

SUBJECT: Approval of the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area Master Plan

FOR: AUGUST, 2009 BOARD MEETING

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Dan Schuller / Jeff Prey

SUMMARY:

The Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area will provide for low impact, non-motorized remote recreation opportunities along with providing high quality natural communities and habitats.

Straight Lake State Park will provide for rustic and remote camping, hiking 3.5 miles of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, access to Straight and Rainbow Lakes and day use recreation. The park will also offer an opportunity to experience the exceptional glacial feature known as a tunnel channel located along the Straight River. The State Wildlife Area will provide habitat management opportunities for a variety of species throughout the property and offer a full spectrum of hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing options along with a limited number of rustic developments to provide public access.

The plan also recommends that two State Natural Areas be designated within the State Park boundary. These two sites represent examples of high quality natural communities that provide habitat for several rare plants and animals.

There has been an extensive public involvement process that has shown strong support for a low level of development that preserves the natural scenic character of the properties.

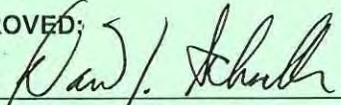
RECOMMENDATION: Board Approval per NR 44.04(3) Master plan development, adoption and public involvement. Plan Approval.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:

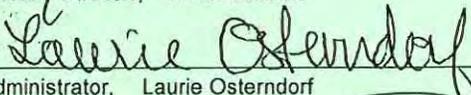
- No Fiscal Estimate Required
- No Environmental Assessment or Impact Statement Required
- No Background Memo

- Yes Attached
- Yes Attached
- Yes Attached

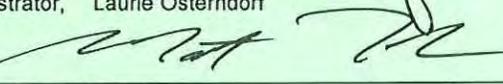
APPROVED:



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Administrator, Laurie Osterndorf



Secretary, Matt Frank

7-8-09

Date

7/19/09

Date

7-21-09

Date

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The Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area Master Plan is located on-line at:
http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/stlake/pdf/MPStriaghtLakeJuly09.pdf



Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

DRAFT JULY 2009



Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Master Planning Team thanks the many private citizens, local officials, and organizations who assisted in the creation of this plan by attending meetings and/or submitting written or verbal comments. It is apparent that the public greatly values Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area for its beautiful natural resources and recreational opportunities.

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Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area



Executive Summary

Location and Access

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area are contiguous properties located in Polk County, Wisconsin. They are owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The properties are also located within the Ceded Territory recognized by *Lac Courte Oreilles Indians v. State of Wis.*, 775 F. Supp. 321 (W.D. Wis. 1991). The properties are situated about 70 miles northwest of Eau Claire WI, near the Town of Luck. The region surrounding Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area is primarily rural with an abundance of forests, farms, and scattered rural residential development. State Highways 48 and 35 run nearby, providing easy access from urban centers in western Wisconsin and the Minneapolis/St. Paul region of Minnesota. See Map A - Regional Location Map.

State Park Management, Development, and Use

Straight Lake State Park will provide for low impact, non-motorized remote recreation opportunities. Recreation will consist of rustic and remote camping, hiking the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, public access to Straight and Rainbow Lakes and day use recreation. Winter recreation will include snowshoeing, ice fishing and cross-country skiing. The park will also offer an opportunity to experience an exceptional glacial feature known as a tunnel channel located along the Straight River. This tunnel channel has outstanding interpretive value in combination with the Ice Age Trail as a place to witness land forms created by continental glaciation. Resource management objectives include protection and enhancement of the mature forest and maintaining an attractive, natural appearing recreational environment.

Wildlife Area Management, Development, and Use

The Straight Lake State Wildlife Area will provide habitat management opportunities for a variety of species throughout the property. The Wildlife Area will offer a full spectrum of hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing opportunities. A limited number of rustic developments will be built to provide public access, and for interpretive and educational purposes. Vegetative management will consist of a combination of forest hardwood, grassland, and wetland management to enhance native species and their habitats.

State Natural Areas

The goal of the State Natural Areas Program is to locate, establish, and preserve a system of areas that as nearly as possible represents the wealth and variety of Wisconsin's native landscape for education, research, and to secure the long-term protection of the state's biological diversity. This plan recommends the Tunnel Channel Woods and Straight Lake Tamarack Fen management areas be designated as State Natural Areas within the state park boundaries. These two sites represent examples of high quality natural communities that provide habitat for several rare plants and animals. The sites are also recognized as ecological reference areas to be used as locations to compare how well biodiversity is maintained within the region.

The Environmental Assessment

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for this Master Plan. The EA assesses the potential impacts of actions recommended in the Master Plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to management and operation of park and wildlife area. The Environmental Assessment concludes that the implementation of the Master Plan will provide positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region with minimal adverse impacts.

The Public Involvement Process

Public involvement has been crucial to the development of this plan. A variety of tools were used to give information on the planning process and solicit public input. These included news releases, newspaper articles, mailings, radio interviews, and a website. In addition, several public open house meetings and listening sessions were held at various stages throughout the planning process. Generally, the public has expressed support for a low level of facility development that preserves the natural, scenic character, ecological resources and geologic features of the land and water bodies.



Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area



CHAPTER 2

Management, Development, and Use

This Master Plan is for the development and management of Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area as shown in Map B - Existing Conditions. While the state park and the wildlife area have different focus, they are managed as complimentary partner properties. This chapter is organized in three sections which follow the combined vision and goals for both properties.

Section One – Straight Lake State Park and the Ice Age National Scenic Trail: This section details the management, development, and use specific to the state park and Ice Age Trail. The focus is opportunities for hiking, remote camping, paddling, fishing, nature study, and picnicking in a relatively undeveloped setting.

Section Two – Straight Lake Wildlife Area: This section details the management, development and use specific to the wildlife area. The focus for this property is opportunities for hunting, wildlife viewing and hiking.

Section Three – This section covers management, development, and use elements common to both properties.

Vision Statement – Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area conserves a rare combination of natural features for present and future generations. The site's location in rural Polk County offers an atmosphere of solitude and remoteness where visitors may experience a connection with the natural landscape. The Straight Lake property's many unique features include; scenic undeveloped waters, wetlands, large blocks of oak and northern hardwood forests, habitats harboring rare species, and the Straight River "tunnel channel", a glacial geologic feature of statewide significance. Because of the site's geologic importance, a segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail runs through the property, providing visitors with a semi-primitive recreational experience. The property also offers areas to enjoy a variety of other high quality non-motorized recreational activities and nature education. Management practices, recreational facility development and public use of the property are sustainable and within the ecological and social carrying capacity of the property and its recreational settings.

Goals – Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

ECOSYSTEM / HABITAT MANAGEMENT GOALS

- Provide high quality native forest communities that range from closed canopy forest habitats for "species of greatest conservation need" such as Cerulean Warbler and Red-shouldered Hawk to ecologically functional wetland/grassland habitat for waterfowl, grassland dependent birds, and other associated species.
- Provide an ecological reference site consisting of northern hardwood / oak forest with embedded ephemeral ponds and aquatic/wetland features.
- Provide high quality wetland and aquatic communities as habitat for waterfowl, fish, and other wetland and aquatic wildlife.
- Provide and maintain the high ecological integrity of the property's natural communities and habitats, particularly by minimizing the introduction and spread of invasive exotic species.
- Protect areas of geological, archaeological, or cultural significance.

RECREATION / INTERPRETIVE GOALS

- Provide recreational experiences of solitude and remoteness in a semi-remote, semi-primitive setting for a range of low-impact, non-motorized recreational uses, such as; hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, wildlife viewing, hunting large and small game, trapping and fishing.
- Provide recreational experiences that encourage individuals and the community to become physically active in experiencing the sense of remoteness and natural character of the Straight Lake property.
- Provide high quality recreational use facilities that maintain the natural scenic quality of the property and are compatible with ecosystem sustainability of the Straight Lake Property.
- Provide high quality recreational experiences for hikers on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.
- Provide interpretive opportunities to educate visitors on natural and cultural resources and important geologic features.

SECTION ONE: Straight Lake State Park

Property Designation and Authority

Straight Lake State Park is designated as a state park under Chapter 27, Wis. Stats. This designation allows for a broad range of recreation, education, and vegetative management activities to occur within park boundaries in accord with the project's vision and goals. Two portions of the park are designated as State Natural Areas.

Straight Lake State Park Acreage Goal: 3,225 acres

Statutory Authority: The authority to acquire and manage land within Straight Lake State Park is described in sections 23.09, 23.11, 23.14, and 27.01, Wis. Stats.

Land Management Classifications and Vegetation Management

Straight Lake State Park is divided into four primary management areas as shown in Map B-1 and listed in Table 2-1. Each management area has distinctive characteristics and unique management and use attributes. Each area is referenced at strategic locations within the management descriptions in the following pages.

Recreation Management

The recreation management settings for Straight Lake State Park are intended to provide a predominantly natural-appearing remote or somewhat remote area offering opportunities for solitude and primitive, non-motorized recreation. The proposed level of recreational facility development is significantly lower than in other State Parks and is limited to facilities that provide public access and as required to support primitive, non-motorized recreation.

Recreation Management Objectives:

- Establish and maintain the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.
- Provide opportunities for hiking and snowshoeing/cross-country skiing on an interconnected network of primitive to lightly developed trails.
- Provide a variety of primitive and semi-primitive camping opportunities.
- Provide day-use recreational activities, including picnicking, canoeing, and fishing.

Table 2-1: Land Management Classifications – Straight Lake State Park

MANAGEMENT AREA NAME	NR 44 LAND MANAGEMENT CLASS*	ACRES IN CURRENT OWNERSHIP	ACRES IN PROPOSED EXPANSION AREA	TOTAL AREAS
Rainbow Lake	Recreation Management Area: Type 3 recreation setting / non-motorized	606	670	1,276
Upper Straight River	Scenic Management Area: Type 3 recreation setting / non-motorized	357	725	1,082
Straight Lake and River (includes Tamarack Fen State Natural Area)	Scenic Management Area: Type 2 recreation setting	378	7	385
Tunnel Channel Woods State Natural Area	Wild Resources Management Area: Type 2 recreation setting	457	25	482

***Land Management Class Descriptions:**

Recreation management areas are to provide and maintain land and water areas and facilities for outdoor public recreation or education.

Scenic management areas are designated to maintain and enhance for long-term public enjoyment lands or waters having unique aesthetic qualities or outstanding scenic beauty and lands where managing for aesthetics is a primary concern due to significant or special public use of the area.

Wild resources management areas are designated to provide and maintain land and water areas where natural ecological processes predominate and evidence of human cultural impact is low; there is little or no visible resource management activity and facility development is limited to primitive recreational uses.

The land management classifications are further defined in Chapter NR 44.06 and 44.07 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code.



TRAILS**Ice Age National Scenic Trail****Ice Age National Scenic Trail Objectives:**

- Provide approximately 3.5 miles of primitive hiking trail that showcases the distinctive tunnel channel and provides a hiking experience in an undeveloped, scenic forested setting.
- Provide parking and access within the park to the Ice Age Trail as shown in Map C.
- Preserve the current sense of remoteness, including minimizing non-natural visual and auditory impacts, for trail users.

One of the primary considerations for the State's acquisition of this property was the potential for extending the Ice Age National Scenic Trail through a block of high quality undeveloped land containing one of the most distinctive glacier-formed tunnel channels in the Midwest.

The proposed conceptual route of the Ice Age Trail is shown on Map C. As part of the master planning process the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation (IAPTF) assisted with developing this route and design of the Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail (IAT) on the property.

The trail will be constructed by the IAPTF Mobile Skills Crew to comply with the "2001 Ice Age National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance".

Once a route for the Ice Age Trail through the property is approved by DNR, the route would be required to go through the federal compliance processes required under sections 7 and 106, as administered by the National Park Service, before trail construction could begin.

It is also recommended that a portion of the Ice Age Trail and surrounding lands be considered for State Ice Age Trail Area Dedication. Once dedication criteria and methods are developed the Department can apply this method to Straight Lake State Park Ice Age Trail segments and surrounding lands for possible dedication.

Other Park Trails**Park Trail Objectives:**

- Provide a system of trails for various recreational and educational experiences including hiking, interpretation and nature study.

See Map C for the conceptual location of planned trails and Table 2-2 for their NR 44 development classification and mileages.

The planned trail system, including the Ice Age Trail, traverses approximately 10.6 miles of oak woods, shoreline and wetlands within the park and connects to trails in the Straight Lake Wildlife Area. The final "on the ground" alignment of these trails, except for the Ice Age Trail, will be determined during the facility design process and included in the Department's Capital Development Program Statement site plans. As discussed previously in the Ice Age Trail section, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail will be constructed by the IAPTF Mobile Skills Crew. All trails will be designed to fit the landscape's features to the degree possible and to meet NR 44 classification and Department trail design standards.

All trails are designed for hiking and are open for snowshoeing or cross country skiing in the winter, but will not be groomed.

Table 2-2: Designated Trails of Straight Lake State Park

TRAIL	DESIGNATED USE	WINTER USE	APPROX. MILES	DEVELOPMENT LEVEL CLASSIFICATION
Ice Age National Scenic Trail	Hiking / Interpretation	Snowshoe and XC skiing (un-groomed)	3.5	Primitive trail – Ice Age Trail Standard
State Park Designated Trails	Hiking / Interpretation	Snowshoe and XC skiing (un-groomed)	3.5	Primitive trail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~2' wide tread • primitive or native surface
			2.0	Lightly developed trail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~4' wide tread • primitive or native surface
	Hiking / Disabled Access	Snowshoe and XC skiing (un-groomed)	0.2	Moderately developed trail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~5' wide tread • stable aggregate surface
	Hiking / Service Access	Snowshoe and XC skiing (un-groomed)	0.5	Lightly developed trail / lightly developed road <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~8'–10' wide tread • stable native or aggregate surface • road gated and un-plowed
			0.9	Lightly developed trail / lightly developed road <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~12' wide tread • stable aggregate surface • road gated and un-plowed
TOTAL TRAIL PARK SYSTEM MILEAGE:			10.6	

¹ The evaluation process and the resulting recommendations are described in the *October 2008–Ice Age Trail Report–To the Straight Lake State Park and State Wildlife Area Master Planning Team*.

CAMPING

Both semi-primitive and primitive camping opportunities are planned, including the development of two primitive water- paddle-in campsites with water views. These are summarized below by camping type and as shown on Map C-1.

- **Semi-primitive Walk-in / Cart-in Camping** – Within the Rainbow Lake Recreation Management Area develop up to ten semi-primitive walk-in / cart-in campsites spaced a minimum of 400-feet apart in the wooded area on the southwest side of Straight Lake as conceptually indicated on Map C-1. Several of these sites would have partial views of the lake. The final locations of the sites will be selected to provide privacy, good drainage and air movement. Two to three rustic styled two unit unisex vault toilet buildings are planned. (The specific number, type, and size of toilet facilities for the camp area will be determined during the site design phase, and the final design will comply with the requirements for a NR 44 Type III recreational use setting and other applicable codes.) Potable water would be available near the camp area from an existing well that will be fitted with a handle type pump. Carry-in carts and canoe and kayak carry-in wheel assemblies would be stored on-site for use by registered campers, and carry-in boaters.
- **Remote Primitive Camping** – Develop two primitive paddle-in / hike-in campsites at the top of the bluff on the north shore of Straight Lake in the Straight Lake and River Management Area. Primitive trail spurs will link these sites to the Ice Age National Scenic trail. The campsites will have a minimum separation distance of 1,000 feet between them and be separated from the Ice Age Trail by at least 300-feet. Also develop four additional hike-in primitive campsites along the Ice Age Trail. They will be located within the Rainbow Lake Management Area, the Straight Lake and River Management Area, or the Upper Straight River Management Area. The campsites would be located within 300 feet of the Ice Age Trail. Each campsite would have a box latrine.
- **Group Camping** – Within the Rainbow Lake Recreation Management Area, develop two small walk-in/cart-in group campsites. These campsites would accommodate up to 20 campers each with a fire ring / gathering area at the center of each. The two group sites would be separated by a minimum of 500-feet. A four unit unisex toilet building and water well would be located between the two sites. Parking would be available at a lot located at the central park-

ing area. The walk-in/cart-in distance to the group campsites would be about one mile. The existing gated service road on the south side of the property would be extended to provide management only access. No drop-off of camping supplies, etc. by campers would be permitted.

