

**SUBJECT:** Approval of the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan

**FOR:** SEPTEMBER 2010 BOARD MEETING

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Teague Prichard and Jim Halvorson

**SUMMARY:**

The Department requests approval of a master plan revision for the Flambeau River State Forest. NR 44 requires Department lands to have a master plan approved by the Natural Resources Board. Wisconsin Stats. s. 28.04 requires the development of plans for State Forests to assure the practice of sustainable forestry. The master plan spells out how the land will be managed, used and developed; how it will look; and what benefits it will provide. The plan provides a vision and framework for the use, development, management, and acquisition of the forest well into the future with an emphasis on the next 15 years. The Department worked actively with state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, tribes, citizens, and businesses over two and a half years to develop the plan. The master plan promotes diverse forest cover types and age classes; proposes enhanced recreational opportunities; maintains and expands protection of critical ecological communities; and increases the project boundary by approximately 49,100 acres.

The Environmental Analysis for the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan concludes that the plan complies with WEPA; s. 1.11 Wis. Stats./NR150.

**ISSUES:** No issues of a controversial nature.

The Master Plan and E.A. are hyperlinked to the September agenda under 3.B.4 at: [http://dnr.wi.gov/master\\_planning/flambeau/](http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/flambeau/)

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Department recommends approval of the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan.

**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:**

Robert J. Matthe  
Bureau Director

Paul DeLong  
Administrator

Matt Frank  
Secretary, Matt Frank

8/24/2010  
Date

8/25/2010  
Date

9-2-10  
Date

DATE: September 2010

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Matthew Frank – Secretary, Department of Natural Resources 

SUBJECT: Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan

The Department is recommending approval of the Flambeau River State Forest (FRSF) Master Plan. The master plan spells out how the forest will be managed, used and developed, how it will look and what benefits it will provide. The plan looks well into the future, but management emphasis focuses on the next 15 years. State Statute 28.04 requires the development of master plans for State Forests to assure that through the practice of sustainable forestry, each forest is managed to provide ecological, economic, social and cultural benefits to present and future generations. Wisconsin Administrative Code NR44 requires the development and revision of master plans for properties managed by the Department. Both directives require the use of scientific information and public involvement to develop a master plan. The current master plan for the FRSF was approved in 1980.

### **I. Property Description**

The Flambeau River State Forest is located in Sawyer, Rusk, Price, Ashland and Iron Counties along the Flambeau River. The closest towns are Parks Falls, Phillips, and Winter approximately 20 miles to the east and west. The Forest was established in 1930 beginning with 3,600 acres in public ownership. Through further land purchases, the Forest has grown to its present size of over 91,000 acres; the Department's second largest property.

Most of the land near and adjacent to the FRSF is in public ownership, including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Price, Rusk, and Sawyer County Forests, and the Kimberly-Clark State Wildlife Area. A relatively small number of private in-holdings remain within the Forest boundary, and a few large industrial forest landowners border the current property boundary.

The FRSF is unique in that it hosts over 75 miles of the Flambeau River, a river that is a popular paddling destination for its undeveloped and wild character. In addition to the river recreation opportunities, the property provides a breadth of other recreational opportunities, including camping, hunting, fishing, and a variety of motorized and non-motorized trails. Camping opportunities include canoe campsites along the river, two family campgrounds and rustic backpack camping. The FRSF is also heavily used by hunters and trappers. The most common game species are whitetail deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and bear. Fishing enthusiasts pursue both warm and cold water species on the Flambeau River, surrounding lakes, or along the numerous streams that feed the river. Non-motorized recreational trail opportunities include cross-country skiing, hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and interpretive nature trails. In addition, 38 miles of trails are designated for ATV riding from May through November and snowmobiling throughout the winter. With its wide range of recreation opportunities, the FRSF is a significant contributor to the regional tourism economy.

The forest contains one of the state's largest un-fragmented blocks of forest cover with diverse forest types and age classes. Currently, northern hardwoods are the dominant cover type, followed by aspen, swamp hardwoods, lowland brush, and fir-spruce. In addition, several regionally representative natural community types are present on the property and offer management opportunities for the restoration and maintenance of high-quality examples of Northern Mesic Forest, Northern Dry-mesic Forest, Northern

Wet-mesic Forest, Forested Seeps, Ephemeral Ponds, several wetland community types, undeveloped lakes, and stream systems. The FRSF also supports several Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) listed threatened, endangered, and special concern species, both plants and animals, and several Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

The FRSF conducts management activities (including the establishment of timber sales) on approximately 2,200 acres per year to meet ecological objectives and to provide wood products to local and statewide economies, with approximately one million dollars in annual forest products revenue.

