

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

Item No. 3.B.8.

**SUBJECT:** Request approval to initiate a public involvement process which may result in a master plan amendment to the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest to expand the amount of land being leased for Camp American Legion.

**FOR:** February 2015 Board meeting

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Teague Prichard, Division of Forestry, State Lands Specialist

**SUMMARY:**

The Department (Division of Forestry) requests approval from the Natural Resources Board to initiate the public involvement process for a potential amendment to the master plan for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest regarding the possibility and extent of leasing additional lands to the American Legion, Department of Wisconsin for exclusive use by veterans at Camp American Legion.

The Department owns the underlying lands where the Camp American Legion is located in Lake Tomahawk, Oneida County, Wisconsin. The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin owns the buildings and facilities but leases the underlying land from the Department. Pursuant to Wis. Stat. s. 28.035 the Department is authorized to lease lands for Camp American Legion, however, current statute does not explicitly describe the extent of lands to be leased.

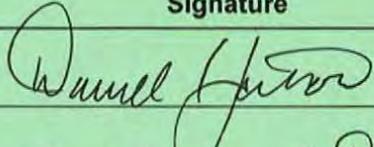
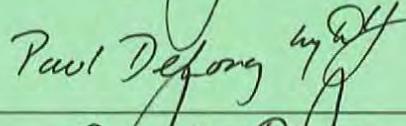
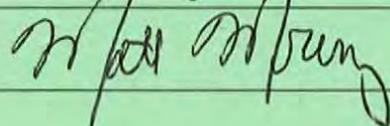
Camp American Legion was established in 1925 when the American Legion, Department of Wisconsin purchased the buildings and equipment of the former Camp Minnewawa, a private girls camp located on state-owned land. Camp American Legion was established as a "restoration camp for sick and disabled veterans of World War I and their dependents." Today veterans of all wars, including World War I, as well active-duty service members, and their families, are able to apply to stay at the Camp free of charge with a physician documented, physical or psychological illness, injury or disability.

Since 1964 the Department has leased to the American Legion approximately 75 acres which surround the Camp buildings including cabins owned by individual legion posts. Prior to 1964, various leases between the State and the American Legion included additional lands. One such lease was for as much as 302 acres. The American Legion has requested to once again lease additional lands for the purposes of offering expanded hunting opportunities to veterans that come to the Camp. Any lease of additional lands to the American Legion would necessitate the closing of those lands to the general public since the lands would be for the exclusive use of the American Legion under a lease.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval for the Department to initiate a master plan amendment process for the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest Master Plan to develop recommendations for leasing additional Department land for Camp American Legion.

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

Board Memo with attached map

Approved by	Signature	Date
Nicole Potvin, Acting Bureau Director, Forest Management		2/11/15
Paul DeLong, Administrator, Forestry Division		2/11/15
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		2/11/15

**CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM**

DATE: February 5, 2015

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Secretary Cathy Stepp

SUBJECT: Request approval to initiate a public involvement process which may result in a master plan amendment to the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest to expand the amount of land being leased for Camp American Legion.

In October 2005, the Natural Resources Board approved the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest (NHALSF) Master Plan for Department managed forestry lands in Iron, Oneida and Vilas counties. The NHALSF includes a property known and operated as "Camp American Legion" on the shores in between Little Tomahawk Lake and Big Carr Lake in Oneida County, Wisconsin. Since the 1925 forestry lands have been leased to The American Legion for the operation of Camp American Legion. The amount of acreage that has been leased for Camp American Legion has changed several times over the last 90 years.

The purpose of this proposed master plan amendment is to determine the extent of lands to be leased to The American Legion and to designate the leased lands as a "special management area" under NR 44.06(7), Wis. Adm. Code. The master plan is currently silent with regard to lease of Camp American Legion, but statutory authorization exists under Wis. Stat. s. 28.035 for the Department to enter into a lease for Camp American Legion.

#### HISTORY OF CAMP

In early 1924 the Wisconsin American Legion started looking for various sites around the state to establish a restoration and rehabilitation camp for sick and disabled veterans of World War I and their dependents. The American Legion created a committee to investigate the sites, including several locations in Vilas and Oneida counties, to establish the rehabilitation camp. The committee discovered "Camp Minne-Wawa" which, since 1912, had been operating as an exclusive girls' camp on state-owned land located between Little Tomahawk Lake and Big Carr Lake in Oneida County. This site was selected by the committee as the location for the establishment of the veterans' camp.