DAY USE

One small, lightly developed day-use area is proposed for the State Park. The associated facilities include a small picnic area and a small, accessible shore-side fishing platform on Rainbow Lake. Access to the picnic area and Straight Lake would be provided by a walk-in/cart-in trail leading from the central day-use parking lot. See Map C for the general location of these facilities.

- **Picnic Area** – Develop a picnic area located southwest of Rainbow Lake. This area would include; a small rustic styled open-air shelter with four picnic tables (two disabled accessible). Up to four dispersed picnic tables would also be provided. Other picnic area facilities include; a rustic styled two unit unisex vault toilet building, a rustic styled information kiosk, fire rings and grills. Potable water would be available near the trailhead parking area from the existing well that would be fitted with a handle type pump. The existing overhead electrical service line and poles in this area would either be installed underground or removed.
- **Rainbow Lake Fishing Platform** – Construct a small, disabled accessible bank-side fishing platform. The platform would accommodate two wheelchair users. An ADA compliant moderately developed trail would link the fishing platform to the Picnic Area.
- **Straight Lake Boat Landing** – Access to Straight Lake is part of the day-use opportunities offered at this site. Day users may access Straight Lake via a carry-in/cart-in trail from the day use area to a landing on the east end of Straight Lake. This access site and trail is shown in Map C-1.

BOAT ACCESS

Non-motorized water based recreation will be one of the primary attractions for Straight Lake State Park visitors. Two landings would be constructed on Straight Lake. One is the primary access for boaters, the other provides access to/from the camp area. Their locations are shown on Map C-1.

- **Straight Lake East Boat Landing** – On the southeast side of Straight Lake, within the Straight Lake and River Scenic Management Area, develop a carry-in / cart-in non-motorized boat landing. A barrier-free path would extend from the dam trail/road to the landing. It would have a gradual slope to make the access easier for those with physical limitations. This path should be designed and constructed to have minimal environmental impact on the site. Boaters would carry or cart their boats to the lake from a drop-off/turn around area on the dam road. Parking would be only at the day-use parking area, except for ADA parking. Two disabled only parking spaces (one van accessible and one standard vehicle with trailer) would be provided near the intersection of the dam service road and the boat landing path.

Table 2-3: Summary of New Straight Lake State Park Facilities

FACILITY	NUMBER
Canoe Landings / Boat access sites	2
Camping sites:	
Semi-primitive walk-in / cart-in	up to 10
Primitive remote paddle-in / hike-in	2
Ice Age Trail primitive remote hike-in	4
Group semi-primitive walk-in / cart-in	2
Day Use Area	1
Public Contact Station	1
Parking Areas	2

- **Straight Lake Camping Area Boat Landing** – On the southwest side of Straight Lake, within the Rainbow Lake Recreation Management Area, develop a non-motorized boat landing to provide water access to the camp area. The trail from the landing up to the bluff top would be reconstructed and re-aligned to mitigate the existing erosion problems and to make the route more accessible. A series of rustic steps extending directly from the top of the bluff to the base may also be constructed. A small picnic site with two accessible picnic tables and a fire ring would be provided at the landing for lakeside picnics or gatherings.

OTHER PARK DEVELOPMENTS

The following developments will provide access and support for recreational uses.

- **Public Entrance Visitor Station (PEVS) Building** – Construct a Public Entrance Visitor Station (PEVS) building at the location shown on Map C-1. The PEVS would be a small to modest sized (less than 1,000 sq. ft.) rustic style building with interior restrooms, and may have office space. A small visitor parking lot for short-term parking would be provided near the building. Phone and electrical service lines (and gas if available) would be installed underground.
- **Storage/Maintenance Building** – At a future time, a separate equipment storage and maintenance building may be constructed on the property. It would be sited at an unobtrusive location.
- **Park Roads and Parking Areas** – Construct a two-way park entrance road from the dead end of 120th St. (a town road) north to the Public Entrance Visitor Station (PEVS) and on to the parking areas as shown on Map C-1. This road will be a “moderately developed” road with an aggregate or asphalt surface.

Parking for day-visitors will be at the Day-Use Parking Area located in the existing clearing southwest of Rainbow Lake (the approximate location is shown on Map C-1). Parking for campers using the semi-primitive camp area would be at a small trailhead parking lot located on the west side of the Day-Use Parking Area. Parking for group campers would be at a small parking lot located on the east side of the Day-Use Parking Area. Initially, parking should be provided for up to 35 vehicles (including three ADA parking spaces and one ADA van space) plus 10 car-trailer or bus/RV spaces. Parking may be expanded in the future based on demand.

Construct a lightly developed road / lightly developed hiking trail from near the Day-Use Parking Area to the dam, approximately 0.6 miles. The road would be closed to public access beyond the intersection with the boat access trail. This road will be a 12' wide with a compacted, stable aggregate surface. It will provide vehicle access for dropping off boats at the landing turn-around, and for management or emergency vehicles, and also serve as a short section of the trail system.

- **Signing** – Develop and implement a park-wide signage system that meets current state park design standards as well as the standards of NR44 for each recreational use setting, provides the necessary “way-finding” and has a unified aesthetic character that is harmonious with the area’s natural surroundings. Signs covered by the plan include: directional signs to park entrance and facilities, trail markers, regulation signs, directional and informational signs. Signage and trail markings related to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail will be designed and installed by the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation in compliance with the 2001 Ice Age National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance.

- **Park Entrance Sign** – Construct a rustic styled park entrance sign and native plantings located on the east side of the intersection of 120th Street and 270th Avenue so that it will be visible from vehicles approaching from both directions. The park entrance monument would provide a sense of arrival and establish the distinct architectural / aesthetic character that will be carried throughout the Park in other structures and signage. The monument/sign will be constructed with stone masonry, wood and other rustic or native materials.

- **Straight Lake Dam** – The dam at the outlet of Straight Lake raises the lake level about two feet. This earthen dam was constructed many years ago, it does not meet current state dam standards. Future reconstruction of this structure is required. Engineering studies and design work for the dam redevelopment need to be completed. This plan recommends an earthen dike type dam be designed and constructed in a way that it will blend with the natural surroundings, minimizing its visibility, particularly from Straight Lake. The dam should also be designed to allow hikers and service vehicles to cross the Straight River.

Interpretation / Education Program

Within the State Park System, interpretation is the process of helping each park visitor find an opportunity to connect personally with a place. Each individual may connect to the place in a different way. The goal of all interpretive services is to increase each visitor's enjoyment and understanding of the parks, and to allow visitors to care about the parks on their own terms. Because state parks belong to all of us, the Park System has a responsibility to protect this park for future generations. Understanding the park's importance to our natural and cultural world is the first step toward this preservation.

The following facilities/displays will be developed:

- Display kiosks and signage at the day use area.
- Glacial history and Ice Age National Scenic Trail information.
- Clam Falls Historical Road information.

All of these developments will be outlined further in a property-wide interpretative plan that will be developed with input from park and wildlife staff. Recommended interpretive themes for the Park should include the social and ecological significance of the unique geological, topographic, and ecological features in and near the park, and the history and importance of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Hunting

Straight Lake State Park offers opportunities for hunting of deer and spring turkey. Waterfowl or small game hunting and trapping are not allowed in the park.

Objectives:

- Provide deer hunting and spring turkey hunting opportunities that do not cause undue conflict with other park users.

Deer

The park lies within Deer Management Unit 15 and is currently open to the nine day firearm hunt. Deer numbers within the State Park are currently at high levels. Deer are browsing vegetation, significantly limiting tree and shrub regeneration. Continued high deer numbers impair the ability of park managers to achieve many of the vegetation management objectives outlined in this plan. Deer hunting is a valuable tool to help manage deer numbers.

- Allow deer hunting in non-intensive public use areas of the park. Provide gun hunting during the 9 day gun season and the subsequent 11 day muzzleloader deer hunt. Establish a deer archery hunting season via administrative code beginning November 1st and continuing until the close of the season in January.

(Note: deer hunting during both the 9 day gun season and the 11 day muzzleloader hunt has been allowed since the park was opened deer hunting in 2005).

Turkey

Wild turkeys are abundant upon the property and in nearby surrounding lands. Limited turkey hunting opportunities may be provided by the park without undue conflict with other park users. Through a permit system, a spring wild turkey hunting season will be established for portions of the State Park and be limited to the first three time periods of the statewide spring turkey season.

Fisheries Management

Rainbow Lake

It is recommended that Rainbow Lake be managed for a coldwater fishery. Rainbow Lake has the potential for a coldwater trout fishery because of its depth (17 feet) and topography (steep shoreline). The lake does not currently support natural trout reproduction, so stocking would likely be necessary to establish or sustain a trout fishery on a seasonal and perhaps year round basis. The lake has the potential to provide high angler catch rates and ample shore fishing opportunities.

Straight Lake

It is recommended that Straight Lake be managed for a quality largemouth bass, northern pike and panfish fishery. Based on the results of a 2005 fish survey Straight Lake should support populations of these species with larger than average size fish as compared to similar waters in Polk County. The Department will promulgate administrative rules for appropriate angling regulations, stocking recommendations or habitat restoration to achieve a quality fishery. Future fisheries surveys should be conducted on a periodic basis (8-12 years) and management activities should be evaluated and adjusted if warranted in order to meet the objective of a quality fishery.

Straight River

Considering the river is dominated by warm water minnows there appears to be limited value in terms of providing angling opportunities. No management plans are anticipated for this waterbody based on the results of the 2005 fish survey.

Vegetation Management

The primary focus of vegetative management in the park is to provide recreational and conservation opportunities in a forested environment. Management for each of the four management areas is described below. See Map E for future vegetative coverage on these management areas.

RAINBOW LAKE RECREATION MANAGEMENT AREA

Vegetative management on this portion of the park emphasizes native vegetation and the maintenance of an attractive and safe recreational environment. Currently 606 acres are in state ownership. This area is classified as a Recreation Management Area: Type 3 - Non-motorized Recreational Setting. Management of this area is described below.

Management Objectives:

Long-term Resource Management Objective (50 yr +):

- Provide an attractive, natural appearing forested setting featuring forest with larger diameter trees, lakes and wetlands for opportunities for high quality, lower intensity, non-motorized recreational uses.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0 - 50 yr):

- Protect and enhance the natural, scenic character of the area. Maintain and expand the acreage of mixed northern hardwoods and closed canopy forest conditions. On appropriate sites, increase the presence of larger, older trees (130 to 150 years).
- Maintain Rainbow Lake and its shoreline in a predominantly undeveloped, natural appearing condition. Manage as needed to minimize user impacts.
- Protect and maintain the area's high quality wetlands.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- To the extent reasonably practical, vegetation and other significant management activities should be timed and performed in a manner that preserves the aesthetic quality (scenic and auditory) and the overall quality of the visitor's recreational experience.
- Trees and shrubs may be removed as needed for the development or redevelopment of designated public use areas or sites. Planting and maintenance of native trees, and shrubs may be done on these sites for screening, scenic enhancement, wildlife enhancement or to enhance recreational use of the site.
- Conduct un-even aged selection harvests, and small group harvests to maintain and expand oak/northern hardwoods and establish larger trees with closed canopy conditions. Gradually convert aspen dominated stands near public use areas to northern hardwoods and maintain aspen as a stand component. Retain abundant snags and dead/downed trees for wildlife habitat, except near designated public use facilities.
- Underplanting with appropriate native species may be used to increase stocking levels, provide structural or compositional features for wildlife, or enhance aesthetics.
- Old fields and upland clearings will be allowed to naturally fill in. Small openings may be maintained around administrative or recreational facility sites if needed.
- To maintain or restore scenic values, conduct salvage harvests and take other actions as necessary to restore sites following natural disturbances. Planting appropriate native tree species may be used.
- Use periodic even-aged selection pine plantation thinnings to develop a more natural appearing structure. Over the long-term, gradually convert the stand to mixed northern hardwoods, while retaining some pine to their biological maturity.
- Cut hazard trees in public use areas and along trails as necessary.

Authorized resource management activities: Timber harvests (single tree selection or small group selection) planting trees and shrubs, mowing in public use areas and chemical treatment of invasive species.

TUNNEL CHANNEL WOODS STATE NATURAL AREA

It is proposed that this management area be designated a State Natural Area. This area contains the largest and oldest block of oak/northern hardwood forest within the property. Interior forest conditions are present with abundant rare species populations. A high concentration of ephemeral wetlands occurs in the area. A portion of the highly significant tunnel channel geological feature is found in this management area. Current ownership is 457 acres.

Long-term Resource Management Objective (50 yr +):

- Provide an area with little fragmentation by trails or roads and having a closed canopy northern hardwood forest, with an oak and white pine component exhibiting old-growth characteristics, such as large diameter trees and coarse woody debris, and a ground layer free of exotic or invasive species.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0-50 yr):

- Maintain conditions where natural processes may continue to enhance old-growth forest characteristics within the area.
- Restore and maintain the core of the management area, which includes the ephemeral ponds, in an undeveloped condition and unfragmented by roads and trails. Provide limited access on primitive trails located on the fringe of the management area.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- Conduct no timber harvesting, use passive management to naturally convert and age the forest.
- Conduct no salvage within the area after natural disturbances.
- Control wildfires, insect and disease threats when required by statute.
- If necessary, control invasive species using the least intrusive, practicable means available.
- Construct and maintain limited primitive trails (as shown on Map C and described in the trails section) and remove hazard trees along the trails as required.
- To the extent practicable, actively discourage the use of and visually camouflage all old, non-designated roads and trails. Allow them to naturally revegetate.

Authorized resource management activities:

The following tools may be used to accomplish the prescriptions listed above:

Cutting individual hazard trees, limited earth work to construct and maintain trails, earth work and/or planting native species to restore abandoned roads and trails and prevent erosion, use of herbicides or hand cutting to control invasive species and insecticides to control forest pests.

STRAIGHT LAKE AND RIVER SCENIC MANAGEMENT AREA

This management area is the primary wetland/aquatic corridor on the property. Marsh, sedge meadow, and tamarack fen are found on the northwestern shore of and upstream from Straight Lake. A 7-acre northern wet forest is located on the southwestern shore of Straight Lake, and additional wetlands occur on both sides of the Straight River, extending approximately ¼ mile southeast from the Straight Lake Dam. Straight Lake proper and the viewshed are the primary features of this management area. This area is classified as a Scenic Management Area: Type 2 Recreational Setting. Currently 378 acres are in state ownership.

A State Natural Area, the Straight Lake Tamarack Fen State Natural Area, is located within this management area. The SNA is a sub-unit with its own set of management objectives and prescriptions. It is detailed in a separate, following section.

Area-wide Management Objectives:

- Provide an opportunity for people to experience solitude and remoteness in an attractive, natural appearing setting with little development and a low level of apparent management activity and use.
- Protect and enhance the natural, scenic character of the viewshed of Straight Lake and the tunnel channel.
- To the extent practicable, actively discourage the use of and visually camouflage all old, non-designated roads and trails. Allow them to naturally revegetate.
- Protect and where possible enhance habitat for interior forest species and habitat associated with high quality ephemeral ponds and wetlands.
- When appropriate, screen developments with native vegetation or other natural materials.

Straight Lake and its viewshed are the predominant features. The uplands are a mix of northern hardwoods, aspen and red pine plantation. In addition two wetland areas are associated with this area.

Long-term Resource Management Objective (50 yr +):

- Provide habitat for interior forest bird species in a natural appearing, undeveloped recreational setting that is characterized by a generally closed canopied, older forest dominated by larger diameter, longer lived trees.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0–50 yr):

- Expand the acreage of mixed stands of northern hardwoods and maintain oak as a component. Increase the presence of larger, older trees (up to 120–140 years.) on appropriate sites.
- Maintain and enhance closed canopy forest conditions within the Straight Lake and the Tunnel Channel viewshed. Maintain and enhance closed canopy forest conditions in the remainder of the management area to the degree practicable.