## **II. Master Plan Summary**

### ***Land Management Highlights***

The Flambeau River State Forest has been divided into 21 Land Management Areas: six Forest Production Management Areas, 10 Native Community Management Areas, one Habitat Management Area, two Scenic Resources Management Areas, one Wild Resources Management Area, and one Recreation Management Area.

- Forest Production Management Areas will maintain northern hardwoods, and management will aim to increase tree size and quality. Aspen will be maintained in some areas, while longer-lived species such as pine will be promoted in other areas. Cover types such as white pine-red maple mixes will also be promoted where appropriate.
- Native Community Management Areas will be managed to develop older, closed canopy forests by promoting later successional species, longer-lived species, and increased coarse woody debris, primarily in older northern hardwood and hemlock-hardwood stands. In addition, high conservation value wetlands and peatland areas will be protected.
- The Flambeau River (including the Upper North Fork) will be protected by designating two Scenic Resources Management Areas of over 15,000 acres along the river with provisions to manage with a high level of consideration for river recreation users.
- A designated Habitat Management Area will be maintained, which focuses on promoting a range of patch sizes and age classes of early successional species (primarily aspen) to provide habitat for ruffed grouse and other early successional game and non-game species.
- Management around designated recreation areas will promote larger, longer-lived species, such as white pine.
- Existing research areas will be maintained, which focus on old growth management, using both active and passive techniques.
- Eight State Natural Areas (SNAs) are proposed, within Native Community Management Areas and the Wild Resources Management Area, totaling just over 3,000 acres. These State Natural Areas recognize high conservation value forests representing older northern hardwoods forests as well as many wetland complexes. Of the eight SNAs, six are new and two are existing.

### ***Recreation and Development Highlights***

The master plan will maintain most of the existing recreational amenities; however, some changes are proposed to address changes in use levels and user preferences. The plan calls for:

- Improving the existing river camping opportunities to reduce conflict by adding small primitive campsites with very few amenities, and by redesigning existing closely-clustered rustic family campsites to single separated sites or group sites.
- Constructing a new forest headquarters in the existing location, with an additional day use area, access to the river, an accessible nature trail, and interpretive facilities.
- Adding a 10-unit rustic family campground near the forest headquarters with access to the river.
- Extending the existing ATV trails on the south end of the Forest to connect to the Rusk and Price County trail systems. A total of less than six miles of new trails will be created.

- Adding a primitive hiking trail along the Flambeau River.
- Providing hike-in back country camping opportunities.
- Developing a fully accessible handicap cabin with water access and associated barrier-free landings for overnight river trips.
- Enhancing and upgrading existing campgrounds and recreation facilities.
- Expanding facilities and trails for skiing, snowshoeing and other winter recreation.
- Increasing barrier-free trail and water access facilities.
- Formally designating a road system to provide public access for hunting, wildlife watching and other remote recreation, including hunter walking trails.

#### ***Project Boundary Adjustment and Land Acquisition Highlights***

The master plan proposes an expansion of the project boundary by approximately 49,000 acres. Six expansion areas are proposed based on their ability to provide additional ecological, economic and social benefits including:

- protecting undeveloped shorelines and the watershed of the Flambeau River,
- protecting high conservation value forests, and
- connecting existing public lands for habitat connectivity.

In addition, the acquisition identifies the opportunity for public access easements and recreational trail corridors on adjacent large blocks of industrial forests, primarily west of the forest.

### **III. Public Involvement and Significant Issues of Public Interest**

Public involvement has been a cornerstone during the development of the master plan. The public has been involved at key points over the past two years, including issue identification, vision and goal development, alternative concepts and the development of the preferred alternative, and review of the Draft Plan and Environmental Analysis. Public involvement included direct mailings to interested individuals and neighboring landowners, a dedicated website, open house meetings, and correspondence with local and county governments, organizations, and recreational user groups.

