

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

SUBJECT: Approval to initiate a 15-year Master Plan review process for the Brule River State Forest and initiate a Master Plan amendment process for the remaining six Northern State Forests specific to motorized road access and land management classifications.

FOR: February 2016 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Paul DeLong, Administrator, Division of Forestry

SUMMARY:

Administrative Code, NR44, defines the procedures for master planning for department properties. NRB approval is required to initiate plan review and plan amendment processes.

The first request is approval to initiate a 15 year plan review process on the Brule River State Forest, approximately 47,000 acres, located in Douglas County. The Brule River State Forest's master plan was approved in December, 2002. Initiating the plan review in 2016 will allow the review and recommendation process to be completed by December 2017, the expiration date of the current plan.

The second request is to initiate master plan amendments on the remaining six Northern State Forests, including; the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest, Peshtigo River State Forest, Flambeau River State Forest, Coulee Experimental State Forest, Black River State Forest, and Governor Knowles State Forest.

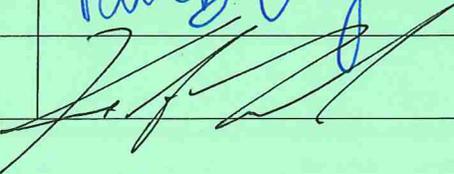
The amendment process will focus on two specific statutorily-directed elements: motorized road access and land management classifications. The process will be conducted simultaneously for all Northern State Forests, in combination with the Brule River plan review, to gain efficiencies and consistency in process, and to make engagement and review from interested publics and partners more streamlined.

The first plan amendment element will implement and comply with a Legislative directive to inventory and develop a plan for all department roads. The second plan amendment element will implement the Legislative directive to designate 75 percent of all lands on Northern State Forests, with the exception of Governor Knowles State Forest, to be classified as a forest production areas.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval to initiate a 15-year Master Plan review process for the Brule River State Forest and approval to initiate a Master Plan amendment process for Northern State Forests, specific to motorized road access and land management classifications.

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

- Background memo
- Type name of attachment if applicable
- Type name of attachment if applicable

Approved by	Signature	Date
Carmen Hardin, Bureau Director, Forest Management		1/25/16
Paul DeLong, Division Administrator Forestry		1/26/16
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		2/1/16

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 2016

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp – Secretary, Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Requesting approval to initiate master plan reviews for: 1. Brule River State Forest 15-year master plan review, and 2. Master Plan amendments for the remaining Northern State Forests, specific to motorized road access and land management classifications.

I. Purpose and need for the approval to initiate Master Plan reviews and amendments.

Administrative Code, NR44, defines the procedures for master planning for department properties. NRB approval is required to initiate plan review and plan amendment processes. This initial approval step does not address any specific future use or development recommendations; it simply authorizes the department to initiate and engage in a public planning process. The NRB has final approval for all department master plans, including plan amendments.

II. Background

The first request is authorization to initiate a 15-year plan review process on the Brule River State Forest, approximately 47,000 acres, located in Douglas County. The Brule River State Forest's master plan was approved in December, 2002. Administrative Code requires the department to review property master plans every 15 years and make a recommendation to the Board. Master plan reviews typically take one to two years to complete. Initiating the plan review in 2016 will allow the review and recommendation process to be completed by December 2017, the expiration date of the current plan. The plan review will include a full review of all plan elements, including land management, recreation, road infrastructure and administrative elements.

The second request is to initiate master plan amendments on the remaining six Northern State Forests, including the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest (Oneida, Vilas, and Iron counties, approximately 230,000 acres), Peshtigo River State Forest (Marinette County, approximately 11,000 acres), Flambeau River State Forest (Rusk, Sawyer, and Price counties approximately 90,000 acres, Coulee Experimental State Forest (LaCrosse County approximately 3,000 acres), Black River State Forest (Jackson County, approximately 70,000 acres), and Governor Knowles State Forest (Burnett and Polk counties, approximately 20,000 acres).

The amendment process will focus on two specific statutorily-directed elements: motorized road access and land management classifications. The process will be conducted simultaneously for all Northern State Forests to gain efficiencies and consistency in process, and to make engagement and review from interested publics and partners more streamlined.

The first plan amendment element would implement and comply with Wis. Stat. s. 23.116(3) that states: "The department shall inventory and map all roads that are located on each department property. Each map shall designate which roads are open to the public for the use of motorized vehicles and shall state when each road is open or closed for such use. For each department property, the department shall work with members of the public, governmental units, and other interested parties to prepare a plan for allowing

the public to use motorized vehicles on the department property." Northern State Forests have approximately 1,000 miles of existing roads open to public vehicles.

The second plan amendment element will implement and comply with ACT 55 2015, which states "the department of natural resources shall amend the master plans of all state forests except for the southern state forests, as defined in section 27.016 (1) (c) of the statutes, and except for Governor Knowles State Forest so that 75 percent of all the land in those state forests combined is classified as a forest production area."

An integrated planning process is desirable given the land classification directive is for all State Forests combined, with the exception of Governor State Forest.

The Brule River State Forest master plan review will include both the motorized road access and land classification elements as part of the full Master Plan review.

III. Significant Issues of Public Interest

The request for approval is simply to initiate the planning process and does not specify any future use or development at this stage. The request authorizes the department to begin preparing assessment documents and engaging public and partners early in the process.

Even with the minor decision action, to initiate the planning process, this item may generate noticeable interest from stakeholders as the item shows the department's intent to engage in planning for two plan elements with a high level of interest. In addition, the planning effort includes some of the department's largest state-owned properties with high levels of public use and management. In particular, we anticipate motorized road access on the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest in Vilas, Oneida, and Iron counties will generate significant public interest.