- Use periodic even-aged selection pine plantation thinnings to develop a more natural appearing structure. Over the long-term, gradually convert the stand to mixed northern hardwoods, while retaining some pine to their biological maturity.
- Maintain and enhance the wetlands associated with Straight Lake and Straight River, with no disturbance of the existing wetland vegetation and habitat.
- Maintain low visibility of management activities in the area, particularly in the viewshed of Straight Lake and along designated trails.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- Conduct resource management and development activities consistent with the requirements of a Type-2 Recreational Use Setting in NR 44.07(5).
- Conduct un-even aged selection harvests and small group harvests to maintain and expand oak/northern hardwoods and establish larger trees with closed canopy conditions. Gradually convert aspen dominated stands to northern hardwoods and maintain aspen as a stand component. Retain abundant snags and dead/downed trees for wildlife habitat, except near trails and other designated public use facilities. Within 200 feet of Straight Lake shoreline, use only sanitation type cutting to maintain a fully stocked condition, retaining abundant snags, coarse woody debris, and legacy trees.
- Use periodic even-aged selection pine plantation thinnings to develop a structure similar to a natural pine stand. Over the long-term, gradually convert the stand to mixed northern hardwoods, while retaining some pine to their biological maturity.
- When desirable, under-plant native species to increase stocking levels or speed restoration following a disturbance.
- Remove hazard trees along designated trails as required.
- Conduct forest management activities during non-peak recreational use seasons. Minimize the visual impact of management activities along designated roads and trails and near campsites following the requirements in NR 44.07(5)(g).
- Maintain and enhance the wetlands associated with Straight Lake and Straight River through passive management, except for the control of invasive species and wild rice seeding.
- Ask the State-Tribal Wild Rice Committee to evaluate the suitability of portions of Straight Lake, Straight River and their associated wetlands for establishment of wild rice as an additional component of, and to help achieve the above objectives.
- If wild rice establishment is found feasible, in cooperation with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the St. Croix Tribe, seed wild rice into the suitable portions of Straight Lake, Straight River and their associated wetlands in consideration of the Committee's recommendations.
- Permanently close the island in Straight Lake to public use to protect its habitat and scenic values.

Authorized resource management activities:

Timber harvests (single tree and small group), planting trees and shrubs and fish stocking in Straight Lake.

STRAIGHT LAKE TAMARACK FEN STATE NATURAL AREA

This is a sub unit of the Straight Lake and River Scenic Management Area. The 80-acre tamarack fen and sedge meadow lying west of Straight Lake is to be designated as a State Natural Area. This fen has diverse plant communities including several rarely found species are harbored in these wetlands.

Long-term Resource Management Objective:

- Provide and maintain an ecologically functional tamarack fen and adjacent sedge meadow.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives:

- Maintain an undisturbed condition where natural processes predominate.
- Maintain the area free of invasive species.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- Conduct no management activities except, if necessary, control invasive species using the least intrusive, practicable means available.
- Conduct no salvage within the area after natural disturbances.
- Control wildfires, insects and disease threats when required by statute.
- Construct no permanent roads or trails within the area.

Authorized resource management activities:

The use of herbicides or hand cutting to control invasive species.

UPPER STRAIGHT RIVER SCENIC MANAGEMENT AREA

This management area is the primary headwater source areas for the Straight River flowing east and the Trade River flowing west. Currently 357 acres in state ownership.

The area has marsh and spring areas in the wetlands and oak/northern hardwoods and aspen clones in the uplands. This area is classified as a Recreation Management Area: Type 3 - Non-motorized Recreational Setting.

Long-term Resource Management Objective (50 yr +):

- Provide an attractive, natural appearing setting comprised primarily of oak-northern hardwood forests, patches of aspen, and open wetlands for the Ice Age trail and other compatible, dispersed recreational uses.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0–50 yr):

- Protect and enhance the natural, scenic character of the area by maintaining and expanding the acreage of mixed oak-northern hardwoods and closed canopy conditions, and increasing the presence of larger diameter trees on appropriate sites.
- Protect and maintain high quality wetlands.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- On appropriate sites, manage for older closed canopy forest conditions using uneven-aged or all-aged silvicultural techniques.
- Regenerate oak where feasible using appropriate silvicultural techniques.
- Where appropriate, maintain aspen as a northern-hardwood stand component using suitable silvicultural techniques.
- Modify management techniques to maintain a low visibility of management activities along the Ice Age Trail.
- Conduct no management activities within the wetland except, if necessary, control invasive species using the least intrusive, practicable means available.
- Manage power line corridor by planting shrubs and feather the transition between forest and grass.

Authorized resource management activities:

Timber harvests (selective harvests, group harvests, small patch harvests, coppice harvests, and shelterwood harvests), mechanical scarification, planting, and herbicides.



SECTION TWO: Straight Lake Wildlife Area

Property Designation and Authority

Straight Lake Wildlife Area is designated as a State Wildlife Area. Wildlife Areas are managed under the authority of Sec. 23.09 (2) (d) (3) and (15) Wis. Stats. to provide an area where people can hunt, trap, and fish. Hiking, wildlife viewing, nature study, berry picking, and other low-impact recreational activities are also permitted under this designation. Other recreational uses may be allowed under the property's Master Plan when they do not detract from the primary purpose of the property.

Straight Lake Wildlife Area Acreage Goal: 1,802 acres

Statutory Authority: The authority to acquire and manage land within the state is described in sections 23.09, 23.11, and 23.14, Wis. Stats.

Land Management Classifications and Vegetation Management

Straight Lake Wildlife Area is divided into two management areas according to the primary management or use focus of each area. These management areas are described in Table 2-4 and are shown on Map B-1.

Wildlife Management Goals

Two complementary goals of the Straight Lake Wildlife Area are to provide wildlife-based recreation including hunting, trapping, and wildlife observation, and to increase the populations of resident and migratory wildlife species through habitat improvement practices. Additional objectives are to provide wildlife-based interpretive and educational opportunities, and to monitor wildlife population trends as well as public use of the property through periodic surveys.

Recreation Management

The wildlife area provides opportunities for a variety of wildlife related and compatible non-motorized recreational uses in a setting with primitive to lightly developed facilities.

Recreation Management Objectives:

- Provide opportunities for and emphasize wildlife-related recreational activities, such as hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing and interpretation.
- Secondly, provide opportunities for compatible activities like hiking, nature study, and berry picking.

PUBLIC ACCESS

- Construct five small 2-4 vehicle parking lots on the periphery of the wildlife area in the general locations shown on Map C. Site and develop a parking lot off 280th Ave. so it also provides a vehicle-accessible observation area overlooking the lower flowage.
- Develop and maintain up to a 6.4 mile network of primitive to lightly developed trails to provide access for hunting, wildlife observation, and hiking, as generally shown on Map C. The trails on the wildlife area will be connected to the state park trail system to allow hikers' access to the entire Straight Lake Park and Wildlife Area trail system. Temporary management roads and trails will provide additional access-ways throughout the wildlife area.

** All trails will be open in the winter season for cross-country skiing and snowshoe use, but will not be groomed for these uses.*

Table 2-4: Land Management Classifications – Straight Lake State Wildlife Area

MANAGEMENT AREA NAME	NR 44 LAND MANAGEMENT CLASS	ACRES IN CURRENT OWNERSHIP	ACRES IN PROPOSED EXPANSION AREA	TOTAL AREAS
Hardwoods Forest	Habitat Management Area*	556	275	831
Wetlands Management Area	Habitat Management Area*	669	302	971

*Habitat management areas are to provide or enhance habitat, whether upland, wetland or aquatic, to support specific species of plants or animals. The land management classifications are further defined in Chapter NR 44.06 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code.

Hunting and Trapping

The primary recreational uses for the Straight Lake Wildlife Area are hunting and wildlife observation. All hunting and trapping seasons currently allowed on state fishery and wildlife areas will be permitted on the Wildlife Area. Hunting and trapping seasons for resident and migratory wildlife species are designed to help meet population management objectives as well as provide public recreation. Surveys will be conducted on the property to determine the population status of various wildlife species (including game, non-game, and endangered and threatened), as well as to determine the level of public use on the property.

Deer

The Straight Lake Wildlife Area is located within Deer Management Unit 15, which has an over-winter goal of 22 deer per square mile of deer range. For the purposes of this wildlife area, all land within the boundary is considered to be deer range. All deer seasons will be permitted on the Wildlife Area. This management will complement the 9 day gun, muzzleloader, and limited archery seasons on the State Park and will help ensure that deer numbers are kept at the population goals for Unit 15.

Turkey

The Straight Lake property is located in Wild Turkey Management Zone 4. Both spring and fall turkey hunting will be permitted on the wildlife area.

Bear

Bear hunting will also be permitted on the wildlife area.

Small Game

Small game species open to hunting on the wildlife area include ruffed grouse, woodcock, mourning dove, gray and fox squirrels, cottontail rabbit, raccoon, red and gray fox, and coyote.

Waterfowl

Management of the three flowages for quality wetlands habitat will significantly increase the production of resident waterfowl species as well as improve their attractiveness to migrating waterfowl species both spring and fall. This will provide a quality hunting experience for mallards, blue-winged and green-winged teal, wood ducks, ring-necked ducks and Canada geese.

Furbearers

Trapping and hunting (where applicable) for terrestrial and aquatic furbearers will be permitted on the wildlife area. Furbearer species include, but are not limited to; beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, red and gray fox, coyote, bobcat, raccoon, and fisher.

Wildlife Observation and Interpretation/Education

Opportunities for wildlife viewing and wildlife interpretation and education will be encouraged on the wildlife area. This will be facilitated by a system of multi-use trails with informational trailhead signage, and the establishment of observation sites with interpretive signs at appropriate locations. These may be moved from time to time as habitat conditions wildlife habits change. A joint State Park and Wildlife Area interpretive plan will be developed by the park and wildlife program staff. Recommended interpretive themes for the Wildlife Area should include; wildlife ecology, the habitat requirements for game and non-game and endangered and threatened species, and the ecological and cultural significance of wild rice.

Fisheries Management

The State Wildlife Area contains 3 man-made flowages. All three of these shallow flowages are subject to "winterkill", and consequently they have no significant fishery or potential for a fishery. No fishery management plans are proposed.

Vegetation Management and Habitat Improvement

The size and the health of wildlife populations are direct functions of habitat quality. A management objective for the Straight Lake Wildlife Area is to manage terrestrial and aquatic vegetation to improve habitat for resident and migratory wildlife species, thereby increasing population numbers of those species. Maintaining and improving habitat for non-game and endangered and threatened species (in addition to game species) will be a priority on the entire wildlife area. Special emphasis will be given to wetland and grassland dependent wildlife species on the Wetlands Habitat Management Area. In the Hardwoods Forest Habitat Management Area priority will be given to forest wildlife species, including Cerulean Warbler and other forest dependant SGCN bird species. Emphasis will also be given to preventing the establishment of invasive species, and to eliminate invasive species where they already exist on the wildlife area.

Existing vegetation types are a combination of wetlands, open fields and mature hardwoods and are shown in Map D. Vegetative management within the wildlife area falls into two primary management areas. See Map E for future vegetation coverage within these two management areas.

HARDWOODS FOREST HABITAT MANAGEMENT AREA

This management area features mature oak forest with small patches of aspen and northern hardwoods. Many gaps with younger forests occur due to past timber harvest and clearing for the failed golf course development. Several small ephemeral ponds are found in the area. Current ownership is 556 acres.

Long-term Resource Management Objective (50 yr +):

- Provide a predominantly oak-northern hardwood forest comprised of a variety of age classes (to 150 years) for habitat for forest game and other forest wildlife species.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0 –50 yr):

- Maintain and enhance age structure of the existing oak-northern hardwood forest habitat.
- Maintain existing aspen stands.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- Maintain older oak and northern hardwoods forest stands where appropriate (120-140 years) by managing for older closed canopy forest conditions using uneven-aged or all-aged silvicultural techniques.
- Regenerate oak where feasible using appropriate silvicultural techniques.
- Where appropriate, utilize small patch clearcutting or other methods at the standard rotation age to regenerate and maintain aspen/northern hardwood stands as shown on Map E.
- Manage power line corridor by planting shrubs (on both sides) to feather the transition between forest and grass.

Authorized resource management activities:

Timber harvests (selection harvests, group harvests, small patch harvests and shelterwood harvests), mechanical scarification, planting, application of herbicides, mowing, and prescribed burning.

WETLANDS HABITAT MANAGEMENT AREA

This management area features an interspersed of many habitats – shallow flowages, wetlands, non-native cool season grasses, planted warm season grasses, and small patches of oak forest. Current ownership is 669 acres with 135 of these being water.

Long-term Resource Management Objectives (50 yr +):

- Maintain a hemi-marsh habitat.
- Provide extensive grasslands adjacent to the two southern impoundments (as shown on Map E) for grassland dependant wildlife species and waterfowl nesting cover.

Short-term Resource Management Objectives (0 –50 yr):

- Establish a biologically diverse hemi-marsh habitat (approximately 50% diverse mix of native aquatic and emergent wetland vegetation and 50% open water) that will be beneficial for waterfowl, shore-birds other wetland dependant species.
- Enlarge the patch-size of the grasslands to enhance its functional value for grassland- dependant wildlife species.
- Convert existing crop fields to grasslands or to forested habitat, as appropriate to the site.
- Provide scattered aspen/oak forest habitat in variety of age classes ranging from 0 to 120 years.

Resource Management Prescriptions:

- Remove wooded fencerows and groves to connect grassland patches.
- Thin forested edges to “feather” the forest-grassland transition.
- Manipulate flowage water levels as needed to allow the desired mix of native aquatic and emergent wetland species 3-4 years to establish.
- Ask the State-Tribal Wild Rice Committee to evaluate the suitability of the three Wildlife Area flowages for establishment of wild rice as a component of the wetland’s vegetation to help achieve the above Objectives.
- If wild rice establishment is found feasible, in cooperation with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the St. Croix Tribe, seed wild rice into the flowages in consideration of the Committee’s recommendations.
- Conduct prescribed burns and/or mow to develop and maintain grasslands.
- Plant existing crop fields to convert to grasslands.
- Conduct timber sales as appropriate in larger forested stands to create a diversity of forest habitat types.
- Manage power line corridor by planting shrubs (on both sides) to feather the transition between forest and grass

Authorized resource management activities:

Timber harvests (selection harvests, group harvests, small patch clearcut harvests and shelterwood harvests), mechanical scarification, tree planting, site preparation and grassland planting, herbicides, mowing, and prescribed burning.

SECTION THREE: Common Management Elements – State Park and Wildlife Area

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area share a number of common management objectives. The following management elements apply to all properties and management zones of Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area, excluding lands in private ownership and easement areas, unless otherwise stated below. This part of the plan contains sections related to:

- Property-wide management policies.
- Operations, administration and development.
- Property boundary changes.
- Real estate management.

General Property Management Policies and Activities

Vegetative Management:

- Conduct a public educational effort to explain vegetation management.
- Control invasive exotic plant species such as spotted knapweed, purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, honeysuckle, buckthorn, and other alien and invasive plants that may become problematic in the future.
- Cutting, girdling, application of herbicide or other methods may also be used in park and wildlife area lands for control purposes.
- All management activities will be designed and carried out in ways that minimize soil erosion and emphasize protection of the water quality, following the Department's Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality
- Access roads (for logging or other management purposes) must comply with the NR 44 access standards for the land use classification of the management area they are located in. Temporary or permanent logging roads may not be sited on the Ice Age Trail or designated primitive hiking trail routes within management areas with a Type-2 Recreational Use classification. Trail crossings are allowed when other routes are not feasible. Logging roads and skid trails, to the degree practicable, are to be located so they are well screened from designated trails and campsites.

Wildlife Management:

Wildlife surveys will be conducted on both the state park and wildlife area to monitor population trends of game, non-game, and endangered and threatened species.

From time to time some wildlife may become overabundant. Overabundant wildlife species such as raccoon can cause nuisance problems and, in some cases, health hazards for park visitors. Management of these species within Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area will include the controlled removal of these animals during high population periods, or when excessive human exposure and/or danger exists. Live trapping and relocation of these species to other

areas is not a viable option due to their overpopulation throughout the region as a whole. Animals may be removed by contract trapping or shooting and/or removal by staff.

Access:

- For ecological integrity and environmental protection, close and restore as appropriate all old roads and trails that are not sustainable or as designated in this plan for continued public use or management purposes.
- Provide only limited public vehicle access to the property as designated in this plan, principally to the flowage area and to the southern portion of the property near Straight Lake and Rainbow Lake. Provide additional vehicle access at small parking lots located on the fringe of the property.

Motorized Uses:

- Public use of motor vehicles is limited to designated open roads.
- Public use of motorized watercraft is not allowed on any waters within the property. Disabled persons may use an electric motor on any lake by a permit issued by the property manager.
- The use of gasoline powered ice augers is not allowed.
- Department staff and its contractors may use motorized vehicles, boats, and other equipment to conduct management and maintenance activities or for public safety purposes. Such activities, to the degree practicable, should be scheduled at times that will create the least disturbance of property visitors.