The American Legion negotiated the purchase of the buildings and equipment from the previous owners of Camp Minne-Wawa for the sum of \$25,000. A law was passed in June of 1925 that the soldiers' rehabilitation board (predecessor to the Department of Veteran Affairs) was authorized to transfer the needed monies from their funds to the Wisconsin American Legion for the purpose of purchasing the buildings and equipment. At, or around that time, the Wisconsin American Legion also negotiated with the state a lease for the lands on which the Camp buildings were located. It should be noted that no known copy of the lease exists and it is unclear exactly how much land was leased from the state (and no known lease exists for the prior owners of Camp Minne-Wawa). On June 1, 1925 the Wisconsin American Legion officially opened Camp American Legion as a veterans' restoration camp on the former Camp Minne-Wawa site.

In 1927 legislation was enacted that created a state forest preserve and game refuge known as the "American Legion Forest Preserve and Game Refuge," under the control and jurisdiction of the state conservation commission. Part of this 1927 statute also provided that the commissioners of public lands (BCPL) were authorized and directed to execute and deliver a lease to the Wisconsin department of American Legion. The statute directed that the lease was to be for Government Lots 3, 4, 6 and 7 of Section 8, and Government Lots 2 and 3 of Section 17, all in Township 38 North, Range 7 East, Oneida County, Wisconsin, which totaled approximately 182 acres. The first known written copy of the actual lease agreement between BCPL and the Wisconsin American Legion is from March 21, 1929.

The next known lease agreement for Camp American Legion is from June 15, 1944 between Wisconsin Conservation Commission and The American Legion. This written lease included additional lands that were not specified in 1927 statute and that were not included in the 1929 lease. Those additional lands included Government Lot 5 and the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 8 and Government Lot 4 of Section 17 which thereby increased the amount of lands being leased from approximately 182 acres to 302 acres. This lease continued in full force and effect from 1944 to 1964.

Then on February 7, 1964 the Department's predecessor, Wisconsin Conservation Commission, and the American Legion Department of Wisconsin entered into a new state forest land lease agreement for only the lands described as Government Lots 3, 4 and 6 of Section 8, which totaled approximately 75 acres. By 1964 the relevant statutes had been amended and the exact amount of land to be leased for Camp American Legion was no longer specified by law. Subsequent 10 year leases have been executed between the parties in 1973, 1983, 1994, 2004 and most recently in 2014 and since 1964 the amount of acreage that is being leased for Camp American Legion has remained the same at 75 acres. A color coded map is attached which depicts the various amounts of land that have been leased under the different agreements over the last 90 years.

During the course of the 2014 lease discussions, other types of agreements were discussed as an alternative to the lease and the amount of acreage being leased also was raised by the American Legion. The American Legion has indicated that over the last 10 years they have expanded the services that they offer at Camp to provide specialized programs for veteran client groups and Wisconsin-based Reserve and National Guard units given the increased global conflicts that our military are engaged in. The restoration and rehabilitation services that Camp American Legion offers continue to grow in popularity with military personnel, veterans and their families and the American Legion is looking for new ways to meet the needs of service members and their families. As a result, the American Legion has requested that the Department restore the amount of lands being leased for the Camp to previous levels to better provide expanded opportunities in fulfillment of their mission.