#### ***Summary of Significant Issues of Public Interest***

In general, there were very few issues of public concern regarding the draft plan. The majority of comments focused on the recreational aspects, including river recreation developments. Comments were supportive of the plans to reduce conflict and separate recreational user types at the river campsites while balancing the levels of users and maintaining a remote experience. The planned ATV trail extensions connecting the current trails with County systems were well supported as a collaborative effort to create a regional trail network. The public expressed interest in additional opportunities for dog-friendly winter recreation, and expressed support for the road access and management plan. Land management proposals were generally favorable. Forest management goals and objectives were well supported, including proposed land management classifications and prescriptions. The public expressed appreciation for the inclusion of sustainable forestry, best management practices, and attention to critical issues such as invasive species. Wildlife and hunting enthusiasts favored Master Plan proposals to provide diverse cover types and habitats. Some comments asked for clarification in terms of a summary of the land management areas and acres. The boundary expansion was overwhelmingly supported by interested and affected stakeholders including local units of governments. A more detailed summary of public comments and the Department's response was prepared.

### **IV. Environmental Analysis (EA) Conclusions and Department Recommendations**

The Environmental Analysis assesses the potential environmental impacts of actions recommended in the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan.

The Department of Natural Resources concludes that:

- 1) The Department, under s. 1.11 Wis. Stats., and Ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code, has the responsibility to comply with WEPA, and the authority to determine its compliance with that Act.
- 2) The Department, under s. 28.04 Wis. Stats., has the authority to plan and manage state forests.
- 3) The Department, under ss. 23.27 and 23.28, Wis. Stats., has the authority to acquire, designate, and protect State Natural Areas.

**DECISION: The Department recommends Natural Resources Board approval of the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan.**

# Executive Summary of the Flambeau River State Forest Draft Master Plan

## LAND MANAGEMENT

The Flambeau River State Forest encompasses over 91,000 acres. After removing private in-holdings, open water, and right-of-ways, the total is approximately 88,000 acres, of which approximately 80,000 are forested. The forest (88,000 acres) has been divided into 21 land management areas, with forest production areas comprising approximately 70% of the area. Native community management areas, which include the majority of the passively managed acres, equate to 7% of the forest. About 4% of the forest is classified as habitat management area. Scenic resources management areas, of which there are two, take up the second greatest area of the forest at roughly 18%, as they border the Flambeau River and Upper Flambeau River. The remaining acreage, only about 1% of the forest, includes both a wild resources management area and a recreation management area.

Of the 88,000 acres, approximately 63,000 acres are upland (71%) and 25,000 are lowland (21%). Roughly 6,800 acres have been designated for passive management, of which about 2,500 are upland. This equates to approximately 4% of the upland acreage on the forest designated for passive management. In terms of forested acreage, approximately 6,000 of the passively managed acres are forested (both upland and lowland forests), which equates to about 7% of the forested acreage on the property designated for passive management.

### Cover Type Changes and Forest Production

Over 61,000 acres are managed for forest production, representing approximately 70% of the current FRSF acreage. Overall, there will be no significant changes in forest cover types, but over time, the forest will become more structurally diverse with snags, den trees, coarse woody debris, and large-diameter canopy trees. Approximately 35,000 acres (40%) of the forest is classified as northern hardwoods, which will continue to be the dominant cover type. Forest production levels will increase; approximately 3,000 acres/year (about 3% of the forest land base) with slight annual variations. Forest production management techniques include even-aged management (39%) and uneven-aged management (61%) (thinnings are part of even-aged management regime).

### Native Community Management

Approximately 6,100 acres (7%) will be in native community management. These areas include many wetlands and important community types on the forest. Management to develop and retain old growth forests and forests with old growth characteristics will be an integral part in some of these areas, with an emphasis on hemlock-hardwoods, red and white pine, and yellow birch.

### Scenic River Corridor

Approximately 15,000 acres along both sides of the Flambeau River and the Upper North Fork will be designated as scenic management areas. These areas retain most of the original quarter mile limited management buffer and include three areas that are proposed for designation as native community management areas.

### State Natural Areas

Within the native community management areas and the wild resources management area, there are two existing and six new proposed State Natural Areas totaling just over 3,000 acres. Sites were chosen that contribute to critical habitat for rare species, provide ecological reference areas, or which contain significant geological or archaeological features.

### Wildlife Habitat

Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species will continue to be protected by improving and maintaining habitat. Forest management practices will continue to utilize and incorporate considerations for threatened and endangered species. Large and small game populations will also be maintained through forest and habitat management, providing an array of forest types and age classes. A 3,800 acre habitat management area is proposed near the southern end of the property with an emphasis on early successional species, such as aspen, for Ruffed Grouse habitat.