Trail Development:

- The specific footprint location and design of the designated trails will be determined by the facility design/development process during the initial plan implementation. Trails should be sited and designed to be sustainable over time. Old existing trails and roads should be evaluated for their suitability for the intended use; if they can not be developed to be sustainable or if they can not be readily developed to provide the intended user experience then the trail should be developed on a new suitable site. In the future, if any trail segments are found not to be sustainable they will be redeveloped to be sustainable or closed and relocated on a more suitable site and in either case.

Refuse Management:

- Day-users in the park and wildlife areas are required to carry out all refuse and recyclables they bring in. No trash receptacles are provided. It is also recommend that a glass prohibition be established.

Transmission Line Corridor:

- The power line corridor shall be managed in cooperation with Dairyland and Polk-Burnett Power Cooperatives according to the “Memorandum of Understanding Between Dairyland Power Cooperative and the Department of Natural Resources” to create a feathered, natural appearing transition between the forest and the 80-foot wide grassland corridor that will minimize the visual and wildlife impacts while providing service access routes.

Operations and Administration**Funding Constraints:**

The ability to implement any Master Plan element will depend on the budgetary authorization granted to the Department of Natural Resources by the Wisconsin Legislature and the Governor of the State of Wisconsin, as well as the availability of state and federal funding sources.

Fee Areas:

A vehicular admission sticker or daily fee is required for access to the state park. A sticker or fee is not required for the wildlife area.

Emergency Action Plan:

Maintain an emergency action plan that describes staff response to natural disasters and outlines Department coordination with other agencies. The suppression of fires at Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area is addressed in the emergency action plan for the properties. This plan should be reviewed on an annual basis for possible revision. Department responses to natural resource impacts resulting from natural disasters will be determined by specific interdisciplinary evaluations following such an event.

Response to Catastrophic Events:

Where the management response is not specific to the management area recommendations with catastrophic events such as fire, disease, insect infestation, or timber blow-down will be managed on a case-by-case basis. Specific management options will be chosen after considering multiple factors including visitor safety. The normal response to wildfire on the property will be to protect life, property, and natural resources by extinguishing the fire with immediate response.

Inspections of Designated Use Areas:

All designated use areas must be inspected semiannually (Wis. Statutes s.23.115). Vegetation inspections in designated use areas must be performed semi-annually with one of the inspections performed by a person trained in the identification of hazard trees. Monitoring will pay particular attention to forest infestations that pose a serious threat to forest resources such as: oak wilt, pine bark beetles, gypsy moth, forest tent caterpillar, two-lined chestnut borer, and emerald ash borer. Control measures will be performed as needed.

Tree Removal Schedule:

Except in the case of catastrophic events where diseased or downed trees negatively affect human health, safety, and welfare, tree removal will primarily be performed when the ground is frozen. Management activities will therefore not contribute to the transmission of oak wilt fungus.

Protection of Historic and Archaeological Features:

Approved future facility development sites (parking lots, buildings, etc.) will be inspected prior to construction to locate and evaluate any evidence of significant archaeological or historic material in compliance with federal laws and state guidelines on historic preservation. In the event that St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Department informs WDNR that tribal historic or cultural sites exist on the property, and these sites would be affected by the Master Plan’s proposed conceptual locations of the facility developments and improvements on the property, and if necessary, the locations of the proposed facility developments and improvements would be modified to avoid disturbance of these sites.

Use of Herbicides:

All reasonable precautions will be taken in the application of approved herbicides to mitigate any adverse impacts to non-invasive vegetation, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and water quality, or if possible, to avoid or limit its use.

Facility Development Standards:

All approved future facilities, roads, and structures providing either public recreation or supporting public recreation activities or other administrative services will be designed and constructed in compliance with state building codes and DNR design standards. All park facilities will be constructed with colors and materials that complement the aesthetic of the park. All new facilities and buildings, whether for use by the public or by employees, will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Public Communication Plan:

The property manager will serve as the public contact official for this property. Mailings, news releases, and other means may be used to notify the public of significant issues or events that occur on the property. The Park manager, in cooperation with the wildlife biologist, will maintain a mailing list of persons or groups interested in the park or wildlife area issues.

Yearly Management Assessment / Public Meeting:

The property managers will coordinate, schedule, and lead a yearly public meeting to document and assess progress on the management actions accomplished during the previous year and plan management activities for the upcoming year. A file documenting these yearly assessments is maintained for implementation of the Manual Code 9314.1(C), which calls for formal plans to determine progress on implementation and assess whether the plan is accomplishing the intended results.

Uniform Property-Wide Signage Plan:

The WDNR will develop and implement a property-wide signage system plan in compliance with the *Sign Handbook—Manual Code 8672.05* and the *Design Standards Handbook—Manual Code 8605.1*. Signs will have a unified aesthetic character that is harmonious with the area's natural surroundings. Signs to be developed in this plan include property trail markers and regulatory, directional, informational, interpretive and boundary signs. Signage and trail markings related to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail will be designed and installed by the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation in compliance with the *2001 Ice Age National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance*.

Park and Wildlife Area Facility Development, Improvements and Construction:

The timing of development will depend upon the availability of funding and the approval of the improvement projects as part of the Department of Natural Resources' Capital Development Process. It is estimated that the total cost of all park and wildlife area improvements will be approximately \$1.15 million (in 2009 dollars) as shown in Table 2-5.

Table 2-5: Facility Developments and Improvements

STATE PARK	FACILITY DEVELOPMENTS AND SITE IMPROVEMENTS	COST
Ice Age National Scenic Trail	~4.0 miles of trail (~3.5 within State Park)	By IAPTF
Site Preparation	Site Investigations – incl. archeological studies, boundary. & topo. site surveys, prec. tests. etc. – Allow	\$50,000
	Clearing and grubbing, earthwork & erosion control included in separate site improvement projects	\$0
Boat Access	Straight Lake SW Boat Landing and picnic site	\$10,000
	Straight Lake SE Boat Landing	\$10,000
	Rainbow Lake Accessible Fishing Pier / Boat Landing	\$20,000
Camping	Group Camping Area – 2 Group Campsites, 4-unit vault toilet building, hand pump well and gravel parking area	\$80,000
	Walk-in / Cart-in Camping – 8 hike or cart-in primitive campsites, (3) 2-unit vault toilet buildings	\$100,000
	Ice Age Trail Remote Primitive Camping – 6 hike-in sites with box latrines	\$3,000
Rainbow Lake Day Use Area	Day Use Parking Area – grading, gravel surfacing and misc. site improvements	\$60,000
	Picnic Area– w/ 2-unit restroom, group picnic shelter, 4 dispersed picnic sites, trailhead gate / kiosk, picnic shelter, and misc. site improvements	\$60,000
Park Trails / Service Roads	Primitive Trail– ~2' tread, ~4.3 miles	\$8,000
	Lightly Developed Trail – ~4' tread, ~2 miles	\$10,000
	Moderately Developed Trail- ~5' tread, ~0.5 miles .	\$20,000
	Lightly Developed Trail / Service Road, primitive surface – ~8' tread, ~0.5 miles	\$30,000
	Lightly Developed Trail / Service Road, primitive surface – ~12' tread, ~1.0 mile	\$20,000
Park Entrance Building	Park Entrance Building – 1,000 S.F.	\$180,000
	PEVS conventional septic system – allow:	\$10,000
	PEVS Paved Parking Area, grading and misc. site work	\$50,000
Other Supporting Structures	Footbridge – ~ 50 Ft. Span	\$50,000
	Boardwalk 5 Ft wide x~ 300 Ft.	\$90,000
	Park-Wide Signage – directional and informational	\$7,000
	Park Entrance Sign with boulders and native plantings	\$10,000
	Misc. Site Furnishings – fire rings, picnic tables, etc. – Allow	\$5,000
	1,200 S.F. Unheated 2 bay shop / vehicle building	\$60,000
Park Roads	Gravel Road – two-way – 24-foot wide – 0.2 miles	\$10,000
Park Total Estimated Facility Development Cost:		\$953,000.00
WILDLIFE AREA	NEW FACILITY DEVELOPMENTS	COST
Wildlife Area	Trailhead Information Signs	\$2,000
	Primitive Hiking Trails – approximately 6.4 miles	\$8,000
	Lightly Developed Trail / Service Road w/ primitive or natural surface – approx.1.5 miles	\$15,000
	2 small gravel parking areas (3 have been developed)	\$20,000
Wildlife Area Total Estimated Facility Development Cost:		\$47,000
Park and Wildlife Area – Subtotal:		\$1,000,000
Contingency – 15%		\$150,000
TOTAL STATE PARK AND WILDLIFE AREA ESTIMATED FACILITY DEVELOPMENT COST:		\$1,150,000

Park–Wildlife Area Boundary Realignments and Expansions

Upon the original acquisition of the Straight Lake properties designations were applied creating a state park and state wildlife area. During the planning process it became apparent that “blurred lines” between the park and wildlife area were creating confusion over hunting regulations, development/management responsibilities, and user access fees. In addition, it was important to have a consistent recreational use policy for the Ice Age Trail as it passed through these properties. A boundary adjustment between the wildlife area and park addresses many of these issues. Through a series of land exchanges, a total of 261 acres are proposed to be transferred from the wildlife area to the state park. The parcels that will be exchanged are described in more detail below, and see Map F for boundary realignments and Table 2-6 for acreages.

Table 2-6: Boundary Realignments between Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

	STATE PARK	WILDLIFE AREA
Property Acreage After Boundary* Realignments	1,561 acres	1,235 acres

*Current approved property boundary

Wildlife Area Lands Transferred to the State Park

- South of the power transmission line located in the Tunnel Channel Woods management area 332 acres of designated wildlife lands will be transferred to the park

State Park Lands Transferred to the Wildlife Area

- North of the power transmission line located in the Oak Forest management area 116 acres of designated parkland will be transferred to the wildlife area.

Boundary Expansions / Project Boundary

The state park has a proposed boundary expansion of 1,421 acres and the wildlife area 572 acres. These particular areas of the expansion were selected because of their ability to provide additional ecological, economic, and social value. The approved boundary expansion surrounds the existing ownership of 3,034 acres. As shown on Table 2-7, the proposed new acreage goal for the State Park is 3,225 acres and the proposed acreage goal for the Wildlife Area is 1,802 acres.

Brief descriptions of the expansion areas follow.

Table 2-7: Proposed Acquisition Goals for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

	CURRENT PROJECT BOUNDARY	PROPOSED PROJECT ACREAGE GOAL
Straight Lake State Park	1,804 acres	3,225 acres
Straight Lake Wildlife Area	1,230 acres	1,802 acres

Straight Lake State Park Expansion

The proposed expansion of the park is for the following reasons:

- To provide an important open-space buffer between the park and future development or incompatible land uses.
- To provide additional space for future recreational use and possible facility development, and to provide additional public land for deer and turkey hunting.
- To provide more easily recognized boundaries (i.e. roads).

Straight Lake Wildlife Area Expansion

The proposed expansion of this wildlife area is for the following reasons:

- To provide an important open-space buffer between the wildlife area and future development or incompatible land uses.
- To provide additional lands for public hunting, trapping and wildlife observation.
- To protect and preserve a larger block of existing critical habitat for interforest wildlife species, and to protect and preserve additional lands having a high potential for grasslands/savanna restoration.
- To provide more easily recognized boundaries (i.e. roads) and provide improved public access to all parts of the wildlife area.

Real Estate Management

Real Estate Acquisition Policy

All property purchases are on a willing seller basis. The Department is required by state and federal laws to pay “just compensation,” which is the estimated market value of a property based on an appraisal by a certified general licensed appraiser. At times, it is in the interest of the Department and the landowner for the Department to acquire partial rights to a property, in the form as an easement. The WDNR has a number of easement alternatives available to address these situations. Landowners within the property boundaries will be contacted periodically by Department staff to explain the Department’s land acquisition program and to see if they have an interest in selling their property for park or wildlife area use.

Aides in Lieu of Taxes

For all new properties purchased, the Department makes an annual payment in lieu of real estate taxes to replace property taxes that would have been paid had the property remained in private ownership. The payment is made to the local taxing authority where the property is located. More detailed information on how the Department pays property taxes may be found in a publication titled Public Land Property Taxes, PUB-LF-001.

Existing Leased Areas

There are no leased areas within the currently project boundary.

Existing Easements

The Straight Lake property is currently bisected by two sets of electrical transmission lines extending east to west within the existing right-of-way corridor. These currently consist of two rows of poles supporting lines owned respectively by Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) and Polk-Burnett Power Cooperative (PBPC). The pole and lines are separated by approximately 40-feet. The width of the corridor cleared of vegetation is currently approximately 120-feet.

DPC plans to reconstruct and upgrading their existing electrical transmission lines that cross through the Straight Lake property in 2009. In cooperation with DNR staff, DPC has agreed to consolidate the DPC and PBPC lines onto a single row of poles located in the existing right-of-way corridor, thereby allowing the width of the cleared corridor to be reduced to 80-feet. The PBPC branch line extending to the northeast across the southern end of the lower flowage will be consolidated with the DPC lines and will be rerouted to follow the exiting DPC corridor. DPC has agreed to work cooperatively with DNR's property managers to create a more natural, feathered edge condition at the sides of the cleared corridor.

Restrictive Covenants

The deed to a number of parcels on the Straight Lake properties (shown on Map G) includes a "restrictive covenant" from the U.S. Department of Interior. It states:

"The Grantee hereby acknowledges the property conveyed by this document has been acquired with Federal assistance from the Land and Water Conservation Fund granted under the authority of the National Trails system Act [16 USC 1246(h)], and that such property shall not be converted to other than preservation / recreation uses related to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail or North Country National Scenic Trail without the written approval of the National Park Service."

Off-Reservation Treaty Rights and Tribal Consultation

Off-Reservation Treaty Rights

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area is located within the Ceded Territory recognized by *Lac Courte Oreilles Indians v. State of Wis.*, 775 F. Supp. 321 (W.D. Wis. 1991). Therefore, members of the Chippewa Tribes of Wisconsin may exercise their off-reservation treaty rights in the Park and Wildlife Area. Off-reservation treaty rights are accorded as a matter of federal treaty.

In 1983, in what is commonly referred to as the Voigt case, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit affirmed that the off-reservation hunting, fishing, and gathering rights are part of the sovereign rights that the Chippewa Tribes of Wisconsin have always had and that they have never been voluntarily given up nor terminated by the federal government. The courts defined the scope of these rights between 1985 and 1991.

As a result, members of the Chippewa Tribes of Wisconsin are allowed to hunt, fish and gather in accordance with applicable regulations on public lands within the Ceded Territory. The scope of and regulations regarding these rights have been determined outside of, and are not part of a Master Plan for WDNR managed lands. A Master Plan does, however, determine the management of the lands resources. And this management may directly or indirectly affect the many plants, animals, fish, and forest materials that may be harvested by Wisconsin Chippewa (Ojibwe) tribal members exercising their off-reservation treaty rights.

Tribal Consultation

Therefore, it is provided in NR44.04,(6),(c): (that) "During a planning process for properties lying within the ceded territory the department shall consult on a government to government basis with Indian tribes retaining off reservation hunting, fishing and gathering rights in that territory. The department shall establish the procedures for the tribal consultation process based upon a dialogue with and the agreement of the tribes...."

Summary of the Tribal Consultation to Date:

Consultation for the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area began in June of 2006 when a letter of formal notification regarding the beginning of the master planning process and a request for government to government consultation was directed to James Zorn, Executive Administrator of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). Copies of the letter were also sent to the Tribal Chairpersons of GLIFWC's Wisconsin Member Bands, including; the St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin.

Mr. Zorn suggested that GLIFWC's Wildlife Section Leader, Jonathan Gilbert, and

Wildlife Biologist, Peter David serve as the designated representatives for the Voigt Inter-Tribal Task Force Commission (VITF), with the understanding that the Voigt Intertribal Task Force would be consulted if issues arose in the course of the consultation process the tribal representatives deemed significant enough to warrant the Task Force's involvement.

Because of the close proximity of St. Croix Tribal Lands to the Straight Lake property relative to the other five Member Bands, Jon Gilbert suggested that WDNR's master planning team leader contact Beth Greiff, the Program Director of the St. Croix Tribal Department of Natural Resources, who agreed to participate as representative for the St. Croix Tribe in the Master Plan's tribal consultation.

