

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item**

SUBJECT: Request for Department approval to undertake a master plan amendment process at Blue Mound State Park for the purpose of establishing recreational trail uses and locations.

FOR: December 2014 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Peter Biermeier, Section Chief, Bureau of Parks and Recreation

SUMMARY:

Blue Mound State Park, located in Dane and Iowa Counties, was developed in the 1960's and has served as a popular area for Wisconsin park users, in particular trail users for biking, hiking, cross country skiing, and at one point over 20 years ago, snowmobiling. The park master plan was completed in 1984. Since then there have been two revisions to the plan to authorize an expansion of biking and cross country ski trails and for a new indoor shelter.

Recently, state and local advocates for snowmobiling have requested of the DNR re-open a previously sited snowmobile trail in the Pleasure Valley area of the park that was abandoned more than twenty years ago. The Department believes the request would require a master plan amendment while also believing the request is worthy of Department and NRB review. There are other bike and cross-country ski trails located in the park that may have been constructed outside of the current master plan provisions and the Department would also like to review the placement of those trails in this request as well.

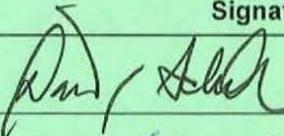
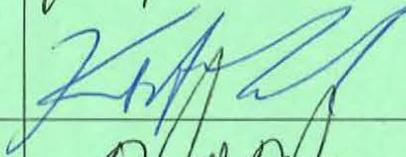
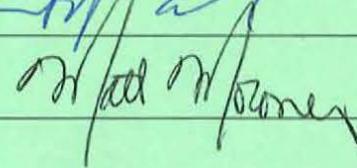
Approval of this request by the NRB would open the process for a master plan amendment review. The Department would undertake a thorough review of the trail requests for Blue Mound State Park and include considerable public input in the process. The end proposal that would be brought back to the NRB may include recommendations for no changes, changes that would remove trails, or changes that would add trails to the plan (existing and/or new).

This matter is anticipated to garner a significant amount of public interest.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval of request for Department to undertake a master plan amendment process at Blue Mound State Park for the purpose of establishing recreational trail uses and locations.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):

- Background memo
- Park maps for Blue Mound State Park
- Type name of attachment if applicable
- Type name of attachment if applicable

Approved by	Signature	Date
Dan Schuller, Bureau Director		11-26-14
Kurt Thiede, Land Division Administrator		11/26/14
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		12/1/14

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 24, 2014

TO: Wisconsin Natural Resources Board

FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary

SUBJECT: Request to undertake a master plan amendment process at Blue Mound State Park

This memo is intended to provide background and process information from which the Natural Resources Board can render an informed decision on a request to amend the Blue Mound State Park master plan.

Background: Blue Mound State Park, located in Dane and Iowa Counties, is a fifty year old state park that contains the highest point in southern Wisconsin as well as significant wooded acres containing major vistas, rock outcroppings and rolling valleys. The park provides a family campground, a biking campground, a swimming pool, two observation towers, and a major trail system serving off-road bicycling, hiking and cross-country skiing.

A master plan for Blue Mound State Park was completed in 1984. The plan identifies the park as a major recreation area for trail users. In that plan there is reference to an existing "two mile snowmobile trail", although that plan does not direct that future uses should include snowmobiling. In the 1980's there were two locations that served snowmobiling in the park: the Military Ridge State Trail within the southern border of the park, and a short section of trail that ran on an old service road in the eastern portion of the property.

This eastern part of the state park is known as Pleasure Valley, which once contained a downhill ski operation and included some service roads for that operation. Pleasure Valley is a distinctively appreciated resource with a deeply wooded gorge, steep rolling hills, and a small stream. It has been used by silent sports advocates heavily since the 1990's, and the master plan was amended in 2002 to further identify some new cross country ski, hiking, snowshoe, and biking trails. Coinciding with this increase in silent sport trails, the Department is aware that the snowmobile activity in Pleasure Valley ceased in the early 1990's.

In 2014, the Department received a written request from the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs to allow a snowmobile trail in the Pleasure Valley area of Blue Mound State Park. The request was intended to re-open the old service road route, and the requestor intended for the route to be re-opened without the need for a master plan change to allow the trail. Department attorneys reviewed the request, and relying on the incomplete language in the existing master plan that did not propose snowmobiling as a park use, and considering the snowmobile route was abandoned over twenty years ago, determined that a master plan amendment would be required to add snowmobiling to Blue Mound State Park.

Master Plan Amendment Process: Section NR 44.04(2) of the Wisconsin Administrative Code requires NRB notification and authorization before the Department may initiate a master plan amendment.

