

2016 Work Plan

Black River State Forest

As a requirement of forest certification state forests annually provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on property activities. The Black River State Forest utilizes an online format including a synopsis of the property's major work plan goals. Annual work goals are directly tied to the property's master plan, which was accepted by the Natural Resources Board in January of 2010. The master plan can be accessed online at http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/documents/MP_BRSF_2010.pdf

The work plan is divided into sections on land management, development projects, and real estate management. All actions taken by the property are directly authorized under the property's master plan.

This year's work plan has two areas related to recent legislation. The first deals with increasing forest production area acreage. The second area of interest deals with motorized access to public lands.

Forest Management:

Forestry is one of the largest contributors to the state economy accounting for 22.6 billion dollars annually. The Black River State forest meets the highest standards for environmental quality in its forest practices being dually certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Twice each year the state forest sells tracts of timber to loggers through a competitive bidding process. Each bid opening averages 6-7 sales totaling 500-700 acres. In 2015 \$1,086,606 in timber was sold on the Black River State Forest. Timber sale revenues are deposited into the state forestry account.

State forest timber sales are a combination of thinnings and regeneration cuts. A thinning is an intermediate treatment where trees of poorer vigor and form are removed to favor higher quality future crop trees. A stand may be thinned once to several times before the final cut when it is regenerated. A regeneration cut removes the majority of the overstory trees at one time. These sites are assessed for regeneration needs at periodic cycles after the harvest is complete. If adequate natural regeneration is not present, then sites are planted or seeded to an acceptable level.

For 2016 the following forest management activities are planned:

1. Timber sales – Thirty four stands comprising 1252 acres will be reviewed for harvesting potential. These areas are shown in the proposed timber sale map provided with this document. If you wish to comment on any stand please include the stand numbers indicated on the map.

2. Forest Reconnaissance – On a 20 year cycle the state forest collects information on forest type, tree density, age, and site quality from every stand on the property. This information is used to schedule forest practices such as thinning and regeneration cuts. In 2016 the state forest will update stand information on at least 5% of the entire property.
3. Forest Regeneration – At this time we do not anticipate any planting or seeding needs for 2016. One stand will receive site preparation work. This is an 81 acre Jack pine stand that will be treated for buckthorn. The site will be monitored for one year before the decision to plant or treat a second time will be determined.
4. Timber Stand Improvement – No timber stand improvement projects are planned for 2016.

Forest Production Areas

Legislation was passed in 2015 requiring that all northern state forests, minus the Governor Knowles, have a combined 75% of their land classified as forest production areas. Currently 66.3% of all state forest acreage is in forest production management areas. On the Black River State Forest 68.5% of the property is currently classified into a forest production area.

The remaining acres in state forests are classified into other land classification types such as native community, habitat management, recreation areas, and scenic management areas. While these classifications do not prohibit forest management, the production of forest products is not necessarily the primary goal.

In 2016 the Black River State Forest will work with other state forests to identify acreage that can have its classification changed to forest production management areas. The expected completion date for this is March of 2017.

Motorized Access Project

Legislation was passed in 2013 requiring the Department of Natural Resources to inventory and map all state owned roads within property boundaries. For the past two years the state has worked towards accomplishing this goal. In 2016 the state forest and all other state properties will release maps showing current road locations and conditions, and draft guidance on how Department roads will be managed for public comment. This is expected to occur in 2016 with final implementation planned for early 2017.

Invasive Species Management:

Invasive species pose a serious threat to the integrity of forest ecosystems by displacing native species and negatively impacting forest regeneration. Invasives are estimated to cost 125-140 billion dollars a year to U.S. taxpayers. Techniques used to control invasives include a combination of herbicide use, hand weeding, and the use of biological

controls such as Larinus beetles to infest spotted knapweed populations. The state forest specific goals for 2016 include:

1. Practice best management practices to prevent the spread of invasive species <http://www.wisconsinforestry.org/initiatives/other/invasive-species-bmps/overview>
2. Control species of greatest concern along the Black River through the use of a private contractor. These species include garlic mustard, greater celandine, dame's rocket, musk, bull, and Canada thistle, honeysuckle, black locust, buckthorn, and if they are detected wild parsnip, tansy, and Japanese hedge parsley. This is an ongoing project to limit the spread along the river and contain it within the floodplain.
3. Control invasive species in timber sales before and after timber operations. This will be accomplished primarily through contracting with private vendors. An 81 acre Jack pine, referenced above in the forest management section will be treated for buckthorn prior to its 2017 scheduled planting.
4. Monitor and control invasive species in high quality native community management areas. Monitoring in native community management areas will be focused on forest roads, as they are the most likely vector for introduction.
5. Monitor sites where invasives are most likely to be introduced. Priorities for this year will include phragmites and highway right of ways, as they serve as a primary vector for species such as wild parsnip, teasel, and yellow toadflax.
6. Aggressively control any newly detected species considered a critical threat to forest health. Controlling any newly detected phragmites populations will be a high priority.
7. Work with interested groups to monitor the Black River for aquatic invasive species. While control may not be feasible at this point, the property would like to track the spread of species of concern. Also work with Jackson County Forestry and Parks and the Ho-Chunk Nation to contain the spread of invasives across boundaries and share detection and distribution information. This may involve joining the local Cooperative Weed Management Area organization if or when it is revitalized.
8. Monitoring for signs of disease or insect damage on invasive plants, especially buckthorn.

All herbicides/chemicals that the state forest uses are tracked and reported annually. Specific chemicals can only be used if they are approved through forest certification. A new requirement starting this year is to include the list of chemicals to be used in the annual work plan. Any additional chemicals not included on this list must go through a

formal Department request process. Chemicals that the state forest are planning on using, along with their intended species needing control are listed below:

- Woody shrubs and small trees (buckthorn, honeysuckle, black locust, etc.)
 - Triclopyr
 - Metsulfuron
 - Aminopyralid
 - Glyphosate

- Biennial and perennial herbaceous plants (garlic mustard, cypress spurge, phragmites, crown vetch, spotted knapweed, etc.)
 - Metsulfuron
 - Triclopyr
 - Glyphosate
 - Imazapic
 - Imazapyr
 - Aminopyralid

Barrens and Karner Blue Butterfly Management:

Barrens are a globally imperiled ecosystem with Wisconsin, including the state forest, having some of the best potential areas for their restoration. The Black River State Forest currently receives funding for barrens management through a small grant. This funding will be used to maintain a semi-open barrens habitat through selective fecon mowing of high quality sites.

The state forest is also a recovery property for the federally endangered Karner Blue Butterfly. The property has been given a goal of attaining a population of 3,000 butterflies on an annual basis every year for five years. Barrens management provides valuable habitat for the Karner Blue and a host of other endangered and special concern species. In 2016 the state forest will focus on meeting the following goals to improve barrens habitat and maintain a viable Karner Blue Butterfly population:

1. Attempt to conduct a prescribed burn in at least one high quality barrens location in the Sand Pillow barrens area.

2. Control spotted knapweed at key barrens restoration sites.

3. Control woody vegetation through cutting, mowing and/or herbicide in the Cemetery road core barrens/Karner Blue area. Work will be focused in the best quality barrens communities and in increasing the connectivity between these areas.

Wildlife Management:

The state forest's wildlife management program is primarily focused on the Dike 17 habitat management area, flowage management, research, and population surveys. The following are the main objectives for 2016:

1. Surveys – Wildlife staff will conduct annual surveys for black bear, wolves, deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, eagles, osprey, waterfowl, furbearers, and amphibians.
2. Land management – All flowage dikes will be mowed to keep them clear of trees and brush. Additional control efforts will be conducted on black locust on the Dike 17 habitat area through mechanical mowing and spot treatment with herbicides (Transline or Milestone). Access roads will be mowed and maintained leading into the fields at Battle Point, Wilson Flowage, Whitetail Flowage, Big and Little Bear Flowages, Tanner and Partridge Crop Flowage. All parking lots will be mowed and property signs will be replaced as needed. Fecon mowing and herbicide treatments may be used to remove brush on the Dike 17 habitat area. Prescribed burn plans will be prepared for Dike 17 and burns may be conducted if appropriate weather conditions exist and resources are available. Wild rice will be planted on several flowages within Dike 17 in an attempt to restore the species. Logging trails and log landings will be reseeded post-harvest with a native seed blend that will benefit wildlife. A focused effort on identifying and inventorying forest openings will occur with a future goal of managing these openings for early successional habitat.
3. Research – Wolf research trapping will be conducted in an effort to radio collar and monitor the wolf packs surrounding Dike 17. All elk released as part of the reintroduction will be radio collared and monitored to evaluate project success.
4. Elk - In December of 2012 the Natural Resources Board approved amendments to the Black River Elk Management Plan. The plan calls for the introduction of up to 75 elk to the Black River Elk Range (BRER). The Department identified a source of wild elk in the state of Kentucky and legislative changes were passed in 2013 that allow the importation of elk into Wisconsin. The first group of elk arrived in March 2015. The elk were held in a quarantine facility in Dike 17 for several months and released after all health tests were complete. The second group of elk is scheduled to be brought up to the same holding facility in March 2016. Similar procedures will be followed in 2016 with an anticipated release of the elk in the summer of 2016. The Department will also conduct habitat management projects focused on barrens and opening management that would benefit elk, including tree/brush removal, herbicide application, prescribed burning, and field plantings.

Development Projects:

Two key development projects are planned for 2016.

1. ATV Trails Wetland Crossing Upgrades – After several years of work the ATV wetland crossing project is nearing completion. In 2016 we plan on finishing the crossings on the Wildcat Loop portion of the trail. Significant progress was made in this area in 2015. These upgrades will protect the long term integrity of the trail system and minimize weather related closures. These projects may result in some short term trail closures.
2. Castle Mound Toilet Shower Building – This project is slated to be bid out in early 2016 with an expected completion date of fall 2016. This project will replace an undersized, poorly sited toilet shower building that is in need of various repairs.

Real Estate Management:

1. Land Acquisition –The Black River State forest acquired three parcels totaling 142 acres in 2015. One interested seller has contacted the property regarding a 40 acre tract. This parcel is currently not slated to be appraised in 2016 but may be in future years.

The state forest will continue to purchase real estate from willing sellers at the fair market price. However, any potential purchase must meet a series of stringent criteria to assure that limited acquisition dollars are spent on the best parcels for conservation.

2. Power line corridor – The state forest is still under consideration as a route for a new power line corridor. This corridor would run along Interstate 94 and impact a small portion of the state forest adjacent to the interstate corridor.

Partnership Work:

The state forest works with numerous partners every year to meet mutual goals. Several of these have already been discussed in other more appropriate sections of the work plan. The following are additional partnership events the state forest will participate in during 2016.

1. Cultural Resource Protection – Each year the state forest provides a map of planned timber sales to the Cultural Resources staff of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Preservation staff are provided the opportunity to comment on any sale that could adversely impact important cultural resources.

2. Friends Group – The Black River Forest Trail Foundation is the officially recognized Friends group to the state forest. Each year they plan and provide a candlelight ski, snowshoe, and hike event in late January or early February.
3. Jackson County Correctional Center –The correctional center within the Black River State Forest provides an 8-10 person crew 1-2 days a week to the forest to assist with property operations.
4. Nature Conservancy & Barrens Restoration – Adequate staffing is often a limiting factor in planning for prescribed burning. The state forest has formed a relationship with the Conservancy to address this issue. The Nature Conservancy has available staffing to provide assistance with prescribed burns on high quality barrens areas.
5. Snowmobile grooming and maintenance – The state forest conveyed all snowmobile trail responsibilities to Jackson County starting the winter of 2011. This arrangement has freed up state forest staff to work on other priorities. This relationship will continue in 2016.

Comments:

Comments on the 2016 Black River State Forest Work Plan should be directed to:

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Comments must be received by March 20th, 2016