

HORICON-SHAW PLANNING GROUP MASTER PLAN PLAN INITIATION PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS FOR PLAN INITIATION

The DNR initiated the master planning process for the Horicon-Shaw Planning Group (HSPG) with a public input process during the months of September and October, 2014. A statewide news release was sent out on August 26 announcing the start of the planning process. A public meeting was held at the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center on September 10. At this meeting, the public was offered information about the properties and the planning process via informational displays, a short presentation, a question-and-answer session, and the opportunity to speak one-on-one with Department staff. The public also was invited to provide input on important issues that should be addressed in the master plan and to comment on several preliminary planning documents including the Draft Regional and Property Analysis (RPA), Preliminary Vision and Goals, and Public Involvement Plan. Some 30 people attended the public meeting. The Department received verbal and written comments, submitted both at the public meeting and thereafter. The public involvement timeline is summarized in the table below.

Chronology of Public Involvement

Date	Contact
August 22 & 25, 2014	Invitation to public meetings sent to stakeholder list and planning documents posted on WDNR Web site. Hard copies of RPA sent to WDNR Horicon Service Center and Beaver Dam, Horicon, Hustisford, Mayville, and Waupun public libraries.
August 26, 2014	Statewide WDNR news release sent out announcing public meeting.
September 10, 2014	Public meeting held at Horicon Marsh Education & Visitor Center, 5:30-7:30 pm.
October 10, 2014	End of public comment period.
November, 2014	Public comment summary posted on WDNR Web site.

The next step in the master planning process is to evaluate whether and how to incorporate the many and varied ideas expressed by the public into a draft master plan. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the plan and on how best to incorporate them will be made based on the properties' statutory designations (i.e. wildlife area, state park, etc.), their physical/biological capabilities, the best role of the properties in their local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of WDNR staff. Every reasonable effort will be made to communicate the reasons for key plan recommendations in the draft plan.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

Public Meeting Verbal Comments/Questions

Various topics were raised verbally during the public meeting. Many of these came up during one-on-one discussions with Department staff members; some were raised during the question-and-answer session.

General:

- Whether the master plan will apply to the federally-owned northern two-thirds of Horicon Marsh and involvement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in this planning process.
- Whether staff are aware of Aldo Leopold's involvement with the original project boundary and acquisition plan for Shaw Marsh Wildlife Area, and whether they are still following that plan.

Resource Management:

- Whether the master plan will address water quality.
- Desire to see more potholes and open water at Horicon Marsh.
- The role of pike spawning habitat should be addressed in any channel reconstruction/meandering projects on Horicon Marsh.
- Horicon Marsh is a river system that is influenced by many upstream challenges including dams at Kekoskee, Theresa, etc. These create management issues for the marsh.
- Food web interactions should be included in the plan. For example, carp disturb sediments, high sediment decreases plant biomass, invertebrates need plants for shelter, fish need invertebrates as food, etc.
- Motor boats are getting into more areas at Horicon Marsh and the props are damaging the wetland vegetation, harming some animals (e.g., turtles), and disturbing nesting birds. Dogs are not allowed to run free on the marsh during the nesting season but there are boats out there in April and May that are disturbing nesting birds.
- Whether *Phragmites* is present at Horicon Marsh.
- Invasive species are an even bigger problem on private lands than on public lands. How does the state expect to control invasives species on public lands when the problem is even larger on private lands?

Public Use:

- Whether the master plan will address biking. There is not much in the RPA about biking and bike trails.
- Desire among paddlers, especially kayakers, for more carry-in boat access sites on Lake Koshong.
- If there were to be a bike trail at Horicon Marsh, it should not go around the Bachhuber Impoundment.

Property Boundaries:

- Property project boundaries should be adjusted to follow existing features such as roads.
- Property boundaries should be squared off.

Written Comments

Three comment sheets were filled out and submitted at the public meeting and 17 written comments were submitted via email or regular mail thereafter, for a total of 20. Comment authors represented a diversity of affiliations including:

- Private citizens
- Duck hunter
- Local businesses
- Local community groups
- Municipal governments
- Local elected officials
- State legislators
- Government agency
- Property friends group

Comments are summarized below, organized by major topic.