".....a plan amendment or revision may be proposed at any time by the department or any person, and an amendment or revision request shall be filed in writing with the secretary of the department. The secretary shall inform the board of requests as filed under this section, and the department shall notify the person or persons making the request of the board's decision"

The relevant information that will allow you to make a decision about the appropriateness and the general



feasibility of this amendment request are contained herein.

Description of the Proposed Change: the request by the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs (AWSC) is to allow a north-south snowmobile route through the Pleasure Valley portion of Blue Mound State Park. The request, as presented, is to provide a link from the Village of Black Earth north of the park along a southerly route approximately 8.8 miles to the east-west Military Ridge State Trail which is located on the south side of the park.

Reason or Need for the Proposed Change as Articulated by the Requestor: AWSC represents that this link is an important one for serving regional riders and local economies. The closest north-south route to the east of Blue Mound State Park is about six miles away and runs from the Village of Cross Plains south to the Military Ridge State Trail. To the west, the distance is similar on a route that runs south from a point west of Arena to the Military Ridge State Trail at a point west of Barneveld. According to AWSC, reasonably distanced links serving large regional areas are critical to the connectivity of the state snowmobile route system. Hence there currently exists two north-south snowmobile trails, each about six miles from the park, connecting to the Military Ridge State Trail which runs from the Madison area west to Dodgeville.

Preliminary Evaluation of Feasibility of Requested Changes: The department has completed an initial review of the request as to several key provisions necessary to advance this request. Please note that the department has not begun a detailed analysis of this request.

- Legal Issues: it does not appear that there are legal issues that would prevent this request from moving forward for review. This would include deed or grant restrictions, or statutory or code limitations.
- Anticipated Compatibility with Existing Uses and Management of the Property: allowing snowmobiles at Blue Mound State Park would require a new sub-classification of master plan use that requires an amendment to the plan. The department is unwilling to declare that this new sub-classification is compatible or incompatible with current uses without extensive review of the request in relation to trail placement and land use, and prior to having a transparent public discourse on park user desires. During its initial review of this request, department staff further determined that the existing trails at Blue Mound State Park should be evaluated for compatibility with the park master plan and the 2002 variance.
- Preliminary Determinations regarding Environmental Sustainability of the Proposal: the department has developed extensive training programs on trail construction and maintenance so as to both develop and operate all trails in a sustainable manner. The department believes an environmentally sustainable route for snowmobiling is maybe possible after its initial review.
- Known Level of Public Interest or Controversy at this Time: the department understands that there is significant public interest in this proposal from both the snowmobile and silent sports community. The local chapter of the AWSC would desire the opportunity to make an important snowmobile link while being able to ride in the scenic Pleasure Valley. The leadership of the Blue Mound State Park Friends Group has spoken to the department about their opposition to placing a snowmobile trail in the Pleasure Valley portion of the park. The Friends Group, which has donated over \$700,000 to the park since 2012 for an indoor shelter and a swimming pool remodeling, have actively been involved for years in the creation, maintenance and grooming of the trails at Blue Mound for silent sports purposes. Since the popular trail system at Blue Mound is fully 100% silent sports based at this time, the department anticipates that existing trail users will be actively involved in commenting on proposed trail options.

- Timing Considerations: although the Blue Mound master plan is nearly 30 years old, the department does not have a master plan update scheduled for the foreseeable future. The amendment process would be the only procedural route to consider this request at this time. The department anticipates the review, public involvement, and development of alternatives for the amendment request to take 5-7 months.
- Priority by the Department: the department currently has a number of full master plans as well as other amendment requests in the queue for 2015. The department believes it can handle this request within its current workload.

Secretary Recommendation: after considering the AWSC request, reviewing the legal issues, understanding the department staff initial review, and following the rule provisions of NR 44, the Secretary's office recommends that this amendment request be approved to move into a planning process whereby a full department review and extensive public input will occur. The department is also requesting that the amendment consider reviewing existing trails in Blue Mound State Park to assure their compliance with the original master plan and the 2002 variance as approved.

