
WILLOW FLOWAGE PROPOSED MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT PUBLIC MOTORIZED ACCESS



**OCTOBER 2013
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals from the Department of Natural Resources have developed this analysis through an integrated planning process. Through their hard work and expertise, these people have developed an analysis that will guide the master plan amendment for the Willow.

Authors

Tom Shockley
Steve Petersen
Teague Prichard
Amy Mercer
Bob Dall

Cartography

Andy Stoltman

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. 20240, or Wisconsin's Office of Diversity, WDNR Office of Diversity, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. This publication is available in alternative format upon request. Contact the Division of Forestry at 608-267-7494.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
101 S. Webster Street
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Property Description

The Willow Flowage is located in west central Oneida County and includes 73 miles of shoreline (95% of which is undeveloped), 106 islands, and 7 boat landings. The property, including the flowage, encompasses more than 30,000 acres and was designated as an Outstanding Resource Water in 1997. The primary uses of the Willow include; hunting, fishing, paddling, camping and hiking. The majority of the use on the Willow focuses on the water, however the property provides snowmobile and ATV connector trails and provides lands for hunting and gathering.

Current Motorized Access

Access to the Willow property by motor vehicles is currently through a network of Town and County roads on the edge of the property boundary. One Department owned road, Iron Gate Road, located off County Highway Y in the Town of Little Rice is currently open seasonally, October through December, to highway licensed vehicles for approximately 4 miles.

An ATV trail provides just over 5 miles of designated ATV trails on the eastern portion of the Willow connecting Town ATV routes originating on Burrows Lake Road north to Willow Dam road and eventually to Cedar Falls Road.

Approximately 19 miles of designated snowmobile trails are on the Willow property. In addition, there are 100 plus miles of primitive, non-maintained, woods roads located on the Willow closed to public motorized access that are used for forest management purposes and used as hunter walking trails.

Previous Master Plan Access Adjustments

In September of 2004, a Master plan amendment was approved by the Natural Resources Board (NRB) that authorized public motorized vehicles on approximately 4 miles of Iron Gate Road starting at County Highway W from October 15th to December 5th to accommodate hunting, specifically the extended Tribal deer hunting season. The amendment specified Iron Gate Road would be open (not spur roads or trails) and the road would only be open to highway licensed vehicles.

Table 1 shows the seasonally open Iron Gate Road is 4 miles long and is maintained as a moderately developed road. In addition to the 4 miles of seasonally open road, there are approximately 111 miles of DNR roads from fully developed service roads to primitive logging roads that are closed to the public and in many cases not maintained. The majority of the 100 plus miles are in the primitive classification. The roads that are maintained to a moderately developed standard are Iron Gate Road, West Side Fire Lane and Cedar Falls Fire Lane (See Willow Flowage Access Map).

Table 1. Road Inventory within Willow Flowage.		
Type of Road/Trail	Road Standard¹	Miles
DNR Service Road – Open Seasonally	Moderately Developed Road	4
DNR Service Road – Closed	Moderately Developed, Lightly Developed, and Primitive Roads	111
Snowmobile/ATV Trail	Lightly Developed Road	19 (5.25 miles of which is ATV trail)
Hiking Trail (designated)	Moderately Developed	5.5
¹ See Appendix A for definitions of road standards.		

Proposed Changes to Motorized Access

Public input indicates that some people are satisfied with the current level of motorized access and others would like to see expanded opportunities for motorized access, particularly for hunting access and connecting existing motorized networks. In an effort to achieve a balance between motorized and non-motorized interests, the following changes are proposed:

Iron Gate Road

Iron Gate road will be maintained at its current development level as a moderately developed road with a gravel base.

The section of Iron Gate road from County Highway Y (Gate 1) to Gate 2 will remain open year round for motorized use. ATV/UTVs will be allowed on the portion of this road section, starting from County Highway Y (Gate 1) to Gate 2 as long as County Highway Y, by ordinance, remains designated as an ATV route and during the same time as the designated ATV trail is open.

The section of Iron Gate Road from Gate 2 (located approximately 2 miles from County Highway Y) to McCord Road (Gate 4) will be open for motorized access, including vehicles and ATVs/UTVs beginning the Tuesday after Labor Day Weekend (typically the first week in September) until December 15th. The change will extend the existing seasonally open portion of Iron Gate Road an additional 4 miles to McCord road and extend the time period of when the road is open. Periodic maintenance will be performed to sustain the road system integrity but no snow-plowing will be available.

