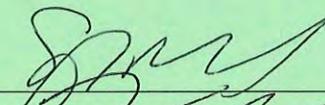
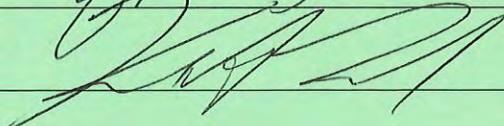
DNR began to proceed with planning for the abandonment/removal option with local town and county officials in 2014 and 2015. Shortly after that, public inquiries on these plans were received by a local legislator. In late 2015, multiple programs (Environmental Analysis, Fisheries, NHC, Waters, and Wildlife) were asked to provide their respective input to evaluate the benefits of the Wozny Dam and associated flowage. Internal feedback was received and the overall consensus was to restore the stream (dam removal) with careful consideration for protection of wild river attributes.

In response to the public concerns on the dam, a public scoping meeting was held in January 2016. At that meeting, DNR outlined preliminary dam options, discussed ecological and recreational issues and public comment was received. The department recommends approval to initiate the master planning process to more thoroughly evaluate potential management options and impacts.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval to initiate the master plan process for the Totogatic Wildlife Area

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background memo | <input type="checkbox"/> Type name of attachment if applicable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Type name of attachment if applicable | <input type="checkbox"/> Type name of attachment if applicable |

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Director, Bureau of Wildlife Management		10-10-16
Sanjay Olson, Administrator, Division of Fish, Wildlife & Parks		10-11-16
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		10-11-16

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 22, 2016

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp – Secretary, Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Requesting approval to initiate the master planning process for the Totogatic Wildlife Area.

Project Description

The department owns and operates the Wozny Road Dam on the Totogatic River, which creates a 1,200-acre flowage. This flowage is within the project boundary of the Totogatic Wildlife Area, located in Sawyer and Washburn counties. The dam was constructed in 1953 for waterfowl habitat enhancement.

Recent safety inspections have found the dam and dike in poor condition. The dam was not designed to be a public bridge and currently serves as a river crossing for public vehicles and as a major ATV/snowmobile route. There are dam safety directives to repair the dam; consultant cost estimates for this repair are approximately \$500K, rebuilding the dam would be approximately \$1.3 million and removing the dam and restoring the river are estimated to be \$300K. A gradual, partial drawdown of the flowage was initiated in 2014 and 2015 to reduce the immediate safety risks associated with this aging structure. In addition, the Department of Transportation will be constructing an alternative public bridge for vehicles in 2017. Initial discussions were focused on the dam. However, the potential impacts of that decision require the scope of the planning effort to include planning for the entire property.

Public Involvement

Preliminary options for the dam were presented for public feedback at a meeting near Hayward in January of 2016. Feedback indicated that there is a desire to have a master plan updated for the Totogatic Wildlife Area that will follow the department's master planning process (Chapter NR 44, Wis. Adm. Code). This will include an opportunity for tribal consultation, a public involvement process, and an environmental analysis to guide decision making for the dam and future uses of the property.

Significant Issues of Public Interest

- The decision of whether the dam will be repaired, replaced or removed could potentially change the recreational uses of the property.
- Wild rice communities have the potential to be expanded within the wildlife area with the removal of the dam or replacing the dam with a structure that the water levels can be adjusted.
- The department does not currently have a source of funding for a repair, rebuild, or removal of the dam.
- The Totogatic River is a designated Outstanding Water Resource and Wild River.

Recommendation

The department recommends NRB approval to begin master planning for the Totogatic Wildlife Area.