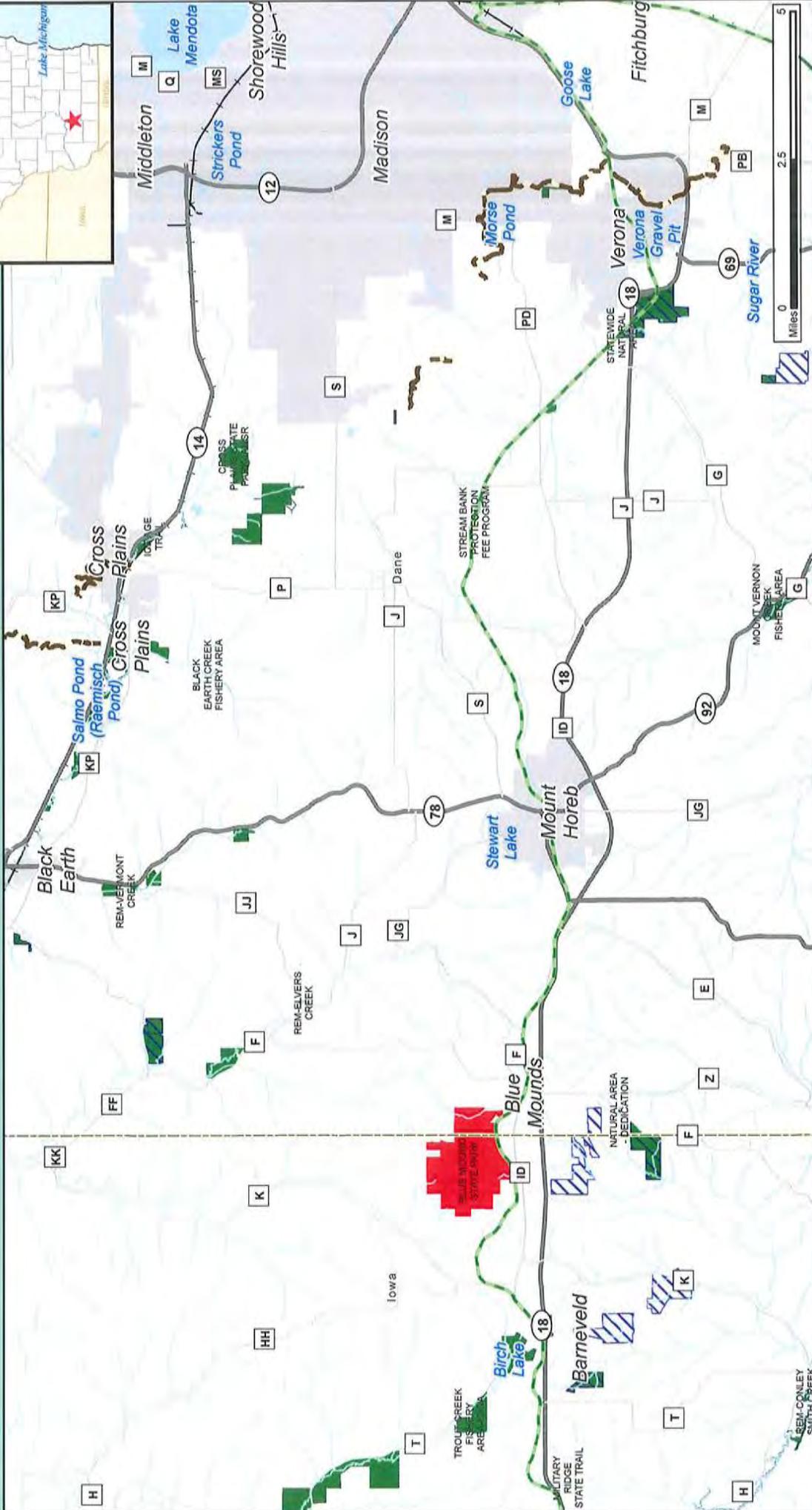
Request to Natural Resources Board: request for department approval to undertake a master plan amendment process at Blue Mound State Park for the purpose of establishing recreational trail uses and locations.

Please let me know if there is additional information we can provide. Thank you.