Access control structures, ranging from signs, berms or gates, may be placed along Iron Gate Road, as needed, to mitigate use of spur roads for motorized purposes. Iron gate road may be closed, by notice of the property manager, during spring break-up, to maintain the existing road base.

West Side Fire Lane

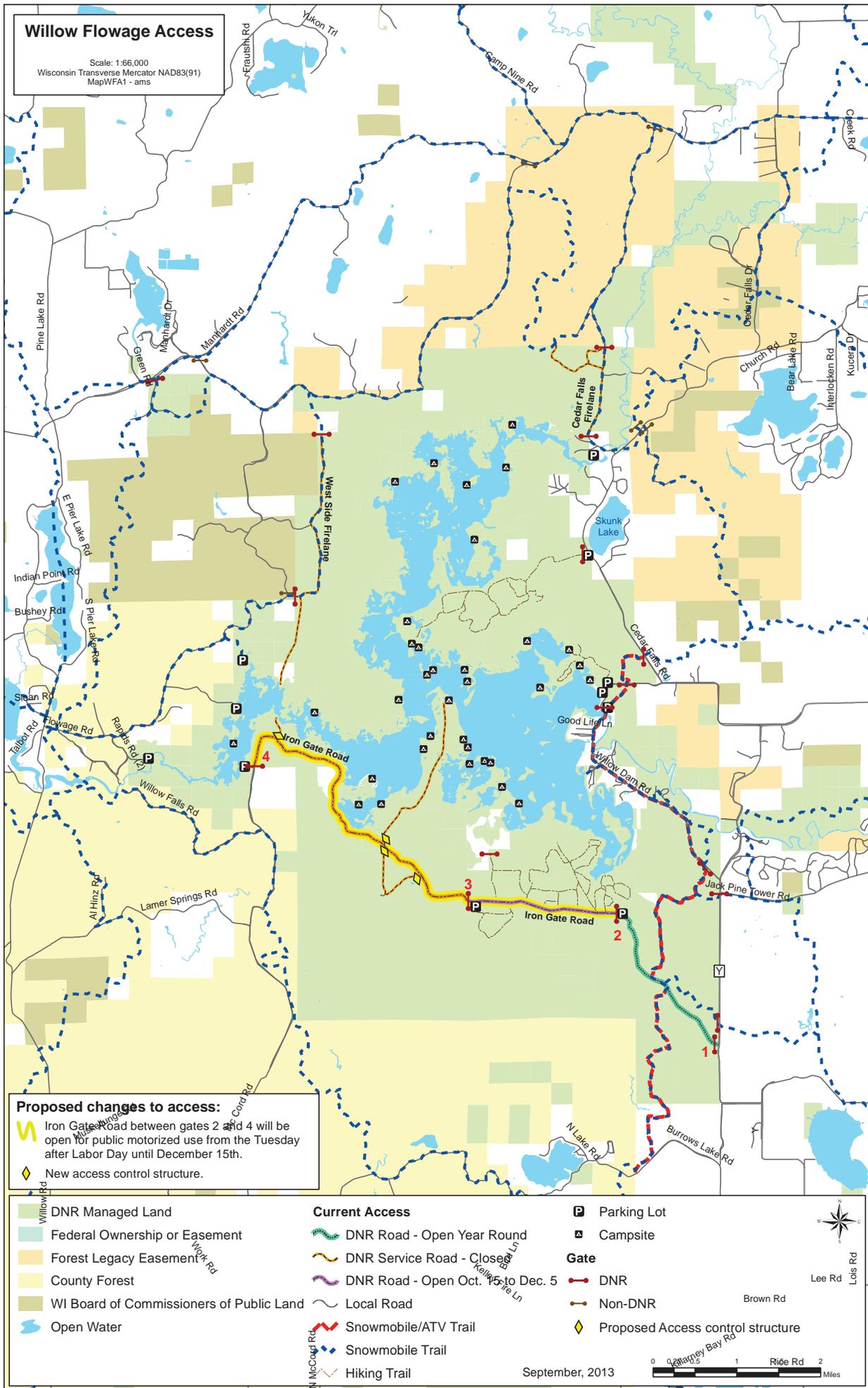
No change is recommended at this time. The Department will continue to work cooperatively with private landowners and the Forest Legacy Easement landowner to the north to evaluate options and impacts of providing motorized access from Manhardt Town Road to Department owned lands.

Cedar Falls Fire lane

No change is recommended at this time. The Department will continue to work cooperatively with private landowners to the south and the Forest Legacy Easement landowner to the north to evaluate options and impacts of providing motorized access to Department owned lands.