### Wetlands and Aquatic Resources

Wetlands, forested and non-forested, account for approximately 29% of the forest, and will continue to be protected. They provide habitat for a diverse range of plants and wildlife, and are known to harbor many rare species. Wetlands are also critical in maintaining water quality for lakes, rivers, and streams. The diverse

array of aquatic resources on the forest includes 75 miles of the North and South Forks of the Flambeau River, many streams, ephemeral ponds, and undeveloped lakes, most within an extensive forest matrix. These important resources will be maintained and protected.

### **Research**

Research on the forest will continue to provide benefits for forest management and ecological values. There are two long-term research projects underway (one by the UW Madison, the other by the Department) studying the use of forest management to accelerate characteristics associated with old growth northern hardwood forests. These areas are represented in an overlay zone; the UW Madison project is an 800 acre project located in Area 14: Flambeau Forks Interior Forest Native Community Management Area, and the WDNR project is 500 acres and is located in Area 1: Exeland Plains Hardwoods and Area 5: Jump River Hardwoods.

## **RECREATION**

### **Camping**

A percentage of campsites at Connors Lake Campground will be upgraded with modern amenities and three new reservable, walk-in-only campsites with lake access will be developed.

Lake of the Pines Campground will remain "rustic." Both locations will receive general site improvements and code upgrades to accommodate a wider range of camping interests.

A portion of campsites will be added to the statewide reservation system. A small campground (5-10 campsites) will be developed near the Forest Headquarters to provide a convenient day-trip opportunity and to disperse river users. A new shower building will be provided in a central location on the property to accommodate campers and other recreationists. Special permit camping will continue on the forest. A reservable outdoor group camp will be developed. Four hike-in primitive back pack campsites will be developed.

### **River Recreation**

The Flambeau River corridor will be designated as a scenic management area and continue to provide a remote, "wilderness-like" experience. River campsites and landings will be renovated or redeveloped as needed. Additional camping opportunities will include individual primitive river campsites, small group campsites, and a small rustic campground near the forest headquarters. An ADA accessible cabin will be developed to provide reservable camping opportunities with road or watercraft access.

### **Day Use Areas**

Day use areas on the forest will be increased. Slough Gundy, a scenic and frequently visited location on the forest, will be developed and improved for day use. Connors Lake Picnic area, a popular day use location will receive some new amenities. One over-used river camp, Hervas Landing, will be restored and re-designated as a day use/picnic area. A Day use/picnic area will be added to site development of the new forest headquarters.

### **Landings**

Most landings will remain unchanged, however, some will be improved to meet users' needs, e.g. handicap accessibility, ramp, fishing pier, boat washing station, or signage. Some landings will be redeveloped to protect shoreline or to improve the approach to water. Several landings will be improved to provide ADA accessibility. Information facilities will be installed to provide maps and details about water related conservation issues or recreational use.

### **Motorized Recreation**

The Flambeau snowmobile/ATV trail will be extended to the south and east forest boundaries providing connections to trail systems in Price and Rusk counties as opportunity allows and sustainability standards are met. Snowmobile/ATV trail facilities will be upgraded to accommodate users' needs and enhance sustainability. An auto tour route is planned to interpret forest resources and management, and educate visitors about public benefits and opportunities.

### **Non-Motorized Recreation**

River recreation – canoeing, kayaking, fishing, camping and sightseeing – will be maintained and enhanced along on the famous Flambeau River canoe trail. A river hiking /backpack trail will be developed to parallel the river and run the length of the forest. Hunter-walking trails in the forest will increase on the forest.

Campground nature trails will be rejuvenated. The Oxbo area will be redeveloped to provide non-motorized summer and winter recreational opportunities. A new interpretive trail is planned using an existing trail to the Bass Lake Wilderness area. An accessible trail will be developed at the forest headquarters.

**Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping**

The state forest will continue to offer abundant opportunities for small and big game hunting and trapping. The diverse landscape of different forest types, lakes and wetlands found on the property will continue to provide important habitats for many game species. Hunter-walking trails will increase. Logging roads and non-designated trails will continue to provide hunting opportunities (see access plan). Non-motorized areas where one can seek a more remote, solitary walk-in hunting experience will remain at approximately current levels. Access to water resources will be maintained at lakes and river corridors throughout the forest to provide opportunities for water recreation, boating, and fishing. Piers will be developed in some locations to enhance opportunities for shoreline fishing.