REGIONAL LOCATOR

Blue Mound State Park

DRAFT



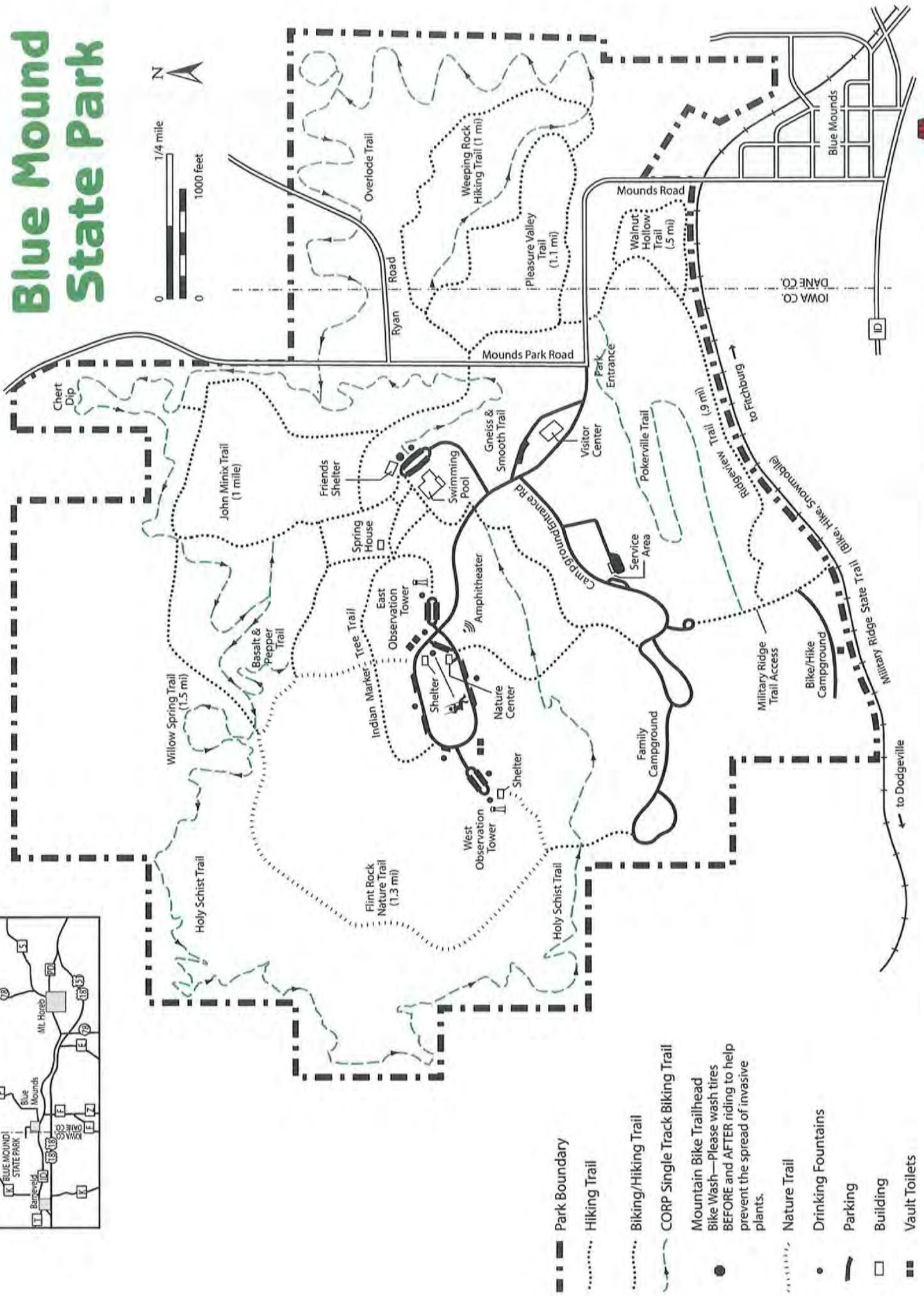
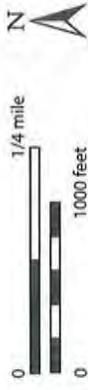
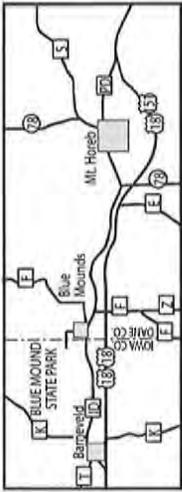
Wisconsin Department
of Natural Resources
Bureau of Parks and Recreation
Date: 1/17/2014
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MAP A

- DNR Managed Land
- Blue Mound State Park
- State Trail
- Ice Age National Scenic Trail
- State Natural Areas

The data shown on this map have been obtained from various sources, and are of varying age, reliability and resolution. This map is not intended to be used for navigation, nor is this map an authoritative source of information about legal land ownership or public access. Users of this map should confirm the ownership of land through other means in order to avoid trespassing. No warranty, expressed or implied, is made regarding accuracy, completeness, or legality of the information depicted on this map.