In subsequent discussions with Jonathan Gilbert, it was agreed that the procedures for the Master Plan's tribal consultation process would include government-to-government consultation between WDNR's master planning team and the designated tribal representatives at the following steps in the master plan's development:

Step 1) The Draft Vision, Goals, Plan Alternatives and the proposed Project Boundary

Step 2) The Draft Master Plan

In spring of 2007 WDNR's master planning team provided the designated Tribal Representatives with a full list of background information, maps and reports that have been prepared in preparation for the development of the Straight Lake SP&WA Master Plan. As part of this initial exchange of information, Beth Greiff asked her staff to conduct a "Wild Rice Assessment" of the property's wetlands and water bodies to evaluate the potential for seeding wild rice on the property. This very useful information was provided to WDNR's master planning team.

Step 1) The Draft Vision, Goals, Plan Alternatives & Project Boundary

In May 2008 the master planning team completed the Draft Vision, Goals, Plan Alternatives, and Proposed Project Boundary and provided this information to the designated Tribal Representatives, for review and comment. The only comment received following this review was from Jon Gilbert, who expressed concern about Alternatives 2 and 3 that proposed to designate the property as a "Recreational Area" as opposed to a State Park and Wildlife Area. As this designation would not allow all types of hunting, Mr. Gilbert pointed out that this would conflict the exercise of off-reservation tribal hunting rights. This comment was taken into consideration as government to government consultation in the development of the Draft Master Plan, which incidentally did not propose designation of the property as a "Recreation Area".

Between Step 1 and Step 2)

The master planning team continued to work with GLIFWC's Jonathon Gilbert and Peter David. However, at this point Beth Greiff left the St. Croix Tribal Department of Natural Resources. Prior to her departure, Beth's interest in the Straight Lake Master Plan was limited to wild rice and the use of herbicides. She made no mention of the need to take the Master Plan to the Tribal Council. At this point, the planning team began working with Martin Shutt, St. Croix Tribal Environmental/Natural Resources Director, Anthony Havranek, Water Resources Manager and Don Taylor, Natural Resources Department as the St. Croix Tribal Representatives. WDNR's master plan team leader provided additional copies of all the information that was provided in Spring of 2007 to Beth Greiff.

Additionally, WDNR's Archeologist, Mark Dudzik sent a letter to Wanda McFaggen at the St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Department on 4/30/09 with a copy of the "April 2009 Draft Master Plan and EA". The

letter provided information Ms. McFaggen requested regarding the location and boundaries of the property, and asked her to; "please refer to the records of tribal historic or cultural sites, and perform an initial review of the Draft Master Plan noting the conceptual locations of the proposed the facility developments and improvements on the property. Having done so, please inform WDNR's archeologist, Mark Dudzik, if there are any known tribal historic or cultural sites present that could be adversely impacted by the proposed management and conceptual development of the property as described in the Draft Master Plan".

No response has been received to date.

Step 2) The Draft Master Plan & EA

On March 16, 2009 the GLIFWC and St. Croix Tribal Representatives were provided copies of the March Draft Master Plan and EA document for review and comment. Later, formatted hard copies of the April Draft Master Plan and EA were provided

On March 26th, upon completing their review of the March Draft, the St. Croix Tribal representatives provided a list 24 of questions / comments. However, it was stipulated by St. Croix Tribal Attorney, Aaron Loomis that these comments and questions were not official comments from the St. Croix Tribal Council and official tribal government comments would follow after the Tribal Council had been consulted at the May meeting on how to proceed with further review of the Straight Lake Master Plan and EA.

On May 5, 2009, WDNR's Northern Region Director, John Gozdzialski also sent a letter to St. Croix Tribal Chair, Hazel Hindsley offering to meet with the St. Croix Tribe for government-to-government consultation.

On May 18th, Martin Shutt, St. Croix Tribal Environmental/Natural Resources Director informed WDNR that the May Tribal Council meeting was canceled due to the death of a former Council member/Tribal Judge. He indicated that "without a Council meeting, it will be difficult to get answers to your questions.... I will keep you informed of any decisions made on this proposal". To date, no future Council meeting date has been set.

On April 30th, WDNR's Archeologist, Mark Dudzik sent a letter to Wanda McFaggen at the St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Department with a copy of the "April 2009 Draft Master Plan and EA". The letter provided information Ms. McFaggen requested regarding the location and boundaries of the property, and asked her to; "please refer to the records of tribal historic or cultural sites, and perform an initial review of the Draft Master Plan noting the conceptual locations of the proposed the facility developments and improvements on the property. Having done so, please inform WDNR's archeologist, Mark Dudzik, if there are any known tribal historic or cultural sites present that could be adversely impacted by the proposed management and conceptual development of the property as described in the Draft Master Plan". No response has been received to date.

Further comments on the April 2009 Draft Master Plan and EA were received on May 11th from Jon Gilbert which focused on the proposed Plan revisions and provided some additional comments and clarifications. Comments were also received from Peter David which clarified

some information about wild rice harvesting and the need to consult with the Tribal-State Wild Rice Committee.

On June 9th, WDNR provided the tribal representatives with written responses to each question or comments submitted. The final NRB Draft Master Plan has been revised in consideration of these comments.

At the June 10, 2009 meeting of the Voigt Inter-Tribal Task Force Committee, Jim Zorn, Executive Administrator of GLIFWC, made a presentation to the attendees on the development of the Draft Master Plan for Straight Lake State Park & Wildlife Area, explaining that WDNR's master planning team had consulted extensively with his staff and incorporated much of their input into the Plan. The Committee's reaction was positive and when asked if the Task Force would like a more detailed presentation by WDNR, they declined.

Following the presentation to the Voigt Inter-Tribal Task Force by Jim Zorn, Mr. Gozdziński sent a second letter to Tribal Chair, Hindsley on June 10, 2009 informing her of the presentation's positive outcome and offering to meet with Ms. Hindsley, or the Tribal Program Directors and staff to discuss any further comments or concerns. Mr. Gozdziński's letter explained that the Master Plan will include the following provision: "The property managers will consult at least annually with the St. Croix Tribe, as well as, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission on management issues related to their treaty rights. Special consultation meetings with the Tribe will be scheduled as needed, should any issues warrant immediate attention". The letter concluded; "So, the Department will be sure that an open dialogue with the St. Croix Tribe, regarding Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area will continue well into the future. No reply has been received, and no further comments from the St. Croix tribal representatives have been received to date.



Plan Changes in Response to Consultations:

In addition to the many minor plan revisions made in response to the questions and comments submitted by the tribal representatives, the following changes were made in consideration of the government-to-government tribal consultations:

- To clarify the regulations applying to tribal hunting (harvesting) in the State Park vs. the State Wildlife Area, the Plan recommends that the State Park be added as an amendment to the State Park deer and turkey hunting provisions within the Off Reservation Model Code and the Wildlife Area will follow all appropriate Model Code requirements.
- In response to a request, the following clause was added: "Nothing contained within this Plan is intended to interfere with the exercise of Ojibwe treaty rights to the extent allowed under Lac Courte Oreilles v. State of Wisconsin, 775 F. Supp. 321 (W.D. Wis. 1991)".
- In response to comments regarding the seeding of wild rice, the following clause was added; "As part of the Master Plan's implementation WDNR's property managers will ask the State-Tribal Wild Rice Committee to evaluate the suitability of portions of Straight Lake, Straight River, their associated wetlands and the three wildlife flowages for their suitability for establishment of wild rice as an additional component of the existing native communities. If wild rice establishment is found to be feasible, WDNR's property managers, in cooperation with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the St. Croix Tribe, will seed wild rice into suitable sites in consideration of the Committee's recommendations".
- In response to concerns expressed about the protection of cultural/historic resources, the follow clause was added; "WDNR will continue consultations with the St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Department, as part of the Master Plan's implementation. And, in the event that St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Department informs WDNR that tribal historic or cultural sites exist on the property, appropriate measures would be taken to avoid disturbance of these sites by facility development or improvement".
- In order to allow continuing consultations, the following clause was added: "The property managers will also consult at least annually with the St. Croix Tribe as well as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission on management issues related to treaty rights. Special consultation meetings with the Tribe will be scheduled as needed, should any issues warrant immediate attention".

An aerial photograph showing a large body of water, likely a lake, with a shoreline and surrounding land. The image is faded and serves as a background for the title.

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area



Supporting and Background Information

Material for this chapter is taken from the *Regional and Property Analysis for the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area* (WDNR 2008). Refer to this document for additional data and analysis on these properties and their ecological and socio-economic context.

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area are contiguous properties located in Polk County, Wisconsin. They are owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Situated about 60 miles northwest of Eau Claire WI, the region surrounding Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area is primarily rural with an abundance of forests, farms, and scattered rural residential development. State Highways 48 and 35 run nearby, providing easy access from urban centers in western Wisconsin and the Minneapolis/St. Paul region of Minnesota.

Land Use and Trends

Land ownership within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the property is approximately 60% rural residential / recreation land and 40% agricultural parcels ranging in size from 2.5 to 200 acres. The housing density of the sections (1 square mile) surrounding SLSP&WA at approximately 6 dwelling units per square mile is significantly lower than the Polk County average of 23 per square mile.

Most of the surrounding area's land cover is wooded uplands and lowlands with approximately 30% of the land cleared for agricultural use as field crops and some row crops.

Based on a conversation with adjacent property owners, the surrounding area previously consisted primarily of family farms. These family farms have been divided over the years for offspring. Hence, there are strong family ties among long term residents. These farms have also been divided and sold to others for year-round homes or to out-of-state residents as second seasonal homes, future retirement homes or recreation land. From the mailing addresses on the tax records for the surrounding properties, one could deduce that approximately 20% of the parcel owners in this area have permanent residences out of state, primarily in the Twin Cities area, and occupy homes seasonally.

An 80-acre parcel abutting the northwest side of the SLSP&WA property is owned by Camp Forest Springs which operates the Oak Forest Center as an adult retreat facility. According to their brochure, the facility currently includes a lodge designed to accommodate up to 150 guests. They plan in the near future to add overnight lodging to accommodate 100 guests and to develop a recreation field and hiking trails. (This building is nearly complete, or completed, at this time. Their long range plans include the addition of overnight lodging to accommodate 400 guests. An RV park, a gymnasium and small golf course are also being considered.

Geology and Soils

A number of unique geological features with regional and statewide significance are found within and nearby these properties. These properties sit within a transition boundary of two geological zones. The more predominant of these zones is the hummocky ridge with basalt knobs (known as the Polk Basalt Moraines), which transects the northern part of the property. The unique features of this zone include the topographic changes within the property that are characteristic of this hummocky ridge complex. Also within this zone are many pits that were formed where buried ice melted. Examples of these include Rainbow Lake and the associated shallow ephemeral ponds on the property. Many of the erratic boulders here were derived from the Keweenaw basalts, which occur between St. Croix Falls and Lake Superior. The Straight River Tunnel Channel is connected to the Late St. Croix Moraines zone, which consists of hummocky outwash plains and ice-walled plains. This tunnel channel was formed between 15,000-18,000 years ago when sub-glacially derived melt water was forced under extreme pressure towards the glacier's margin. The Straight River Tunnel Channel is considered to be the finest example of this rare glacial phenomenon in Wisconsin.

Vegetative Cover

Much of the Straight Lake properties are upland and consists mostly of oak (white and red), red maple, sugar maple, and basswood. The upland forest type consists primarily of red oak overstory and an understory of sugar maple, basswood, ironwood, and white birch. Smaller stands of aspen, red pine, and swamp hardwood also are present. Large blocks of intact, mature forest are rare as many of the forested areas in this part of the state have been and continue to be increasingly fragmented. These forests support many rare plant and animal species and are extremely important for regional biological diversity and for sites for research. These properties also have offer diverse habitats with over 500 acres being grasslands, wetlands and fields.

Historically, this area was a mix of northern hardwoods with a predominance of red oak and white pine. The natural disturbance regime prior to European settlement was mostly fire and some wind-throw. Fire, at longer intervals of 100 years, maintained the red oak, white and red pine, and white birch component in this area. Existing northern hardwood/oak stands are 90-plus years of age and were established at the turn of the century during the cut-over era. There is some evidence of fire from the charred stumps existing in the area. Once the area was settled, fire suppression stopped the natural fire regime of the region.

Today's forest understory of oak is out-competed by more shade tolerant sugar maple, basswood, and ironwood and is seriously impacted by deer browse on oak seedlings. The longer the period without a major disturbance, the stronger the dominance of sugar maple will be. There has been some forest management in portions of the project area, evidenced by cut trees and stumps, but this management occurred in patches of intermediate thinnings.

Table 3-1 summarizes the various vegetation cover types occurring in the project area.

Table 3-1: Vegetation Cover Type within the Straight Lake Properties

COVER TYPE	ACRES	PERCENT
Grassland / Field and Row Crop	462	16
Red Pine / Mixed Conifers	20	0.8
Oak dominated Northern Hardwoods	1,431	51
Aspen dominated Northern Hardwoods	188	6.8
Northern Hardwoods	159	5.8
Swamp Hardwoods	14	0.6
Open Water	253	9
Emergent Wetland	158	5.7
Wetland	121	4.3
Total*	2,806	100

*Based on lands managed in 2007

Conservation Needs and Opportunities

The "Rapid Ecological Assessment for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area" identified the following significant ecological features, characteristics and opportunities:

Large Intact Forests

The rolling terrain of the properties is dominated in some areas by large, relatively contiguous blocks of forest that contain scattered kettle wetlands and Ephemeral Ponds.

Large Intact Forests on public lands are rare throughout the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape, and many remaining forested areas, in general, are becoming increasingly fragmented. Forests such as those on the properties are extremely important for maintaining biological diversity and maintaining reference areas for scientific research. These forests support numerous rare animal species, including the Cerulean Warbler, and some of the best opportunities available in the ecological landscape to develop and maintain high-quality, old-growth forest.

The Straight Lake properties contain good quality examples of forest types that are rare in this part of the state. Examples of dry-mesic forest dominated by hardwoods such as red oak and white oak are uncommon or rare in this Ecological Landscape (they are perhaps more common locally, but very few protected examples are known).

There is a long-term opportunity to manage the upland communities to further develop the structural, compositional, and functional northern hardwood/oak forest. With the well drained soils and past fire history, and information provided by original land surveyors, this area is appropriate to manage for and maintain northern hardwood with red oak dominance. Both active and passive forest management practices should be considered. (Matula, corresp.1/8/07).

Ephemeral Ponds

The abundance of ephemeral ponds scattered throughout much of the properties need special management considerations for their preservation. The State Park property provides excellent opportunities to preserve Ephemeral Ponds and benefit a wide range of amphibian and invertebrate species.

Lakes and Wetlands

The high quality lakes and wetlands on the property support both rare and representative plants and animals. Undeveloped lakes are becoming increasingly rare in the state, and Straight Lake was the highest rated wild lake for protection in the St. Croix Basin (Bruce Moss, pers. communication).

Primary Biodiversity Sites

The "Rapid Ecological Assessment for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area, Polk County, WI 2006" identifies six "Primary Sites" that generally include the best examples of both rare and representative natural communities, aquatic features, and rare species populations that have been documented for these properties. All or significant portions of these sites warrant high preservation and/or restoration consideration.

Grasslands/Wetland Habitat

The area surrounding the three impoundments provides the opportunity to manage a large area of grassland and wetland habitat for waterfowl, wetland species, and grassland birds. The water levels of the impoundments could be lowered at certain times of the year to stimulate natural growth of vegetation that is attractive to migratory waterfowl. The impoundments also provide the opportunity to establish wild rice which would add to the food base for wetland wildlife. This would potentially increase habitat diversity, and wildlife production.

Endangered Species

Department of Natural Resources wildlife surveys of the SLSP&WA property found rare birds on the property, including two State Threatened species, a State Endangered species and a Federally Threatened species. The older, more intact, contiguous forest here supports the largest population of cerulean warbler in the Midwest. The cerulean warbler is ranked 6th in all of North America as a species of concern. Special Concern species (a number of bird and one amphibian species) were documented, and several of these species had not been recorded on the property prior to 2006. These species are listed on Table 3-2. The only rare plant found was American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*).