**Education and Interpretation**

A range of educational activities will be initiated to enhance visitor experience and alert them to the benefits and opportunities provided by Flambeau River State Forest. Preserving the history and traditions of the forest through educational activity is a key objective. Educational activities will enhance the forest's recreational niche by encouraging responsible behavior and use of forest resources. Information facilities will be installed or upgraded at key public contact points, landings and trailheads. A self-guided interpretive auto tour is planned.

**BOUNDARY EXPANSION**

The current project boundary of the state forest is over 91,000 acres, with few private in-holdings (approximately 5,000 acres). The proposed boundary expansion will provide the basis for land acquisition from willing sellers. It includes 6 expansion opportunities totaling approximately 49,000 acres. Expansion focuses on protection of water resources and providing contiguous blocks of forested land for a wide range of opportunities, including protection of high conservation value forests and unique habitats and providing public access for recreation. The areas selected will provide greater ecological, economic, and social values for the property and region.

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

The Environmental Analysis (EA) analyzes the potential impacts of actions recommended in the master plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to forest management and operation. The EA for this plan concludes that the implementation of the master plan provides positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region with minimal adverse impacts.

**Flambeau River State Forest**  
**Draft Master Plan and Environmental Analysis**  
**Summary and Response to Public Comments**  
**June 2010**

## **The Public Review Process for the Draft Plan**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources released the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Analysis for the Flambeau River State Forest for public review on April 5, 2010. The 29-day comment period ended on May 3, 2010. Two hundred and thirty copies of the Draft Master Plan were published, with 125 direct-mailed to interested stakeholders along with a comment form. An additional 375 households received a cover letter announcement, executive summary of the Draft Master Plan, and a comment form. Email announcements with an electronic link to the forest's Master Plan web page were distributed to 140 individuals. Additional copies of the draft plan were made available at public meetings, public offices, libraries, and by request. The Master Plan documents were accessible electronically on the Department's web site: [http://dnr.wi.gov/master\\_planning/flambeau/](http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/flambeau/).

On April 16 and 17, 2010 public meetings were held in Park Falls and Winter, Wisconsin to seek public review and comment on the Draft Master Plan. Prior to the public meetings, one-to-one contacts were made with several partners and stakeholders. Between the two meetings, 61 people attended, including interested citizens, local residents and landowners, business representatives, recreation organizations, and government representatives. A total of 77 comments were received during the public comment period. In addition, Tribes were consulted on a Government to Government basis given the property is located in the ceded territory, with significant consultation occurring with the Lac Courte Oreilles Band.

## **Summary of Comments on the Draft Plan**

The public expressed overall satisfaction with the Flambeau River State Forest Draft Master Plan, saying they liked, "...its emphasis on meeting the diverse needs of the property and its users."

In general, the future use and management outlined in the Draft Master Plan was supported by the public. The majority of comments received focused on the recreation aspects of the plan, primarily recreation developments and management along the Flambeau River and access for hunting and fishing. The land management proposals received a fair number of comments which were generally supportive and in some cases asking for additional clarification. The property boundary expansion was the most widely supported Master Plan issue. The public discussed the values of future land acquisition and described associated ecological, social and economic benefits.

In general, continuing support was shared for:

- maintaining the wild and scenic qualities of the Flambeau River and forest as a whole,
- enhancing the recreational experience along the Flambeau River by providing a range of camping opportunities from primitive to somewhat developed,
- protecting and enhancing a diverse forest to provide a range of habitats,
- maintain a working forest to meet ecological objectives and provide support for local economies,
- maintaining public access that emphasizes the primitive nature of the forest while providing opportunities for public recreation, and

- expanding forest boundaries to provide additional ecological, economic and social benefits.

While there was general support for the majority of the draft plan elements, there were a few proposals the public expressed a higher level of interest in. These comments are summarized below. Most comments did not suggest a change be made but sought clarification. A few comments prompted the Department to change the plan to reflect the comments. Both clarifications and plan changes are described below.

## **Summary of Proposed Recreation Use and Development Comments**

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Recreation proposals received the majority of public comments. There was strong support for maintaining the generally undeveloped nature of the forest with many opportunities to maintain and enhance the highly scenic recreation destination areas, including the Flambeau River.