Blue Mound State Park



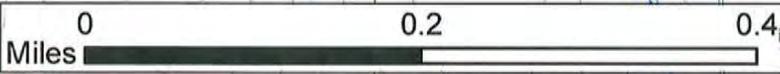
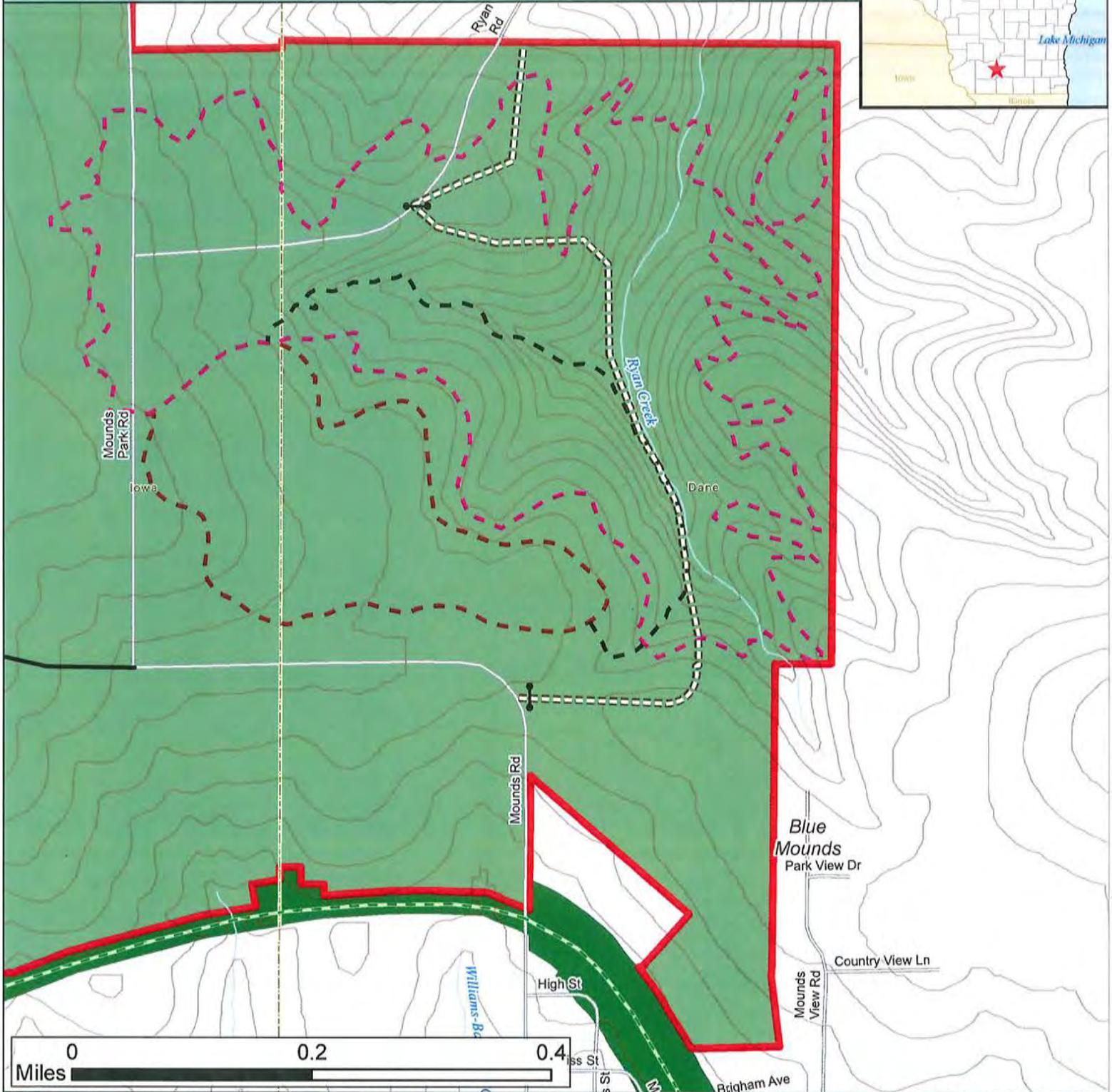
- Park Boundary
- Hiking Trail
- Biking/Hiking Trail
- CORP Single Track Biking Trail
- Mountain Bike Trailhead
Bike Wash—Please wash tires BEFORE and AFTER riding to help prevent the spread of invasive plants.
- Nature Trail
- Drinking Fountains
- Parking
- Building
- Vault Toilets

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Pleasure Valley
 EXISTING TRAILS AND ROADS
 Blue Mound State Park

DRAFT



- - - Overlude Trail
- - - Pleasure Valley Trail
- - - Weeping Rock Hiking Trail
- - - Military Ridge State Trail
- - - DNR Managed Land
- Blue Mound State Park
- - - - Service Road
- Park Roads



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 of Natural Resources
 Bureau of Parks and Recreation
 Date: 1/12/2014
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MAP C

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