Table 3-2: Documented Rare / Threatened Wildlife Species upon the Properties

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	STATUS
American Woodcock	<i>Scelopax minor</i>	GC
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	SC/FL, LT
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>	SC/M
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	SC/M
Canada Warbler	<i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>	GC
Cerulean Warbler	<i>Dendroica cerulea</i>	THR
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>	SC/M
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>	SC/M
Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>	SC/M
Golden-winged Warbler	<i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>	SC/M
Least Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax minimus</i>	GC
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	THR
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	END
Veery	<i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	SC/M
Wood Thrush	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	SC/M
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	SC/M
Four-toed Salamander	<i>Hemidactylium scutatum</i>	SC/H

END = endangered; THR = threatened; SC = Special Concern. WDNR and federal regulations regarding Special Concern species range from full protection to no protection. SC/H = take regulated by establishment of open closed seasons; SC/FL = federally protected as endangered or threatened, but not so designated by WDNR; SC/M = fully protected by federal and state laws under the Migratory Bird Act. LT = Federal listed threatened. GC = Greatest Conservation Need

Water/Fisheries Assessment

Straight Lake is a shallow 107 acre undeveloped drainage lake with a maximum depth of 12 feet. A small dam is present on the outlet of Straight Lake that raises water levels several feet. Straight Lake is also the headwaters of the Straight River which exits the eastern portion of Straight Lake on flows eastwardly towards Polk County Highway I. Rainbow Lake is a small landlocked seepage lake located southeast of Straight Lake with a maximum depth of 17 feet.

A 2005 fisheries survey was conducted for the waters within these properties with these results:

Straight Lake

- Largemouth bass were the most common gamefish collected. Largemouth bass ranged from 3.5 to 17.9 inches in length and the size structure of largemouth bass is considered in the normal range for Polk County Lakes.
- Northern pike were the second most common gamefish collected. Bluegills were the most common panfish along with Yellow perch and pumpkinseed. Other fish present were fathead minnow, black bullhead, bluntnose minnow, white sucker, golden shiner and central mudminnow. Survey results suggest that a desirable fishery is pres-

ent, however considering there were no fish collected older than 6 years of age and given the shallow depth of Straight Lake (12 feet), it is likely that a fish winterkill occurred sometime within the past 10 years.

Rainbow Lake

- Black crappie were the only game or panfish collected. Based on the survey results a sport fishery is not present in Rainbow Lake and it is likely fish winterkill conditions occur on a frequent basis.

Straight River

- Sampling of the Straight River at Polk County Highway I, documented one juvenile largemouth bass (3.9 inches) and the remaining fish were warmwater minnows. More specifically, creek chub, black nose dace, northern red bellied dace, white sucker, common shiner, brassy minnow, fathead minnow, golden shiner and blacknose dace were collected.

Public Lands and Recreation Supplies

Map A illustrates the locations of various types of public lands within the region, such as Department managed lands, county forest lands, and federal lands relative to the project area. This Map also illustrates the locations of tribal lands, Managed Forest Law Lands, Board of Commissioners Public Lands, and municipalities.

Public lands and recreation supplies are key components for assessing current and future recreation and ecological needs for these properties. The northern region of Wisconsin includes the highest concentration of public land in the state, but Polk County has a lower-than-average percentage of public land ownership at just 8.3%. Within Polk County, parks and forests comprise 57% of the public land holdings. However, less than 1% of statewide public lands exist within Polk County. Table 3-3 summarizes public land holdings within Polk County.

Table 3-3: Public Conservation and Recreation Lands in Polk County (acres)

OWNERSHIP TYPE	ACRES
Federal	1,085
State Forests and Wild Rivers	4,984
State Parks	2,090
State Fisheries and Wildlife	13,198
County Parks and Forests	21,799
City, Town, and Village Parks	512
Total	43,668

Public Lands near the Straight Lake Property

Gandy Dancer Trail

The Gandy Dancer State Trail, a converted rails-to-trails corridor, is within five miles of the property. The trail runs 47 miles north from St. Croix Falls through Polk County and Douglas County to Danbury, on its way intersecting the communities of Frederic to the north of SLSP&WA, and the Village of Luck to the west of the park. Summer use of the trail is limited to hiking and biking. In the winter snowmobiling is permitted.

Ice Age National Scenic Trail

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail passes through Polk County in the townships of Bone Lake and Luck. The trail acts as a recreation link within the County. The Ice Age Trail meets the SLSP&WA near the center of the western boundary of the property, north of Straight Lake. A 40-acre parcel owned by the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation (IAPTF) is near the southeastern edge of the property. While most of the Ice Age Trail route that crosses Polk County is in private ownership, the DNR has purchased several miles of the trail in fee title or easement. The Ice Age Trail also passes through a six mile wide section of McKenzie Creek State Wildlife Area, located approximately 10 miles east of the Straight Lake property.

State Wildlife Areas

State-Wildlife Areas comprise 10,581 acres of public lands in Polk County. The McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area and the Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area lie within 10 miles of Straight Lake. These properties are described in more detail below. Other wildlife areas within the county are Joel Marsh (1,284 acres), Loon Lake (3,102 acres), Balsam Branch Wildlife Area (180 acres) and the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area (350 acres).

McKenzie Creek and Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Areas share similarities with the Straight Lake property. Like the Straight Lake Property, they have rolling glacial topography and are extensively wooded wetlands areas embedded within the forest. Undeveloped lakes and streams are also present.

McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area

The 5,400 acre McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area is located approximately 4 miles east of the Straight Lake project. It was established in 1945 for a variety of reasons, including winter deer yarding, watershed protection, and public access to 4 trout streams. The property is about 6 miles long and has a maximum width of 2 miles.

Access is limited to foot travel through most of the property and there is an extensive trail system made up of reclaimed logging roads. A 6 mile segment of the National Scenic Ice Age Trail crosses this property, also. Current public use centers on hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, berry picking, and nature study.

The McKenzie property's vegetation consists of aspen, oak, northern hardwoods, lowland hardwoods and swamp conifers. Terrain is gently to steeply rolling and there are some impressive views along some of the 13.8 miles of trout streams. There are also 5 named lakes, of which 2 are wild lakes and 1 is part of a natural area. The Clam Falls Flowage is also on part of the property.

Because of the popularity of this property for deer and grouse hunting, forest management, especially aspen management, are geared toward providing age class diversity to maximize food and cover for these and other wildlife species that utilize early successional forest. However, there are also extensive areas of oak and northern hardwood that consist of larger diameter older trees with closed canopies and very open understories.

Rice Beds Creek Wildlife

The 3,200 Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area is located approximately 9 miles southeast of the Straight Lake project. It was established in 1951 as a deer wintering area. Since then, the property's focus has expanded to include hunting for deer, bear, upland game, and waterfowl, as well as trapping, and fishing. This property is about 3 miles long and 1-2 miles wide.

This property is mostly gently to steeply rolling forest land. The non-forested areas are either wetlands, consisting of many naturally occurring small glacial ponds or beaver flowages, streams, or lowland brush. The forest consists of aspen, oak, northern hardwood, and lowland hardwood. The aspen is managed for deer, ruffed grouse, and early successional wildlife. The oak and northern hardwood has been thinned and consists of a closed canopy, relatively open understory forest.

The namesake of the property, Rice Beds Creek, has 5 miles of stream running through the wildlife area. A stream widening in the middle of the property is noted for its wild rice beds, which are important to waterfowl, furbearers, water birds, and variety of other wildlife. About 1 1/2 miles of the Apple River also flows through the property.

Access is via an extensive trail system, consisting of reclaimed logging roads. These trails are mowed annually for hunter walking trails, as well as hiking, berry picking, and nature study.



CHAPTER 4

Assessment of the Environmental Impacts of the Master Plan

This chapter explains the potential primary and secondary environmental effects of the management plan for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area. Chapter Two describes the preferred management alternative. An analysis of environmental impacts is an important element of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Master Plan. The intent of the EA is to disclose the environmental effects of an action (the Master Plan) to decision-makers and the public, and to determine if the action would have a significant impact on the natural and man-made environment. If such an impact is determined, the development would require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. The EA in this Master Plan has been prepared to meet the requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) and Chapter NR 150 of Wisconsin Administrative Code.

Environmental Effects and Their Significance (long and short-term)

Impacts to Air Quality

The primary impacts to air quality would come from smoke from prescribed burns used to maintain the grassland cover in the wildlife area. The grassland areas would be burned occurrence of these impacts infrequent and of short duration (less than one day). Impacts on nearby residents will be reduced through staff notifying the public in advance of a planned burn.

During construction periods, dust may be present in the air surrounding project areas in the State Park. There will be very limited primitive roads and trails constructed in the wildlife area. Application of water from a tank truck is a common dust suppression practice that is used during road and trail construction and on large-scale site grading projects. This technique may be appropriate for the campground road, gravel surfaced park roads, trail development, and at various building construction sites. Impacts on air quality, whether from fugitive dust particles or construction equipment exhaust emissions, will be finite and short-lived. When construction is complete, no residual impacts to air quality will be detectable from dust-creating activities.

Impacts to Groundwater Resources

There are two existing potable water wells onsite from the previous owner that will be used to serve the campsites and day use area in the state park. Two additional wells will be drilled, one at the group campsite and one at the new public contact station. All wells, except the one at the contact station, will be hand-pump. Because these wells are dispersed throughout the multi-thousand acre property, and the volume

of water pumped quite low, their effect on the local water table is expected to be negligible. No wells are proposed for the wildlife area.

Impacts to Surface Water Resources

A negligible amount of increased sheet runoff would result from the impervious surface area of the new park roads and from some trail improvements. Any surface water will quickly permeate the loose and open soils found throughout the properties and would not flow into the surface waters, minimizing any risk of water pollution from spilled or water-transported materials.

Overall, because this proposed project maintains the nearly all the lands in a natural, permanently vegetated condition it would have strongly positive effects on the quality of water resources.

Impacts to Geological Resources

No geological resources will be impacted by the proposed project.

Impacts to Visual/ Scenic Resources

Negative impacts on the visual/scenic resources in the area will be minimal. Site design of the day use area and campsites will comply with the Type II and III recreation settings as defined in NR 44 Administrative Rule. There would be strong positive visual effects over time due to the forest management that would produce larger and older trees across the park and in a large portion of the wildlife area. Overall, visual evidence of management activities would be low.

The development of recreational structures such as shelters and buildings would very low and they would be designed to harmonize with the natural surroundings. The undeveloped view of the Straight Lake shoreline would be preserved as buildings, trails, and campsites, and parking areas would be located so as to be screened from view and the boat landings would only be minimally visible. Construction of fishing pier and disabled boat access on the undeveloped Rainbow Lake would create a visual intrusion into the natural shoreline. The impact would be reduced by using a design and materials that allow the structure to blend into the landscape to the degree practicable.

Signs and informational kiosks will be a new visual element within the trailheads and along the trails within the park, but will be designed to be unobtrusive. Limited future signs within the wildlife area will mark boundaries, give information, and direct people to small parking areas. Signs placed on nearby public roads will direct visitors to the park and wildlife area and will be a new visual element.

Impacts to Land Use

The main impact would be an anticipated increase in the level of recreational use. These impacts would be mitigated by providing developments

Most neighboring land use in the vicinity of the Straight Lake properties is residential, recreational, or commercial forest. Some areas of commercial business development also exist. It is likely that some increase in service sector business could occur as spin-off of state park uses. It is anticipated that some growth in recreation-oriented business development would take place in the vicinity the park. Local planning and zoning codes would regulate such development.

Impacts to Infrastructure and Transportation

After facility development is complete, an estimated 35,000 people in 10,000 vehicles will visit Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area annually. The majority of users will visit primarily from May through October. The increased traffic would likely generate a need to upgrade the primary local roadways serving the park and would increase annual maintenance costs. The extent and cost of road upgrades is not known at this time.

Local area residents would likely notice an increase in traffic; however, the increase would not likely cause significant safety or congestion impacts.

Straight Lake State Park operations will be a generator of solid waste. Wisconsin State Parks promote and participate in recycling programs to mitigate generation of non-recyclable material that must be disposed of in sanitary landfills. A licensed sanitary waste contractor will be hired to pick up recyclable waste and non-recyclable materials.

Noise Impacts

Noise impacts from the proposed project would be negligible. Construction noise resulting from capital improvements such as campsite, road and building construction, vegetation management, and other development activities, could have a slight and temporary impact on the properties' users, wildlife, and neighbors. This noise would peak (high level, short duration) during construction periods, and would not be continuous. Noise generated by recreational users should not be noticeable by nearby residents.

Impacts to Recreational Resources

The primitive campsites and trail system in a largely undeveloped setting would increase opportunities for remote camping and hiking experiences, which is highly limited in the region and state. The proposed "light level" of development together with its highly rustic style would enable and compliment the intended recreational opportunities. The focus of facility development is two-fold. The first focus is to provide limited improved amenities for campers, hikers and boaters preferring more rustic, dispersed facilities. The second focus is on increasing the intimacy of the visitors' experiences with nature. The planned development and vegetative management would provide a more nature-based recreational experience, thus reinforcing the mission of the DNR to provide nature-based, environmentally-sensitive outdoor experiences.

Recreational impacts on the wildlife area are projected to be minimal. This Master Plan will improve rustic trail access to and throughout the wildlife area for hunters, walkers, and wildlife viewers. Due to the proximity of the wildlife area to the park, the wildlife area will likely see a higher level of non-hunting use than other wildlife areas in the region. At certain times hunter / non hunter conflicts may occur.

Impacts to Human Health

By providing hiking trails, canoe and kayak access, and hunting opportunities the state park and wildlife area will provide for increased exercise and aerobic activities. This property will benefit all those who use them. Increased outdoor exercise has been shown to reduce individual weight, increase overall endurance, and allow for better cognitive skills. Improved physical fitness also reduces the incidence of many diseases such as congestive heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, while also working to extend overall life expectancy.

Impacts to Biotic Resources

Vegetation and Natural Communities

Within the state park, the existing forest community would be maintained or enhanced. Over time the mixed northern hardwoods would acquire mature forest conditions with older, larger trees and coarse woody debris would be especially abundant the natural areas, which would provide critical habitat for rare species. Current open areas, if not developed for recreational use facilities, would convert to forest and closed canopy habitat would increase. The shorelines of the lakes would be maintained in a natural appearing condition and the abundance of larger trees would increase over time. Existing pine plantations would gradually be converted resemble natural appearing stands and, over time, would convert to northern hardwoods. While aspen would continue a strong presence, current aspen stands may gradually succeed to northern hardwoods. Forested wetlands would be maintained through passive management.

Vegetative management in designated public use areas would include removal of trees for construction, supplemental planting of new vegetation for landscape purposes, and the removal of hazardous trees when the need arises. The effect of this management would be a gradual reduction in understory density and a more open appearance.

Within the wildlife area, in the Hardwood Forest Habitat Management Area, the extent of the present forest types would slowly follow successional lines to more northern hardwood species and fewer oaks. The forest conditions would gradually attain greater closed canopy and somewhat older forest attributes. Within the Wetlands Habitat Management Area the acreage of open grassland habitat would increase, providing additional and a larger, more ecologically functional habitat patch size for waterfowl nesting and grassland dependant birds. The composition of the remaining oak/hardwood forested area would slowly follow successional lines to more northern hardwood species and fewer oaks.

Lakes and Flowages

Anticipated impacts on Straight and Rainbow Lakes are beneficial, arising from the natural shoreline management on the perimeters. Best Management Practices for Water Quality (BMP) would be followed when conducting forest management and other management activities, which would prevent significant impacts to water quality of these water bodies.

Development of day use areas would be done so as to prevent negative impacts, primarily by limiting tree cutting and keeping structural development out of the buffer zones except where prescribed in the master plan. The three flowages within the Wildlife Area would be managed for waterfowl habitat, and will be held at water levels approximately 2-feet lower (to meet low-hazard dam requirements) than the original impoundments prior to state ownership. Water levels would be controlled to provide for increased habitat and vegetative management.

Design and engineering work has not been completed for the required reconstruction of the Straight Lake dam. A separate Environmental Analysis (EA) will be completed for this project.

Exotic Plants

A program of regular monitoring and inspection for other invasive exotic species would be implemented. Both aquatic and terrestrial species are included. Some common invasive exotics that would be monitored are purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, spotted knapweed, tatarian honeysuckle, buckthorn, black locust, and Eurasian water millfoil. Department policies in place that address these threats to the resource base will be followed. Control measures appropriate to the species of invasive would be used. These may include manual harvesting, plowing, use of herbicides or poisonous agents and fire. Additionally, the potential introduction and spread of invasive species into the most sensitive areas will be minimized by the proposed limiting of access to or through these areas.