Proposals for camping, from primitive to developed facilities, were well supported. The public supported proposals to improve and develop recreation trails for hiking, ATVs, and special needs. There was also a strong interest in winter recreation. The public was pleased with existing ski and snowmobile trails, and expressed interest in additional opportunities for snowshoeing, ski-joring, dog-sledding, and dog-friendly recreation.

### ***River Recreation and Management along the River***

In general, the public was satisfied with the proposed recreational developments along the Flambeau River, including the river campsite changes and the addition of a river campground and hiking trail. Strong support was expressed for the plans to create new campsites and modify existing river campsites to separate uses between large groups and individuals seeking a primitive camping experience. The new campground located near the forest headquarters and along the river was seen as a positive, providing additional sites and a starting and ending point for river users. The location was supported for being in the highly developed area by the forest headquarters. Strong support was shared for the Plan's proposals for maintaining the natural scenic beauty along the river including increasing larger, longer-lived tree species and promoting a healthy forest through the use of modified forest management provisions.

*Department's Response – Based on the strong support by the public, the draft plan reaffirms the desire to improve existing river camping opportunities to reduce user conflict by adding small primitive campsites with very few amenities, and by redesigning existing closely-clustered rustic family campsites to single separated sites or group sites. In addition, a day use area and rustic family campground will be developed near the forest headquarters. Improvements will occur pending allocation of project funding.*

### ***All-terrain Vehicle Use***

The public supported the proposal to extend the existing ATV trail for a total of approximately six miles on the southern end of the Forest to connect to the existing ATV trail systems in Price and Rusk Counties. There was general acceptance of not including a loop trail extension at the Highway W trail head given the significant social, ecological and economic impacts. Stakeholders appreciated the detailed alternatives and impacts analysis which were completed in order to fully evaluate the options and support the decision not to pursue a loop trail extension.

*Department's Response – As a result of public support, the Department recommends the proposals put forth in the draft plan of developing an additional six miles of ATV trails to connect with county trail systems. The Department also recommends not including a loop trail system due to the significant social, ecological, and economic impacts, and the lack of public support for the loop trail.*

### **Forest Roads and Access**

Support was reaffirmed for a previous effort to develop a road management and access plan providing access for hunting and other remote recreational users. The road management and access proposals provide a balance of providing public access and maintaining a sustainable road network to meet standards for and reduce maintenance costs. In addition, a number of lightly developed roads are planned to be maintained for foot travel for hunting, bird watching, etc. Provisions are included to evaluate the access plan on an annual basis and make minor adjustments as needed.

*Department's Response – Based on continued positive feedback on the road management and access provisions, the Department recommends the proposals put forth in draft master plan.*

### **Winter Recreation and Dog-Friendly Recreational Trails**

The public demonstrated a strong interest in winter recreation and recreation trails where dogs are allowed. They supported a range of winter activities including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling. They encouraged development of additional facilities to accommodate ski-joring, dog-sledding, dog-friendly hiking, skiing and snowshoeing trails, and other general accommodations for recreators with dogs.

#### *Department's Response – Clarification*

*There are locations in the forest that can provide these activities in the future. Accommodations for dog-friendly activities will be considered as new trails and recreation areas are developed or designated. The "Trails" Recreation section of Chapter 2, on pages 138-140, gives detailed descriptions of winter recreation opportunities and proposals. Refer to the headings for, "Oxbo Trail System", "Flambeau Hills Ski Trail System", and "Snowmobiles".*

### **Public Access to Mason and Evergreen Lakes**

A number of comments expressed interest in ensuring future public access to Mason and Evergreen Lakes, two remote lakes popular for fishing. Current access to these lakes is provided to the public through a minimally developed road and boat launch provided by a private landowner. Concern over whether public access would continue if the private landowner no longer provided access was expressed.

#### *Department's Response – Minor Plan Change*

*The Department recognizes the long standing current and historical use and access to Mason and Evergreen Lakes and the importance of providing public access to these waters for fishing and other recreational uses. In response, the Department has included additional provisions in the plan to maintain the same level of public access to these lakes if the private access is no longer available to users in the future. The provisions include developing a new lightly developed road and boat launch with a small parking area that would not be visible from the water's edge.*

## Summary of Land Management Comments

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Forest management goals and objectives were well supported, including proposed land management classifications and prescriptions. The public expressed appreciation for the inclusion of sustainable forestry, best management practices, and attention to critical issues such as invasive species. The public described a “keep it wild” theme and encouraged protection for sensitive natural communities such as wetlands. Wildlife and hunting enthusiasts favored Master Plan proposals to provide diverse cover types and habitats.

