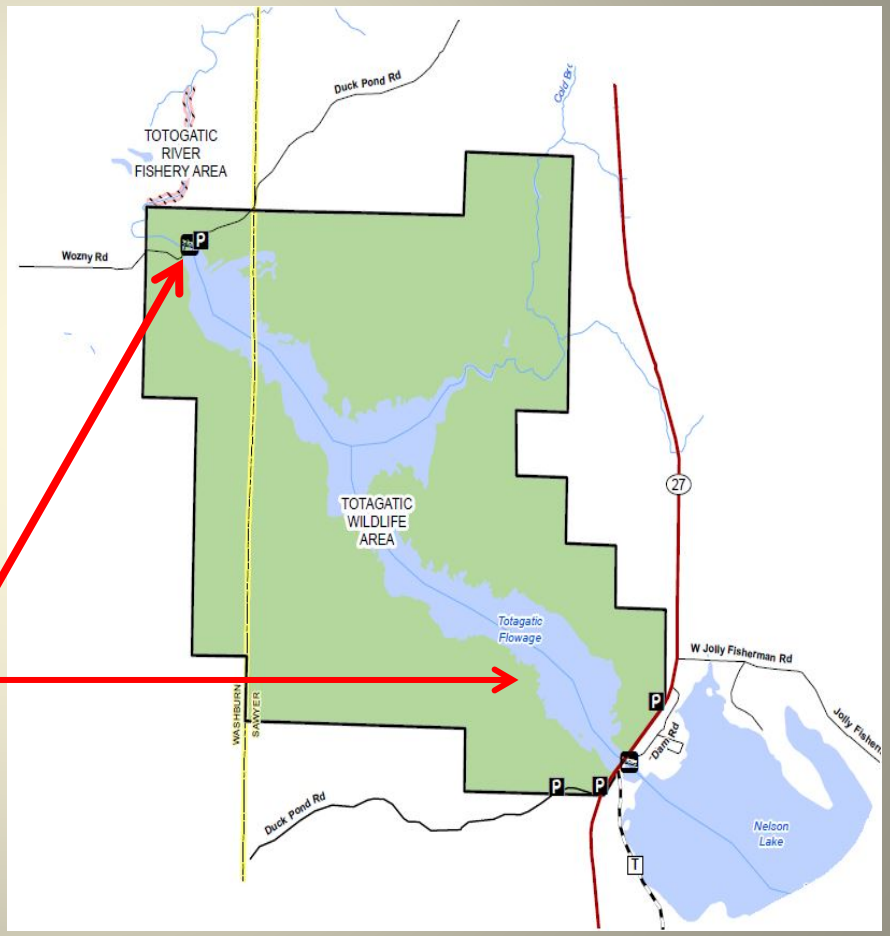
Totagatic River Restoration: Totagatic River Wildlife Area

Critical Elements

- Change wildlife and fishery values and use by restoring the stream (dam removal)
- Stream connectivity
- River crossing for recreation & commerce
- Largest DNR-wildlife flowage abandonment project
- Wild River Designation
- Tribal Wild Rice coordination

Wildlife Area Background

- Located 6 miles North of Hayward off HWY 27 in Washburn & Sawyer Counties.
- Established in 1941 for “waterfowl restoration”.
- Land acquisition complete by 1951 totaling 2719 acres.
- Major flowage development completed in 1953.



Totagatic Flowage Background

- Dike (600’) and Dam (70’) completed in 1953 on the Totagatic River.
- 1200 acre flowage with 400 acres open water.
- Less “Open water” now (200 acres) and it is deep (3-4’ minimum).
- Designated as a Wild River in 2009 (500’ below this dam).

Control Structure Background

- Structure was not designed to be a public bridge.
- Dam safety directives to repair the dam by 2015.
- Consultant cost estimate for repairs is $500K.
- WI-DOT developed plans to construct a bridge immediately downstream of the structure.
- Access over the river provides connection to several well maintained roads used for recreation and logging on adjoining County Forest.

Flowage Wildlife/Fishery Values

- Deep water habitat contains mainly pond & water lily, water shield, and coon tail (limited wildlife value).
- Fishery is not “spectacular”.
- Several nesting pairs of ospreys.
- Limited waterfowl brood habitat.
- No records of nesting trumpeter swans.
- Very limited wild rice.

Flowage Recreational Values

- Boat launch on the upper and lower end.
- Motorized boat access on the upper end more commonly used for pan fish, largemouth bass and northern pike fishing.
- Waterfowl hunting occurs during certain parts of Fall migration.
- ATV use over the control structure is extensive; connected to multiple, county-wide trail networks.
- Vehicle crossing over the control structure for wildlife-based recreation.

Boat launch below Nelson Dam

Considerations

- Dam repair ($500K)will not address bridge standards.
- Dam abandonment ($50-60K)must consider river crossing.
- Do dam abandonment and new bridge construction at the same time and at the same site.
- Protect downstream river reach during construction.

Wildlife/Fishery Changes Without Dam

- Wild rice will likely be more prevalent due to shallower water.
- Overall wildlife values and use will likely improve due to more shallow water habitat.
- Uninterrupted flow and exchange of water, energy, sediments, nutrients, and organisms.
- Fish passage and spawning habitat will improve.
- Trade-offs for unique species.
- Stream connectivity (longitudinal and lateral) improved due to nearly 4 miles of restored stream.

Recreational Changes without dam

- Fishing opportunities will change, may or may not decrease.
- Canoe/Kayak use may increase with existing connection to the designated Wild River.
- Waterfowl hunting will increase if waterfowl habitat improves.

Collaborative Efforts Underway

- Liaison with WI-DOT to address river crossing.
- Project Development Request for dam abandonment.
- Coordination with Fisheries, Waters, and Natural Heritage Conservation to gather more information.
- Internal Briefings
- Preliminary GLIFWC coordination on wild rice.
- This project may be used as a prototype to evaluate other similar wildlife flowages statewide