Impacts to Endangered or Threatened Species

Many rare, uncommon, and declining animal species, particularly birds, have been documented within and near the state park and wildlife area. Some of the species are that are sensitive to size, isolation, context, and quality of their habitat, both forest and grassland habitats. This plan would have no known adverse impacts on threatened and endangered species. The threatened, endangered and other rare species listed below would benefit and receive long-term protection by the habitat management proposed by the plan.

Table 4-1: Documented Rare / Threatened Wildlife Species upon the Properties

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	STATUS
American Woodcock	<i>Scolopax minor</i>	GC
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	SC/FL, LT
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>	SC/M
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	SC/M
Canada Warbler	<i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>	GC
Cerulean Warbler	<i>Dendroica cerulea</i>	THR
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>	SC/M
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>	SC/M
Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>	SC/M
Golden-winged Warbler	<i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>	SC/M
Least Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax minimus</i>	GC
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	THR
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	END
Veery	<i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	SC/M
Wood Thrush	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	SC/M
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	SC/M
Four-toed Salamander	<i>Hemidactylium scutatum</i>	SC/H

END = endangered; THR = threatened; SC = Special Concern. WDNR and federal regulations regarding Special Concern species range from full protection to no protection. SC/H = take regulated by establishment of open closed seasons; SC/FL = federally protected as endangered or threatened, but not so designated by WDNR; SC/M = fully protected by federal and state laws under the Migratory Bird Act. LT = Federal listed threatened. GC = Greatest Conservation Need

Impacts to Historical and Archaeological Features

Available records show that no archaeological sites have been documented within the state park or wildlife area. However, this does not preclude the possibility of future discoveries.

One historical feature, a remnant of the Clam Falls Road crosses the property. The road was surveyed by Henry H. Newbury and authorized as a State Road in 1875. The road connected with the New Richmond to Ashland Road. Reportedly, the road was used in the mid-1800s by early settlers, loggers, lumbermen, traders and river drivers. This plan recommends the preservation and interpretation of this feature. There have been reports of old logging dam sites and at least one logging camp site on the property, however, these sites have not been located or documented.

When required, site-specific archeological surveys would be conducted prior to construction of development projects following Wisconsin State Historical Society and DNR procedures.

Economic Effects and their Significance

The anticipated increase in tourist numbers will increase the utilization of local business establishments. Economic benefits are anticipated to result from the influx of visitors to Straight Lake State Park. Recent data indicates that, in the northwestern region of Wisconsin, local resident park visitors contribute an average of \$48.07 per day to the economy, while non-local park visitors contribute an average of \$48.04 per day. With additional development, anticipated annual visitation for Straight Lake State Park will be approximately a 35,000 visitors per year with a resulting economic impact of approximately \$1.6 million per year.

Economic benefits during construction of the park facilities will accrue to building trade members, laborers, and suppliers, some of whom may be local. Competitive bidding procedures will be followed. Total development cost for the park and wildlife area is expected to amount to many millions of dollars over the life of the projects. No estimate of dollar amounts to the local area is available, as extent of local contractor involvement is not yet known. Employees working on development will probably live in the vicinity of the park. Those employees will participate in the local economy and expend a significant amount on their daily needs as members of the community.

Fiscal Effects – State Government

Lands purchased for addition to the park and wildlife area will likely be acquired using State Stewardship funds or a similar bonding fund. Bonding programs fund the development of much of Wisconsin's State Park and Wildlife Area System. The cost to the state of bonding for land acquisition and project development occurs when the interest or dividends must be paid on the bonds. Several methods of making these payments could be used, the main one being General Program Revenue (GPR).

The Wisconsin State Park and Wildlife programs budget for their capital development needs on a biennial basis, as do all state agencies. Because of the significant development cost of developing facilities for Straight Lake State Park, funding priorities within the capital budget will necessarily be adjusted to accommodate park development. Without an increase in capital spending authority and an increase in the park's operating budget, construction of park and wildlife area facilities could cause temporary delay or deferral of implementation of other WDNR projects.

Estimated Costs of Facility Development

The total cost of all park and wildlife area improvements is projected to be approximately \$1.15 million (in 2009 dollars). A breakdown of costs is shown in Table 2-5.

Estimated Costs of Land Acquisition

DNR policy is to purchase land only from willing sellers. The purchase price is set by an appraisal prepared in compliance with state and national guidelines, unless the seller chooses to make a gift or partial donation of land.

This Master Plan outlines a 1,421 acre addition to the state park and a 572 acre addition to the wildlife area. The approximately 1,993 acres of additional undeveloped land have a current estimated average value of \$2,500 per acre. Individual parcel values vary depending on the individual qualities of the site, as well as whether any improvements or buildings existed on the parcel. If all lands were purchased, the total estimated cost of acquisition at current value would be \$4,982,500. It is unlikely that all tracts within the boundaries will be available for acquisition simultaneously, and some may never be. Expenditures will therefore likely be spread over a considerable span of time.

Projected Staffing and Estimated Annual Operations Cost and Revenue

An additional Park Ranger-Operations position and 1.25 limited term employees (laborer and part-time naturalist) would be needed to implement the proposed park and wildlife area plan. The annual staffing costs are estimated at \$49,500 (in 2009 dollars). Additional staff resources are not projected for forest and wildlife habitat work on the properties; however, this may cause comparable reductions in habitat management work on other properties in the region.

For the state park, supplies and services for the facilities and trail maintenance, vegetative management and restoration is estimated at approximately \$28,250 annually. For the wildlife area, projected oper-

ational costs are \$6,500 per year. This would cover parking area maintenance, property boundary postings, routine maintenance, litter removal, prescribed burning, exotic species control, trail maintenance and law enforcement. Funding for habitat improvement projects will likely be available through Waterfowl and Turkey Stamp funding, as well as Federal habitat-related grants.

Revenue Projections:

The State Park Access Fee will be the main revenue source for Straight Lake State Park. With the addition of semi-primitive and primitive camping, boat access and day use sites and other improvements, yearly revenues are expected to be around \$75,000.

Fiscal Effects – Local Government

According to State Statute 70.114, effective January 1st, 1992, on all lands the Department of Natural Resources acquires, the agency must pay aids-in-lieu-of-taxes equal to the property taxes that would have been paid had the land remained in private ownership. According to State Statute 70.11 (1), property acquired by the DNR is removed from the tax roll. In lieu of the loss of tax base, each taxing jurisdiction receives an aid payment equivalent to property taxes. This applies to all lands within the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area.

The only difference between the DNR payment-in-lieu-of-tax (PILT) program and private land relates to the assessed value. To avoid the need for local assessors to continually assess DNR property, and for the DNR to review and possibly appeal assessments, the initial assessed value is set at the DNR purchase price of the property, which is based on the appraised market value. Subsequently, this value is adjusted to reflect the change in the assessed value of land in the taxation district. The first year payment is actually based on an adjusted purchase price. All other aspects of the DNR aid-in-lieu-of-tax payments under this program are the same as those for a local taxpayer. Under this program the Department of Natural Resources pays a fair share of aid on lands it purchases.

Note: Land purchased prior to January 1st, 1992 is on separate aid payment schedules and procedures.

State Aid Formula Impact:

When the state acquires land, the land is removed from the tax rolls for the purposes of calculating state aid to local governments. How the state aid formula reacts to this change may result in an increase or decrease in local taxes. For example, if aids increase as a result of public land purchases, local property taxes would be decreased to compensate for this increase in local revenue. The largest impact is on the school, township and county tax portions of the property tax. The State of Wisconsin (Forestry Mill Tax) and VTAE have little or no change. In previous tax impact studies for DNR land acquisition projects, the change on an average residential property tax bill has been +/- \$1-\$2.00 for the overall tax bill. This assumes that there are no changes in spending, tax rates, or aid formulas for the townships.

Significance of Cumulative Effects

Acquisition of additional lands for the park and wildlife area is expected to produce a cumulative benefit, as it will complement the existing public properties in the area. Protection and management of rare, threatened, and special concern species; wildlife and fish habitat; natural aesthetics; and archeological sites will contribute to the overall quality of the human and natural environment in the region. Additional acquisition projects of this type in the future would improve conditions for wildlife and provide added public land for a variety of recreational activities. The cumulative effects from the preferred alternative for the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area will have a long-term positive effect on the quality of human life in the region. In particular, the public has recognized the need to preserve land to benefit present and future generations. They have demonstrated this support verbally and in writing.

Tax impact of state ownership of lands will be negligible because the Department of Natural Resources pays aids-in-lieu-of-taxes equal to the properties' assessed values to each taxing jurisdiction. Payments will be adjusted annually to reflect changes in assessed value in the taxation district.

Significance of Risk

Management and development of Straight Lake State Park presents low overall potential risk to the environment. Environmental impacts associated with park facility construction will be minimal as construction affects less than 10% of total park acreage. Other than trail and related facilities, all construction will be located outside of the designated state natural areas and other highly sensitive habitat sites. The presence of motor vehicles and other equipment during the construction phase may pose an increased risk from spills and erosion. These risks will be mitigated by best management practices and procedures outlined in the bid documents and at preconstruction meetings with contractors. Risk to the resources of the site that result from human activity on the park and wildlife area will be mitigated by emergency action plans put in place by park and wildlife management staff. These plans are reviewed annually and updated as needed or when circumstances change. Risk of introduction of invasive exotic species may increase due to public use of the trails and other use areas throughout the park and wildlife area. Fire would be used as a vegetative management tool for the grassland sites. Risk is managed by following required safety precautions include burning only in optimum, safe weather conditions, using firebreaks and having fire-fighting equipment and trained personnel present on site.

The risk of wildfires from campers and other users is low. During periods of high fire danger, restrictions are put into effect and enforced. During exceptionally dry weather, a complete fire ban may be implemented.

If the proposed land acquisition were not undertaken, public ownership and subsequent management for natural resource and public outdoor recreation benefits would not occur; residential development. Land uses that are incompatible with the habitat and recreational objectives of the park and wildlife area would encroach on and impact important core areas of the properties and the Ice Age Trail.

Significance of Precedent

This project is not precedent setting in the county or state. Such a project has a sound basis in applicable statutes and codes, and state project expansions such as this one are not uncommon. The earlier state park and wildlife area purchase provides a very similar case precedent. Approval of this plan would not significantly influence future decisions on other WDNR property Master Plans as all recreational uses described are currently allowed within other WDNR state parks and wildlife areas.

Significance of Controversy over Environmental Effects

No public controversy over state acquisition has been identified during the public involvement aspect of this planning process. Most people who commented on the plan indicated they wanted the state to purchase as much land as possible to keep it open for public recreation and hunting. Public officials voiced no opposition to state acquisition as long as the state pays real estate taxes on the property acquired. Local officials want to feature the park and wildlife areas as a major component of tourism promotion for the area. They realize that the properties provide for the recreational wants and desires of local citizens and those who visit the area.

A few individuals and groups have requested recreational uses be provided for that are not being proposed by the plan. Most notably are horse and bicycle trails. The Department has concluded that these uses are incompatible with the properties because of environmental reasons, potential conflicts with the primary management goals, and insufficient, suitable land area.

Conclusions

Implementation of Master Plan goals for management and development of Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area will provide positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region by providing a state park and wildlife area that provides public access to a variety of outdoor recreational activities and facilities. These properties also provide for the protection of unique, rare, and endangered species, and the management and restoration of the oak forest community that occurred here prior to European settlement.



COMPLIANCE WITH THE WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

Project Name: Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area Master Plan

County: Polk

DECISION (This decision is not final until certified by the appropriate authority)

In accordance with s. 1.11, Wis. Stats., and Ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code, the Department is authorized and required to determine whether it has complied with s.1.11, Wis. Stats., and Ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code.

Preliminary Decision

The Department has made a preliminary determination that the Environmental Impact Statement process will not be required for this action/project. This recommendation does not represent approval from other DNR sections which may also require a review of the action/project.

Signature of Evaluator		Date Signed	3/27/09
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Number of responses to news release or other notice:

Final Decision

Pursuant to s. NR 150.22(2)a., Wis. Adm. Code, the attached analysis of the expected impacts of this proposal is of sufficient scope and detail to conclude that this is not a major action, and therefore the environmental impact statement process is not required prior to final action by the Department.

The Department has determined that it has complied with s. 1.11, Wis. Stats., and ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code. This decision does not represent approval from other DNR sections which may also require a review of the action/project.

Certified to be in compliance with WEPA	
Signature of Evaluator	Date Signed
	6/26/09

NOTICE OF APPEAL RIGHTS

If you believe that you have a right to challenge this decision, you should know that Wisconsin statutes and administrative rules establish time periods within which requests to review Department decisions must be filed.

For judicial review of a decision pursuant to sections 227.52 and 227.53, Wis. Stats., you have 30 days after the decision is mailed, or otherwise served by the Department, to file your petition with the appropriate circuit court and serve the petition on the Department. Such a petition for judicial review shall name the Department of Natural Resources as the respondent.

This notice is provided pursuant to section 227.48(2), Wis. Stats.



Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area



CHAPTER 5

Alternatives and Their Environmental Impacts

A Master Plan alternative is a grouping of a number of compatible options for resource management, recreational development, and public use of a property owned by the Department of Natural Resources. The content of an alternative should be compatible with the property designation, property capabilities, the Master Plan's vision and goals, and the area's Regional Analysis. The alternatives summarized below are the most recent set of alternatives that were considered as part of the planning effort for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area.

Property Designation Alternatives

Two alternative property designation configurations were considered; the two property designations as State Park and State Wildlife Area, and designating all the Straight Lake property as a State Recreation Area. A property's designation sets certain parameters as to the property's primary focus or purpose, and it may limit some uses as well.

Alternative One: Preferred Alternative – Status Quo of a State Park and Wildlife Area Designation

State Wildlife Areas: A State Wildlife Area's primary purpose is to provide areas for hunting and trapping; however, secondary open-space uses, such as hiking, nature study, and wildlife viewing, may occur at times and places when they do not unduly interfere with the primary purpose.

State Parks: A State Park's primary purpose is to provide areas for public recreation and for public education in conservation and nature study. This allows a broad base of recreational uses and resource protection, but hunting is only a secondary use of parks as parks are closed to hunting unless specific hunting it is allowed on the property by administrative rule.

Alternative Two: State Recreation Area

State Recreation Areas are state lands and waters that are environmentally adaptable to multiple recreational uses, or are so located to provide regional or urban recreational opportunities or preservation. A broad range of public uses may be provided for, including hunting and camping. A unique aspect of State Recreation Areas is that statutes provide that, if necessary, use zones may be established to separate the types of use or regulate the time of use and that limits may be established to limit the number of users.

The State Recreation Area designation is fully compatible with all recreational use and management goals proposed in the plan and it further provides the authority to regulate uses in ways the wildlife area and park designations do not. However, many people believe, and a number of public comments to this effect were received, that because the types of uses allowed under this designation is so broad and unlimited that it would leave the door open for unintended types of uses in the future, particularly motorized uses. Therefore, the Department recommends the dual designation of State Park and State Wildlife Area as proposed in the preferred alternative. The use of these two designations can fully accomplish the plan's goals while providing somewhat more focused objectives for the appropriate portions of the Straight Lake property.

Recreation Management Alternatives

Alternative One: Status Quo

There would be no new recreational facilities or development within the park or wildlife area.

Alternative Two: Minimal Recreational Development

Development of recreational facilities in the State Park and State Wildlife Area would provide a minimal level of development intended to provide the visitor with a sense of solitude and remoteness while still providing for low-impact, non-motorized uses. The key element of this alternative is continuous sections of the Ice National Scenic Age Trail along with hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities. This concept was represented as alternative "one" as part of the May, 2008 alternatives package.

Alternative Three: Moderate-Level Recreational Development

Development of recreational facilities in the State Park and State Wildlife Area would provide a moderate level recreational development. The level of proposed development is in context with a more traditional State Park setting that offers a variety of recreational experiences and provides a more intensive level of resource management and recreational development than Alternative 2. High intensity trail uses were considered but because of the lack of suitable terrain along with impacts to sensitive ecological areas these uses were not advanced to the preferred alternative. This concept was represented as alternative "three" as part of the May, 2008 alternatives package.

Alternative Four: Preferred Alternative – Low-Level Recreational Development

This alternative was chosen as the preferred option. Straight Lake State Park will provide a variety of camping and day-use activities such as picnicking, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, nature study, and other park associated activities. The park will also allow for regulated deer and turkey hunting as secondary activities. Straight Lake Wildlife Area will provide for big and small game hunting, trapping, and wildlife observation. Secondary activities will include hiking, berry picking and other compatible types of recreation. In terms of the range of management approaches, the level of recreational facility development of recreational facilities would be significantly lower than is typical for State Parks in order to provide the visitor with a sense of solitude and remoteness. This alternative will also provide access to all waters of the properties while preserving the sense of solitude and remoteness.