Gold Star Memorial Trail

The majority of written comments (15) addressed a single issue: support for a proposed non-motorized trail known as the Gold Star Memorial Trail (GSMT) which would extend from the City of Mayville to the City of Beaver Dam, and includes a connection to the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center (HMEVC). Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area is within the proposed trail corridor. Specifically, supporters of the proposed trail request that biking be allowed on the service road to Quick's Point (accessed from Palmatory Street) and the portion of an existing hiking trail that traverses the southern edge of the Bachhuber Impoundment in order to access the HMEVC. These comments state the following in support of this proposed trail segment and of the overall GSMT:

- The proposed trail segment through the Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area is the most feasible and desirable off-road option to connect the HMEVC to the City of Horicon.
- The completion of a series of new exhibits will draw an increased number of visitors to the HMEVC. The proposed trail segment would allow access to the HMEVC from surrounding communities without having to drive a vehicle and take up limited parking space.
- Horicon Marsh already is an integral part of several existing biking-related facilities/events (Wild Goose State Trail; Horicon Marsh Bike Route; Tour de Marsh bike event). The proposed segment would allow users/participants to avoid having to ride along the shoulder of Highway 28 in order to access the HMEVC, which they currently have to do and which presents safety concerns.

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- There are various options for safely accommodating biking on the existing hiking trail (e.g., signage; improved trail surfacing; designated “walk your bike” areas; volunteer bike ambassadors, etc.).
- Biking is a nature-based outdoor recreational activity that is compatible with the primary purpose of a wildlife area.
- The GSMT will bring more visitors to the HMEVC, increasing awareness of the DNR’s educational and preservation work on the marsh and providing economic benefits to Dodge County.
- The GSMT will enhance the health and safety of Dodge County residents by providing local, safe, and consistently available opportunities for physical activity. Biking/hiking trail resources currently are lacking in surrounding communities.
- The GSMT will recognize Dodge County residents who have been killed while serving in the armed forces. It is appropriate for a segment of this trail to be routed through Horicon Marsh, as several of the Gold Star service members are from the surrounding communities of Horicon, Mayville, and Beaver Dam.

General:

- The Wildlife Conservation Education Program should be the number one priority of the plan.

Regional and Property Analysis (RPA) and Vision & Goals:

- The RPA should recognize that there is a need to improve non-motorized access to the HMEVC (including by Wild Goose State Trail users).
- “Biking” should be added to Goal 2.

Resource Management:

- There should be an aggressive effort to reestablish the original sinuosity of the Rock River channel.
- Eliminate the main ditch at Horicon Marsh.
- Continue aggressive carp eradication.
- There should be water level manipulation with rotational prescribed burning to enhance moist-soil species.
- The following issues specific to Horicon Marsh should be considered in the master plan:
 - Non-native cattail: these thrive under the high sedimentation and stable impoundment conditions found on the Marsh. They have already taken over much of the Marsh and now threaten remaining habitats.
 - Sedimentation: has increased exponentially due to land use conversion to row crop agriculture in surrounding areas and increased impoundment of water on the Marsh, and threatens water quality.
 - Invasive carp: these damage vegetation and decrease water quality; eradication efforts have been ineffective because carp reinvade during floods.
 - Nutrient loading: the West and South Branches of the Rock River are especially problematic for high phosphorus, Plum Creek and Mill Creek to a lesser extent;

sediments and nutrients that have accumulated in the Marsh and in upstream streambeds may keep concentrations high long after water quality measures are implemented.

- Other contaminants: specifically atrazine.
- Flooding: increased discharges and flashier conditions on the Rock River have increased flood risk and made water level management for nesting and migrating birds more challenging; flooding issues could worsen if Lake Sinnissippi water level management causes more frequent backflow conditions on the Marsh.
- Potential impacts of climate change: changes in various climate variables (higher average minimum temperatures overall, with cooler summers/falls and warmer winters/springs; later first freeze & earlier spring thaw; larger proportion of precipitation falling as rain rather than snow; increase in average annual precipitation; increase in high-magnitude rain/storm events) may result in higher volumes of water, seasonal changes in water volume, increased sedimentation and nutrient loading, and changes in agricultural practices. These changes may compromise water control infrastructure, complicate water level management, exacerbate poor water quality, and make management for wetland vegetation and wetland-dependent wildlife more challenging.
- There should be better coordination of water levels between the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area, and Lake Sinnissippi. The various impoundments along the Upper Rock River should be managed as a system through collaboration among the different water managers in order to maintain and enhance the ecological health and diversity of Horicon Marsh.

Public Use:

- DNR should leverage the HMEVC as a destination and encourage all recreational uses deemed fit for the property.
- Support for the DNR planning team in its choice of appropriate recreational activities for the properties.
- The use of “pro drives” or “surface drives” should be banned on the marsh because they damage wetland vegetation, harm wildlife (kill turtles and frogs; disturb nesting birds), and can lead to hunter injury. If motors will be allowed, then motor boats should not be allowed off the main ditch between April 1 and July 31 (or later, Aug 15). Years ago, DNR banned motors off the main ditch and Burnett Ditch. Maybe they should try this again just on the western half of the marsh (along the river south of the Burnett Ditch to One Mile Island).

Property Boundaries:

- Encourage DNR to expand property boundaries and look for ways to purchase parcels to enhance recreational, educational, and wildlife uses of Horicon Marsh.