LEASE AGREEMENT

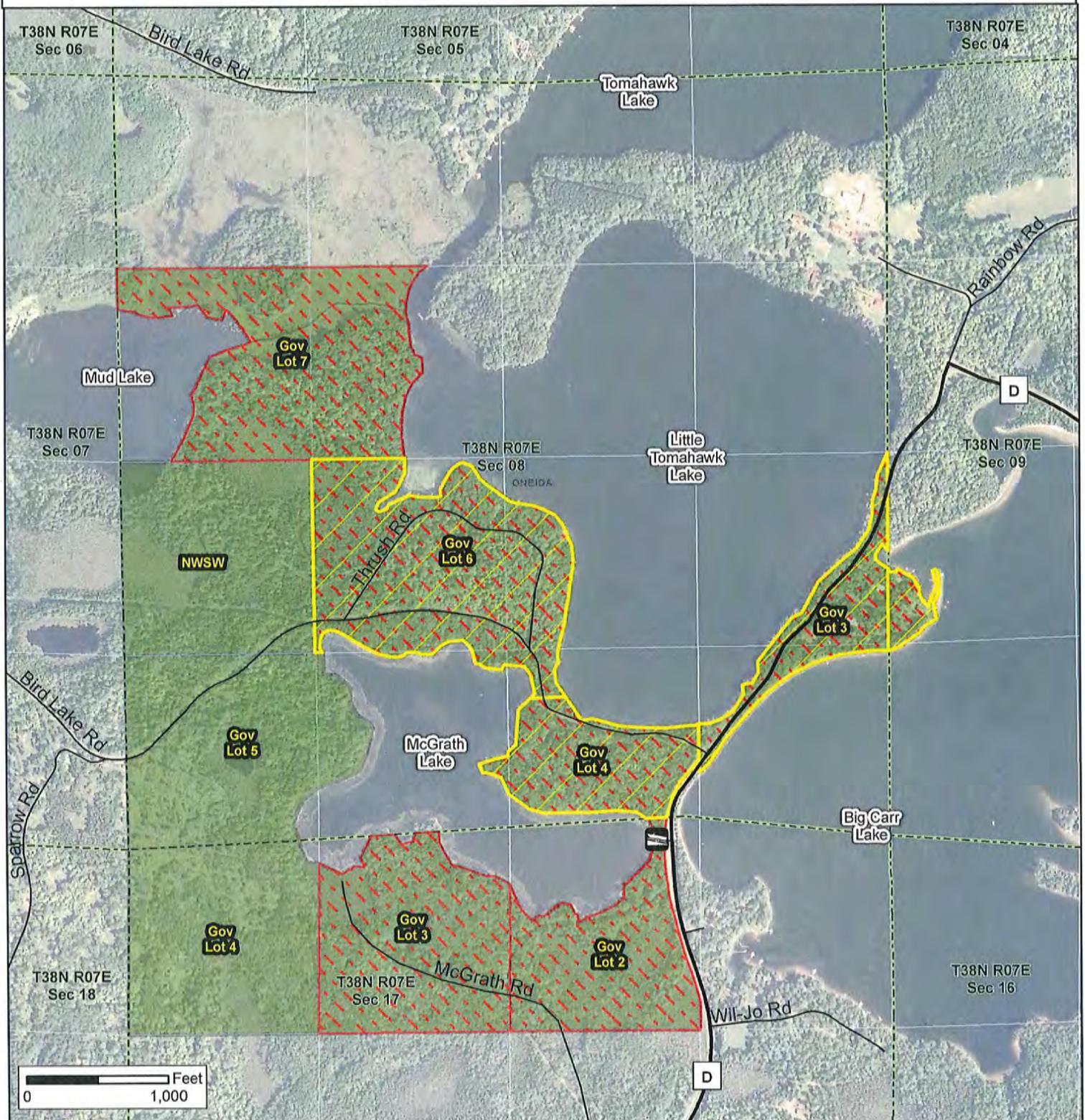
A "lease" by its very nature is a contractual agreement that transfers the exclusive possession, use and control of real estate from the owner/lessor to the tenant/lessee for a defined amount of time. For the last 50 years the Department has leased to the American Legion 75 acres of land in the NHALSF for operation of the Camp. Because of the written lease agreements the general public is restricted from using these 75 acres for any outdoor nature-based recreational activities. If the amount of lands to be leased to the American Legion is increased to historic levels the general public will also be excluded from using those additional lands.

PROPOSED MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

The Department agreed to initiate a master plan amendment process as outlined in Chapter NR 44, Wis. Adm. Code to engage public involvement and comment in evaluating American Legion's request to increase the amount of lands being leased. The Department will follow the master plan amendment process and present to the public all of the information surrounding Camp American Legion, including prior leases and current conditions. Based upon public comment and feedback, the Department will then develop alternatives for the extent of the lands to be leased and make a recommendation for the land management classification of those lands. The Department will then bring back that information, alternatives and recommendations to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

# Lease History of The Camp (1929, 1944, 1964 to Present)

T38N R7E Sec 8, 9 & 17, Town of Lake Tomahawk, Oneida County



-  Camp Lease Area 1929-1944
-  Camp Lease Area 1944-1964
-  Camp Lease Area 1964-Current
-  Public Boat Landing
-  PLSS Section Line


Feb 10, 2015 drs  
 Real Estate Section  
 Bureau of Facilities and Lands

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, applicability for a particular use, completeness, or legality of the information depicted on this map.