Willow Flowage Access

Scale: 1:66,000
 Wisconsin Transverse Mercator NAD83(91)
 MapWFA1 - ams



Proposed changes to access:

 Iron Gate Road between gates 2 and 4 will be open for public motorized use from the Tuesday after Labor Day until December 15th.

 New access control structure.

-  DNR Managed Land
-  Federal Ownership or Easement
-  Forest Legacy Easement
-  County Forest
-  WI Board of Commissioners of Public Land
-  Open Water

- ### Current Access
-  DNR Road - Open Year Round
 -  DNR Service Road - Closed
 -  DNR Road - Open Oct. 15 to Dec. 5
 -  Local Road
 -  Snowmobile/ATV Trail
 -  Snowmobile Trail
 -  Hiking Trail

-  Parking Lot
-  Campsite
- Gate**
-  DNR
-  Non-DNR
-  Proposed Access control structure

September, 2013



Motorized Access Alternatives Considered

Several different options were explored and considered regarding motorized access on the Willow Flowage. Maintaining or reducing the current level of motorized access was considered but due to the number of users who have requested expanded access, this option was not selected. Conversely, opening all DNR roads, or portions of the existing primitive roads, year-round or seasonally, to all types of motor vehicles was also considered to provide greater access but was not selected given an assessment of the condition of existing primitive roads was not completed in full to determine ecological, economic and social impacts.

The use of ATVs and UTVs was considered on each road segment for seasonal and year round use. ATV use was considered for the Cedar Falls Fire Lane and West Side Fire Lane segments, however both roads “dead –end” at the Departments ownership (property) line. The privately owned lands currently do not authorized ATV use so designating DNR roads for ATV and UTV use would not provide a regional connector. The proposal does allow ATV and UTV if the private lands and Town roads are also designed for ATV and UTV use, which the Town roads are currently designated.

Year round access and a number of seasonal access options were considered for each road segment. The seasonal limitations for motorized access were added to accommodate multiple user groups. Two roads, a portion of Iron Gate and West Side Fire lane, are proposed to be open from the Tuesday after Labor Day Weekend until December 15th to allow motorized access during the most popular hunting seasons, including small game, bow and gun deer, and bear season. Having these areas closed during the remainder of the year accommodates hikers, mountain bikers, and skiers. An alternative was considered to open these roads year round for greater access. An alternative was explored to authorize only license motor vehicle but the impacts of ATV and UTV in comparison to motorized vehicles was minimal.

Impacts of Proposed Change

The ecological impacts of the proposed changes are minimal mainly due to the fact that this amendment considers only roads that are in place and currently being maintained. In addition, the road segment under consideration is currently utilized for timber management purposes by both Department employees and timber sale contractors.

Economic impacts are expected to be low considering that the road is currently in place and utilized on a regular basis by Department vehicles. The road surfaces are currently favorable for vehicular traffic however periodic maintenance of some portions of the roads may be required on an annual basis. The installation of several access control structures such as berms or boulders will be required in certain locations. Natural materials sourced from Department lands will be utilized whenever possible.

The social impacts of this proposed amendment will be positive for those who desire increased motorized access. Approximately 100 miles of trails and primitive roads remain closed to motorized vehicles for those who seek quiet areas for hiking, biking, skiing, and hunting. In an effort to minimize use conflicts with the high-use time periods for camping, boating, and fishing on the flowage, the portion of Iron Gate Road that lies in close proximity to the waters edge is proposed to be open seasonally.

Summary and Response to Comments

Public Involvement Opportunities

Beginning July 11, 2013, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began a 30-day review period on a draft Master Plan Amendment for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest (NHAL) and the Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area. The draft amendment was developed following an earlier review of property assessments, issue identification, and a public involvement plan in May 2013.

A state-wide news release, issued July 11, noticed the public review and provided information on how to participate or to acquire documents. Announcements were sent via Gov-delivery, an electronic email distribution system, to 3,667 subscribers. Another 132 email announcements and 33 direct mails were sent to mailing lists that included individual citizens, local and tribal governments, and organizational contacts. Copies of the draft plan, property maps, an electronic survey, and down-loadable comment forms were available on-line at NHAL State Forest and Willow Flowage web pages, at public meetings, and by request.