Vegetation Management Alternatives

Alternative One: Status Quo

Management of the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area would remain passive with no changes. This alternative is feasible but not desirable because it would not meet the vegetative management needs for state park and wildlife lands and there would be no natural area designations.

Alternative Two: Preferred Alternative – Active Forest and Habitat Management

This is described in detail in Chapter 2. A set of diverse habitats are provided, including high quality interior forest habitat of various age classes, and ecologically functional open grassland/wetland habitat for waterfowl and grassland birds. The production of forest products will be an additional benefit of this alternative.

Real Estate and Boundary Alternatives

Alternative One: No Additional Land Acquisition and No Land Exchange between the Park and Wildlife Properties.

This alternative would allow no land acquisition beyond what is within the existing state park and wildlife area property boundaries. Lands recommended in the Master Plan for acquisition would not be acquired. This would cause the state park and wildlife area to not meet their stated vision and goals of providing additional lands for a variety of recreational pursuits and providing additional protection for unique, rare, and endangered habitat and species. Because no land would be exchanged under this alternative, Ice Age Trail would fall upon both the state park and wildlife area and possible confusion over access and use of the subject lands could happen.

Alternative Two: Preferred Alternative – Expand the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area and Exchange Lands between the Wildlife Area and Park.

Under this alternative, the park boundary would be enlarged to include approximately 1,844 acres of land. The wildlife area would be enlarged by about 225 acres. Acquisition would provide an opportunity to protect unique natural resources, including rare and endangered species, while providing land for public recreation and hunting. There would be a land exchange between the park and wildlife area to address hunter and park user concerns.



CHAPTER 6

Summary of Public Involvement

The planning process for the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area began in 2006 with the gathering of background and resource information. During this planning process WDNR staff have hosted two public information meetings/listening sessions with individuals, special interest groups, and government officials. Staff also personally contacted and/or attended meetings with local and state officials. The Draft Vision, Property Goals and a range of three Alternative proposals covering expansion, management, use, and development of the park and wildlife area were provided to public participants, local governing bodies and elected officials for review and comment. Meetings were supplemented with two mailings to approximately 220 stakeholders, newspaper articles and releases, radio announcements and interviews, and a DNR website created for the Master Planning process.

Generally, the public indicated that they wished to see the property developed and managed in a manner that preserves land's natural character, scenic quality and protects the high quality ecological communities, while providing non-motorized types of recreational uses that would be compatible with the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. There was also strong support for hunting, particularly on the State Wildlife Area portion of the property. They also generally supported the expansion of the project boundary to allow the state's acquisition of additional land when it becomes available either through donation or to from willing sellers to keep it in the public domain and open it to a variety of passive recreation uses including hunting.

Chronology of Public Involvement Activities

June 2005 – A public meeting was held in the Village of Luck, Polk County and was attended by 53 public participants. The purpose of this meeting was; to discuss the recent public acquisition of the Straight Lake State Park property, to provide information about the permitted recreational uses on the property in the interim before the approval of the Master Plan, and, in anticipation of the start of the master planning process, to receive input on issues of public interest regarding the future management and development of the property.

November 2006 – The Department released a newsletter that presented the draft public involvement plan that was sent to 195 public participants, local governing bodies and elected officials and announcing the start of the master planning process. This information was also made available on the master plan's web site.

May 2008 – The Department issued a news release to local and statewide news media and mailed out the May 2008 Straight Lake Master Plan Newsletter to over 220 public participants, local governing bodies and elected officials. The Newsletter presented a draft vision statement, draft property goals, a range of three alternatives for the management and development of the property and a proposed project boundary. This information was also made available on the master plan's web site.

June 2008 – A public meeting was held in the Village of Luck, Polk County and was attended by 80 public participants. The purpose of this meeting was to receive input on the information presented in the May newsletter and posted on the web site. By the close of the 30-day public comment period, 95 comments were received.

April 2009 – The Department held a 21-day public review/comment period on the April '09 Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area. The Draft Master Plan and EA was posted on the DNR web site for public review and comments on April 6th. A News Release regarding the availability of the Draft Master Plan for public review was issued statewide, several articles appeared in the local papers, and we emailed or mailed notification letters to over 360 public participants on our mailing or e-mailing lists. Over 400 copies of the Draft Master Plan downloaded from our web site. The Department held a public informational meeting / listening session in Luck on April 23rd at the "DBS" Hall from 6-8 PM. The meeting was attended by approximately 65 public participants. The agenda included an overview presentation on the Draft Master Plan/EA followed by a discussion / listening session, where guests were invited to visit a number of "discussion stations" focusing on various topics, staffed by DNR master planning team members. Sixty one written comments were submitted.

Summary of Public Comments and DNR Response – June 2008 Draft Vision, Goals, and Alternatives**Ice Age National Scenic Trail Dedication Comments**

Comments were received on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail be dedicated within Straight Lake State Park. The view of these comments stems from a perception that the Ice Age National Scenic Trail may be lost from the property sometime in the future.

Response:

State Statue 23.239 defines a State Ice Age Trail Area Dedication and lands under Department control may receive dedication. But the Department has no administrative rule or manual code in place that determines criteria for a State Ice Age Trail Area Dedication. Once dedication criteria and methods are developed the Department can apply an approved method to Straight Lake State Park for possible dedication.

The plan was changed to recommend evaluation of Straight Lake State Park Ice Age Trail segments and surrounding lands for possible dedication.

Equestrian Use Comments

Several comments were received for equestrian access to the Straight Lake properties and the development of a trail system and a day use parking area. Comments suggested that the Straight Lake properties are compatible with equestrian use both in an ecological context and user compatibility.

Response:

The Department's master planning team revisited its previous evaluation and further analyzed the suitability of equestrian trails to the specific characteristics of the Straight Lake property. This analysis considered the applicable regulations, design standards and potential adverse impacts to sensitive native communities and rare or endangered resources.

The Department also considered a shorter, half-day ride trail and facilities. This analysis sought to identify areas on the property capable of supporting a shorter trail loop / system that was at least 3 miles in length¹ connected to a trailhead staging area to accommodate trailers and the unloading/loading horses. The analysis sought to identify "areas of anticipated conflict...or other areas considered as sensitive by the Department¹."

In consideration of the Straight Lake property's particular combination of physical and biological characteristics, the following factors were considered detrimental to equestrian trail development:

- Sensitive wetlands
- Sensitive water bodies
- Steep erosive soils²
- Primary sites identified for bird breeding and nesting⁵

- State Natural Area designation
- Deed restricted areas
- Other incompatible recreational uses or facilities as planned

These areas, when combined, cover approximately 80-90% of the State Park and Wildlife Area. The remaining areas are fragmented, narrow or irregular in shape and too small to accommodate a 3-mile trail route connected to a staging area. In conclusion, the expanded analysis of equestrian trail suitability to the Straight Lake characteristics concluded that the development of horse trails is not an appropriate or compatible use on this property and would not provide a quality recreational experience within this setting.

No change was made to the plan.

Mountain Bike Use Comments

Several Comments were received suggesting the development of mountain bike trails on the basis of demand and the lack of other mountain biking trails in the vicinity. A lesser number opposing this use based on the potential for conflict with less intensive recreational uses and the potential for erosion.

Response:

The master planning team's evaluation analysis and findings of the suitability of equestrian trails to the specific characteristics of the Straight Lake property also applies to the development of mountain bike trails. The same factors considered to be detrimental to equestrian trail development would similarly be detrimental to the development of mountain bike trails. Consequently, mountain bike trails would not be routed through "areas considered as sensitive by the Department³." Generally, mountain biking is not considered to be a compatible use on hiking trails where an experience of solitude and remoteness is desired. The remaining areas considered to be suitable for mountain bike trails are fragmented, narrow or irregular in shape and too small to provide a destination type of trail system or even the required minimum 3-miles of trail. Therefore, it is concluded that the development of mountain bike trails is not an appropriate or compatible use on this property and would not provide a quality recreational experience within this setting.

No change was made to the plan.

¹ Department Design Standards Handbook 8605.1; Horse Trails, Routing, page 30-70 and 71.

² USDA Soil Conservation Service: Soil Survey of Polk County, Wisconsin; Table 12–Recreational Development.

³ Department Design Standards Handbook 8605.1; Bicycle Trails page 30-50 and 51.

Groomed Cross-Country Skiing Use Comments

Several Comments were received suggesting the development of groomed dual cross-county ski trails.

Response:

The master planning team considered the possibility of providing groomed dual cross-county ski trails. Groomed ski trails are generally considered to be incompatible with designated hiking / snow-shoe trails and a separate trail system would need to be developed. In addition with the recommendation of the property being non motorized and ski trails typically groomed with snowmobiles, this did not fit the over character of the property.

No change was made to the plan.

Expanded Boundary Comments

A majority of comments were received that called for Department to expand the project boundary. Reasons cited included watershed protection, Ice Age Trail extensions and habitat improvements.

Response:

The Department considered a number of project boundary expansions. The most logical expansions from the proposed alternatives were to extend to the Northwest for Ice Age Trail extension and watershed protection.

The plan has been modified to reflect these changes.

Summary of Public Comments on the April 2009 Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

The following is a summary of the ~60 written comments received during the comment period, either, via mail, e-mail, or at the public meeting.

Generally, comments were very positive about the Draft Master Plan, the master planning process, and specifically the public involvement process. They ranged from a couple of sentences to three typed pages. As in the June 2008 public comments, there was strong support for preserving the property's natural character, scenic quality, and ecological features.

Major Recurrent Themes

The following major recurrent themes are presented in the general order of higher to lower number of comments received.

- Nearly one third of the comments received wanted to see the Project Boundary expanded. Some wanted it expanded southeast to include land on either side the Straight River down to Highway 48 or as far as Round Lake, to preserve the glacial tunnel channel feature and to facilitate development of the Ice Age Trail. Others wanted it expanded to the east 2.5 miles to link with McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area. And some wanted both.

- There was strong support for developing horse trails on the property on the basis that it would be compatible with the non-motorized, low impact type of recreational uses and would increase the supply of equestrian facilities needed to meet demand as identified for the region in the SCORP. Many of the comments were from nearby horse-property owners who wished to be able to ride to, and on the Park and Wildlife Area. There were also a few comments that opposed horse trails on the basis that they are incompatible with the primitive hiking experience or would introduce invasive plant species.
- Many respondents felt the Park was overdeveloped and expressed strong support for generally keeping the development of new recreational facilities, such as; internal roads and parking areas, to a level that retains the natural character of the land. Some stated that the level of facility development being proposed was inconsistent with the "original vision" of the property expressed in the "2002 Feasibility Study" as a "low-impact", "wilderness", "primitive" recreation type property and as stated in the Vision Statement and Property Goals in the Draft Master Plan.

Additional themes included:

- Support for a footbridge for Ice Age Trail hikers to cross Straight River.
- Support for dedicating the Ice Age Trail corridor, but nearly an equal number of comments expressed concern about the implications of dedication on other recreational users, such as hunters.
- Support for maximizing hunting opportunities on the entire property / opposition to the proposed reduction in Wildlife Area acreage.
- Support for preserving and interpreting the property's unique historic, geologic, and ecological features
- Support for better access by vehicle for disabled or elderly visitors to view Straight Lake or launch a small boat and fish on Straight Lake.
- Support for limiting recreational uses to non-motorized only (no ATV's or snowmobiles)

A few comments expressed opinions on issues outside of the scope of the master plan.

- The town chairmen and town supervisors of Luck and Bone Lake Townships strongly urged DNR to find funding to pave 120th St. north from Hwy 48, and 270th Ave. west from the main entrance into the state park.
- There was a proposal to connect a biking trail between Straight Lake and Interstate State Parks.

Consideration of Public Comments

To develop an effective property master plan, the Department listens to many voices. Recreation users, commercial interests, neighboring landowners, conservation groups, elected officials, other government agencies, tribal representatives, and other interested persons or groups have all been encouraged to participate. Input received at each major step in the planning process was considered as the next step of the Plan was developed.

Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the Plan will be made based on the type of property (e.g. state park or state wildlife area), its capabilities, and the best role of the property in its local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of DNR staff. Further, the plan must comply with applicable Federal Laws, State Statutes, Administrative and Department Codes, and design standards.

While a broad range of interests will be listened to and considered in developing a proposed master plan, the final decision-making responsibility and authority on the master plan rests with the DNR's citizen policy-making Natural Resources Board (NRB).

The Department would like to express its' sincere appreciation to those who took the time to attend the meeting or to submit comments. They are greatly appreciated.



Glossary of Terms

Biological Diversity – The variety and abundance of species, their genetic composition, and the communities, ecosystems, and landscapes in which they occur. Biological Diversity also refers to the variety of ecological structures, functions and processes at any of these levels.

Cultural Resources – Any archeological, architectural or historical artifact, site, or structure that reflects on the human-made environment.

Ecological Capability – The potential of an area to support or develop one or more communities, with the potential being dependent on the area's flora and fauna, its non-biotic attributes, its ecological processes, and disturbances within and upon the area.

Facility Development – The construction of infrastructure, including buildings, roads, and trails for resource management, public use, or other purposes.

Forbs – Non-woody flowering plants, most often native to the region in which they occur.

Group Campsite – Any campsite authorized for use by groups other than those meeting the definition of a camping party in a family campground as defined by Ch. NR 45.

Hemi-Marsh – A hemi-marsh is a 50/50 mix of vegetation, and shallow open water areas.

Invasive – Both native and exotic species that have a tendency to take over a site in the absence of periodic fires or other natural processes that would have historically kept the plant species in check. Typically the overabundance of invasive species causes a dramatic decrease in a system's diversity.

Master Plan – A DNR plan which describes the authorized land management, resource protection, facility development, and management of recreational use on a DNR property, but does not include a study prepared for the purpose of considering the feasibility of land acquisition respecting a new or existing project.

Native Community – An assemblage of biotic organisms indigenous to the area or region they inhabit.

Native Surface Material – Unprocessed indigenous road and trail surfacing material.

Natural Succession – The predictable tendency of certain longer-lived species to replace shorter-lived species over a period of time and if left undisturbed.

Savanna – Savannas are plant communities that were defined arbitrarily by John T. Curtis in the Vegetation of Wisconsin as having no less than one tree per acre and no more than a 50 % tree canopy. He further subdivided Wisconsin savannas into four categories: oak barrens, pine barrens, oak openings, and cedar glades. The first two communities are covered under Oak and Pine Barrens Community descriptions.

Passive Management – A management style in which objectives are achieved without direct action.

Property or Properties – Areas of land approved for acquisition by the governor under sec.23.14, Wis. Stats., or as otherwise established by the Natural Resources Board.

Rare Species – Species which occur infrequently. Often these species are Endangered, threatened, or species of special concern.

Trails

- **Primitive trail.** A primitive trail shall be a minimally developed single-file trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 8 feet and a minimal tread width for the intended use, have a rough, ungraded bed where large rocks, stumps and downed logs may be present. It primarily follows the natural topography, has no or few shallow cuts and fills, and is surfaced with primitive or native materials, except for limited distances where environmental conditions require the use of other materials. Modifications to the natural trail surface are limited to that which is minimally necessary to provide essential environmental protection.

- **Lightly developed trail.** A lightly developed trail shall be a trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 16 feet, a moderately wide tread width for the designated uses, a rough-graded base to remove stumps and large rocks, and a surface of primitive or native materials, except where other materials are required due to environmental conditions or where the trail also serves as a lightly developed road where other types of surfacing materials are used.

- **Moderately developed trail.** A moderately developed trail shall be a trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 8 feet, a minimal tread width for the intended use, a relatively smooth graded base with a compacted surface composed of stable materials such as aggregate. Where practicable and feasible, a moderately developed trail shall, at a minimum, meet the standards for recreational trails accessible to persons with a disability.

- **Fully developed trail.** A fully developed trail shall be a trail with a smoothly graded base and a stable, hard surface composed of materials such as asphalt, aggregate or frozen earth. The trails cleared width, tread width and cuts and fills are not limited, but shall be appropriate for the trail's intended use. To the degree practicable and feasible, fully developed pedestrian trails shall be fully accessible by persons with physical disabilities.

Walk-In and/or Single Unit Campsite – A campsite designated for use by a family, their dependant children, and up to two guests, for a total of 6 persons or less.

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