### ***Land Management Designations***

Generally, there was support for the various land management proposals. Comments recognized the designations for scenic management along the Flambeau River, protection of high conservation value forests, including older/late successional hemlock hardwood and northern hardwood forests, maintenance of a habitat management area for earlier successional dependant species, and the designation of eight State Natural Areas (SNAs). The public was happy to see that the SNAs encompassed several wetland types, including those identified as “Wetland Gems”. Support was also expressed for the two long-term research areas.

One comment requested that property acreage information be presented up front in the document, specifically property acreage and forested acreage.

#### *Department’s Response – Minor Plan Change*

*The Department recommends the land management recommendations put forth in the Draft Master Plan. Additionally, in an attempt to enhance the plan, a summary was included in the executive summary describing property acreage, forested acreage, upland versus lowland acreage, forested versus non-forested acreage, and acreage designated for passive management.*

### ***Forest Management***

Comments praised the slight increase in forest management acreage, specifically mentioning support for increasing larger, older trees, maintenance of coarse woody debris, retention of older successional species such as white pine, and the social and economic benefits that forest management provides locally and statewide. Despite the praise, one person questioned the ability of the property to meet management goals due to budget and staffing shortages.

Conflicting comments were submitted concerning the amount of early successional (namely aspen) management versus the amount of old growth/large tree management. Many people were happy to see that early successional habitats would be maintained, especially because of the game species they support. Other people praised the plan for promoting older forests through the retention of older successional species such as white pine and disagreed with the amount of early successional habitat that is proposed to be maintained. Some suggested maintaining aspen, but managing it to older age classes.

A few comments were submitted expressing concerns about the problems with forest regeneration currently occurring on the property and how that might impact future management goals. Some thought that species that are not regenerating should not be harvested. Other comments suggested methods for improving natural regeneration and releasing advanced regeneration.

*Department's Response – Different values and desires suggest that there is no one proposal that would be the preference of all interested parties; however, the plan broadly supports public interests through a spectrum of forest management proposals that will promote a variety of cover types and age classes throughout the property. Generally, the public is supportive of forest management on the property, but their viewpoints differ in what specific approaches are taken to achieve future desired conditions.*

### ***Invasives Management***

Several comments were submitted that supported the Draft Plan's reference to invasive species management, including the use of a property invasive plant management plan and the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Invasive Species. While several individuals were happy to see that the issue was addressed in the Plan, some still expressed concern that the issue of invasive species is a significant one and may need additional attention.

*Department's Response – Public support reaffirmed the draft master plan's proposals to use invasive species BMPs and the property's invasive plant management plan to prevent, track and control invasive species on the forest.*

### ***Designation and Management of the Upper North Fork Flambeau River Unit***

There was some confusion on the implementation/administration of the plan for the Upper North Fork Flambeau River Scenic Management Area.

#### *Department's Response - Clarification*

*The area will remain designated as the Flambeau River State Forest and be guided by the objectives and prescriptions outlined in the plan. However the plan leaves the day to day management implementation to either State Forest staff or the nearby Turtle Flambeau staff. This provision is to provide flexibility and increase management efficiencies without changing the underlying management objectives. In addition, the plan recognizes the Upper Flambeau Citizens Advisory group as an important partner in the management of this unique area.*

### ***Elk Management***

Several comments supported expansion of Elk management into the Flambeau River State Forest.