Participation

During the comment period 155 people responded, with the majority of the comments submitted using an on-line feedback form, with others submitted by written comment forms and letters, or conversing with Department staff. Among those responses, 91 were regarding the NHAL land management proposals for recent acquisitions, 22 for the NHAL camping at Rainbow Flowage, and 80 for motorized access at the Willow Flowage. Two informational public open houses were attended by more than 30 citizens at each of the meetings at Presque Isle, Vilas County and the Town of Little Rice, Oneida County. In addition, 27 individuals participated in an on-line chat session at the DNR web site.

Given the property is located within the ceded territory, government to government discussions were held with representatives of the neighboring Lac du Flambeau tribe, the Voigt Intertribal Task Force, and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Willow Flowage Public Motorized Access

Approximately 80 comments were received regarding the access proposals on the Willow. The comments submitted were at times broad in nature and others were very specific to proposed road segments.

A number of comments referenced the current Master Plan and the original management intent was for low-impact recreation and to maintain a wild or wilderness-like setting. Others commented that the current plan is dated and there are existing road corridors that are being used for management purposes and could provide public motorized access with little negative impacts. Furthermore, respondents referenced the aging population, desire for hunting access, local interests and desire for connecting existing road and trail networks, and a general view that public lands should be more accessible.

Iron Gate Road

Relatively few comments were submitted with specific comments to Iron Gate road. Comments submitted were broader in nature referenced above.

The Department does not propose any changes from the draft proposal for Iron gate Road, which is described below. However, the amendment proposal does include a continuance request to address two originally proposed road segments. The proposal recommends including Iron Gate Road in the amendment continuance process. This will allow an opportunity to review the effectiveness of the Iron Gate Road opening in the fall of 2013 and the continuance mechanism provides the mechanism to propose and seek feedback on any adjustments.

In brief.....The proposed change would allow seasonal (day after labor day until Dec 15) public motorized access on a segment of Iron Gate Road totaling approximately 4 miles. A portion of Iron Gate Road is currently open year round for public vehicles and another section open seasonally. Iron Gate Road, in full, would also be open to ATV/UTVs during the same time period as vehicle access, creating an additional regional connector link using county forest and town roads to the existing Willow Flowage ATV trail already in place.

Cedar Falls Fire lane and West Side Fire Lane

A surprisingly high number of comments were received regarding Cedar falls fire land and West Side Fire lane. Comments received identified a number of complex private land dependencies and connecting roads and trails impacts. In many cases, private roads, are also designated as snowmobile trails and part of a regional network and private landowners indicated increasing public vehicle access may impact existing trails networks.

Due to a number of unresolved private land access issues, at this time, the Department is not recommending any changes to access on West Side Fire Lane or Cedar Falls Fire Lane. A recommendation is made for a plan amendment continuance to continue negotiations and resolution with private landowners. If solutions or alternatives emerge that would allow public motorized use in these locations, the Department will seek public feedback and approval.

In addition to exploring access options on West Side and Cedar Falls fire lane, the continuance would include an evaluation of Iron Gate road as well as additional access proposals as they emerge.

Appendix A: Road and Trail Standards from Chapter NR 44 – Master Planning for Department Properties

NR 44.07(3) Road and trail standards. For purposes of this section, roads and trails are classified as follows:

- (a) **Primitive road.** A primitive road shall be a temporary or permanent seasonal road with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 12 feet, little or no roadbed grading, minimal cut and fill, a surface of primitive or native material.

Note: Due to their unimproved, rough condition, primitive roads commonly are only suitable for H/ohci's and other off-highway vehicles, and may not be negotiable by ordinary highway vehicles.

- (b) **Lightly developed road.** A lightly developed road shall be a temporary road, a permanent seasonal road or a permanent all-season road which is primarily a single lane with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 16 feet, is lightly to well-graded with minimal cut and fill, is surfaced with primitive, native or aggregate materials except in limited special use situations where asphalt may be used, and has a maximum speed design of 15 mph.

Note: Due to the variability of roadbed conditions at different times and places, some lightly developed roads might not be negotiable by ordinary highway vehicles.

- (c) **Moderately developed road.** A moderately developed road shall be a permanent seasonal road or a permanent all-season road which typically is 2-lane, but may be one-lane, have a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 45 feet for 2-lane and 30 feet for one-lane, a well-graded roadbed and may have moderate cuts and fills and shallow ditching, has a surface of aggregate, asphalt or native material, and a maximum design speed of 25 mph.

- (d) **Fully developed road.** A fully developed road shall be a permanent all-season road with a cleared width normally of 50 feet or more, a roadbed with cuts and fills as needed, an aggregate, asphalt or other paved surface and be designed for speeds exceeding 25 mph.