#### *Department's Response - Clarification*

*The Wildlife Management section of the Draft Master Plan describes the possibility that elk could expand their range naturally into the FRSF. Elk management would focus on pioneer species habitat types, such as aspen, with no anticipated changes in timber management. The State Elk Management Plan will be followed, and the State Elk Biologist will work with all stakeholders, including the FRSF if/when considerations are made regarding future reintroductions.*

## **Summary of Proposed Boundary Expansion Comments**

The public provided consistent and strong support for the proposed project boundary expansion. The comments stated that expanding the state forest boundary would provide the opportunity to enhance management objectives including: increasing management efficiencies, maintaining wildlife corridors, protecting significant natural communities, reducing forest fragmentation and parcelization, creating connections to other public lands, protecting headwaters and streams, and increasing recreational opportunities. In addition to the support for the proposed boundary expansion, notable comments were

received expressing interest in maintaining the current benefits being provided by a large block of industrial forest lands west of the property. Comments referenced the rapidly changing ownership patterns, the potential for parcelization and associated impacts, as well as recreational access. Adjacent and affected local units of government, including Towns and Counties, suggested the industrial lands west of the property be included in the boundary expansion area.

*Department's Response – Clarification*

*The Department recognizes and generally agrees with the comments relating to the current and future ecological, social, and economic benefits of the forested industrial lands west of the property. The draft master plan formally recognizes the western industrial lands and the benefits it provides, but it does not recommend including this area in the boundary expansion area for fee title acquisition. The plan recommends exploring opportunities to keep the lands in a forested condition open for public access using a conservation easement. This approach involves working with partners with similar interests. A conservation easement maintains the public benefits and interests without the Department having to manage the land on a day-to-day basis. The proposed boundary expansion is 49,000 acres which is a significant undertaking and fiscal investment. The conservation easement would be a more effective land use tool to ensure the public benefits are retained for future generations with a much smaller investment by the public, both in terms of acquisition costs and management costs. The master plan does not preclude the Department as an interested landowner in either option, fee title or easement; however, a fee title purchase would require approval from the Natural Resource Board. In summary, the Department recognizes the importance of the western industrial lands but suggests working with partners and using a conservation easement to protect the current and future benefits this land is providing rather than including it in the fee title boundary expansion area.*

## **Summary of Administration and Operations Comments**

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### ***Monitoring***

The public suggested monitoring certain activities and resources as part of the forest's ongoing management. Specific concerns mentioned sensitive natural resources, levels of river use, affects of trail recreation, and invasive species.

*Department's Response - Clarification*

*A number of functions are performed throughout the forest during the year to monitor activities or changes that influence the forest:*

- *Wisconsin State Forests are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). To meet this independent, third-party certification state forests are audited regularly to meet strict standards for ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Forest certification is described in the General Land and Forest Management Policies and Provisions section in Chapter 2 of the Draft Master Plan. This section describes, "Monitoring the Implementation of the Master Plan" and "Yearly Management Assessment".*
- *The Road Management section of Chapter 2 describes annual inspection and review of forest roads, and monitoring of roadsides for invasive species.*
- *The Public Communications Plan, in Chapter 2 of the Master Plan, describes the process for completing annual property reports and sharing with stakeholders.*

*All of these activities provide the forest with an opportunity to evaluate management and development on the property and determine whether the objectives of the Master Plan are being achieved.*

## **Topics Receiving Minor Comments**

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Issues which were supported but received less attention from the public:

- education to protect resources and encourage appropriate public use
- new forest headquarters
- protection of glacial landforms
- youth and community involvement
- collaboration with conservation groups
- permits and reservations to manage recreational uses
- UTVs
- energy efficiency and green buildings
- forestry research
- accessible “barrier free” facilities and trails

## **Comments Received on Issues outside the Scope of the Master Plan**

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### ***Deer Density***

Deer management was a common issue throughout the public comments. Many comments recognized the importance and long history of hunting on the FRSF and other comments mentioned the deer herd may be overabundant and impacting forest habitats, including limiting hemlock and white cedar regeneration. Suggestions included aggressively managing deer populations, reducing management goals, eliminating baiting of deer, and revising deer stand policies. Additional comments supported increasing habitat for deer and wildlife species that depend on early successional forest.

#### *Department’s Response - Clarification*

*Hunting and trapping regulations and population goals are not set through the master planning process. Game populations are managed through regulations and goals set by the Natural Resources Board. The public is involved in all stages of this review and implementation.*

### ***Flambeau River Water Levels and Dam Regulation***

In general, individuals were unhappy with the water levels of the Flambeau River for the past several years, which has made various types of recreational pursuits difficult.

#### *Department’s Response – Clarification*

*Several dams are located along the Flambeau River but are not owned or operated by the Flambeau River State Forest. Xcel Energy and Flambeau Hydro, Inc. operate the dams and control the water levels of the Flambeau River. The operation of these dams is outside the scope of this master plan.*