

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

**SUBJECT:** Request approval of the Northern Kettle Moraine Region Wildlife, Fish and Natural Area Draft Master Plan  
**FOR:** May 2016 Board meeting

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Diane Brusoe, Property Planning Section Chief

**SUMMARY:**

The draft master plan was presented to the NRB at the August 2015 meeting. The agenda item was tabled pending recommendations from a stakeholder team regarding recreational infrastructure at Mud Lake (Cedarburg Bog State Natural Area). The Mud Lake Boat Storage Stakeholder Team has concluded their work and recommended a primitive boardwalk be installed and a boat storage area be designated under NR45.11. The department incorporated these recommendations into the Northern Kettle Moraine Region draft master plan for your review and approval.

The Northern Kettle Moraine Region Fish and Wildlife Properties (NKMR) Draft Master Plan includes nine properties totaling 15,903 acres of state owned land. The NKMR planning group includes six wildlife properties (12,698 acres), two fishery areas (1,472 acres) and one state natural area (1,733 acres). In addition, 591 acres of easements and 309 acres of leased land included in the plan provide public access for hunting, fishing and other nature-based recreational activities.

The NKMR properties are within one hour's drive of nearly two million people. Use of these properties is expected to increase as our population grows, land ownership becomes more fragmented and access to private lands becomes more difficult. Fishing, hunting and trapping are popular in Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Washington counties with a total of nearly 56,000 fishing licenses, 67,000 hunting licenses and 900 trapping licenses sold annually.

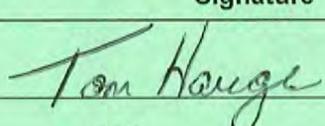
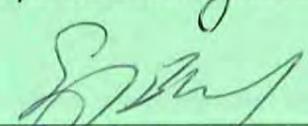
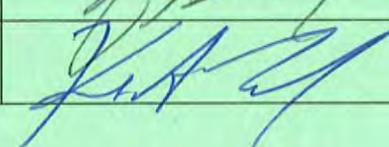
The recreational and habitat management goals for these properties include providing: 1) quality hunting, fishing, trapping, nature-based recreation and research opportunities; 2) improved habitat quality and productivity by managing for larger blocks of habitat for game and non-game species; and 3) coordinating with partners to improve recreational opportunities and management efficiency.

Boundary and acreage goal changes in the plan include reductions and expansions. These changes are outlined in the real estate table in the attached memo. These changes will allow the department to meet the recreational and habitat management goals for the plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Recommend approval of the Northern Kettle Moraine Region Master Plan per NR 44.04 (3), Wis. Adm. Code including boundary and acreage goal adjustments as outlined in the attached memo and master plan.

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

- Background memo  Type name of attachment if applicable
- Draft master plan (may be viewed online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov>, search "master planning")  Type name of attachment if applicable

| Approved by   | Signature  | Date    |
|---|--|---------|
| Tom Hauge, Bureau Director, Wildlife Management                 |   | 4/19/16 |
| Sanjay Olson, Administrator, Division of Fish, Wildlife & Parks |   | 4/21/16 |
| Cathy Stepp, Secretary  |  | 5/2/16  |

cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

DATE: April 18, 2016 FILE REF: NKMR MP

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp – Secretary, Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Northern Kettle Moraine Region Wildlife, Fish and Natural Areas Master Plan and Environmental Analysis

The department is recommending approval of the Northern Kettle Moraine Region (NKMR) wildlife, fish and natural areas master plan. This plan outlines the land management and public use goals for nine properties (i.e., six wildlife properties, two fishery areas and one state natural area) located primarily in Sheboygan, Washington, Ozaukee, Dodge and Fond du Lac counties. The Master Plan documents may be viewed online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/NorthernKettles/> Project boundary and acquisition goal adjustments being recommended for these properties are included in Table 1.

This draft plan incorporates the boardwalk and boat storage area recommendations for Mud Lake at Cedarburg Bog State Natural Area, which were provided by the Mud Lake Boat Storage Stakeholder Team in January 2016. The public was provided a 21-day review period to comment on the stakeholder team's recommendations. Twenty-five comments were received with near unanimous support for the proposed primitive boardwalk and designated boat storage area. Other elements of the draft master plan remain unchanged from the version presented at the August NRB meeting.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

**Recreation Management** - These properties in this plan are within an hour's drive of nearly two million people. They provide opportunities for white-tailed deer, turkey, pheasant and waterfowl hunting, trout fishing and trapping. Other nature-based recreational activities include bird and wildlife watching, hiking, berry picking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and increasingly dog walking. Canoeing and kayaking are increasingly popular as recognized by the recently established Rock River National Water Trail, which begins at the Theresa WA.

The primary recreational management goals for these properties are as follows:

- Provide quality hunting, fishing, trapping, nature based recreation and research opportunities.
- Improve habitat productivity and acreage of grasslands, oak woodlands, savanna and aspen for deer, turkey, pheasant, waterfowl, small game, woodcock and migrating birds.
- Collaborate with public, private and non-profit partner organizations to improve recreational opportunities and increase management efficiency.

**Habitat Management** - About 12,260 acres, 78% of the NKMR total, will be managed as Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) for the benefit of general game and non-game wildlife. Important HMA cover types include emergent wetlands, grasslands, shrub lands and lowland forests.

The proposed habitat management goals include:

- Enhance native cover types to improve opportunities for hunting, trapping, fishing and other nature based recreation in this intensively developed part of the state.
- Improve the quality and increase the acreage of grasslands for ducks and cover for pheasants.

- Improve habitat for woodcock and migrating waterfowl, song birds and shorebirds.
- Protect coldwater streams with an emphasis on the Onion River system and improvements to Nichols Creek and Allenton Creek (the only trout stream in Washington County).

The remaining 3,645 acres will be managed as Native Community Management Areas to protect high quality native plant communities and the associated game and non-game species. The plan recommends the expansion of several existing natural areas (i.e., Cedarburg Bog SNA and Jackson Marsh WA) and several new state natural areas at Mullet Creek WA, Onion River SBP and Nichols Creek WA. All of these expansions are located on existing state lands, except for the Cedarburg Bog adjustment. The natural communities include Bottomland Hardwoods, White cedar and Tamarack forests, Oak Woodlands, Sedge Meadows and Calcareous Fens.

**Budget** - The estimated budget is about \$160,000/year for infrastructure and \$80,000/year for habitat management. These costs will be covered by ongoing state appropriations and multiple sources of federal, state, local and private funds such as the Wildlife Restoration Fund, North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and game stamps (i.e., waterfowl, pheasant and turkey stamps). Costs to manage new parcels will depend on the need for active management, property blocking, fiscal returns (e.g., farm agreements and timber harvests), and access to tools that improve management efficiency. Future operational costs are anticipated to remain similar to or increase slightly above current operations with improved efficiency offsetting some of the costs of managing additional lands.

**Stakeholder Support** – These properties have been generously supported by local units of government, partner groups and individuals. These partners have conservatively donated over 9,000 hours of labor and financial donations totaling almost \$500,000 since 2000. These donated services and funds have been used to enhance the properties in this planning group consistent with the current master plan and at the direction of the department. Some examples of the broad range of support include:

- The Sheboygan County Conservation Alliance has supported efforts in Sheboygan County generally, and helped establish the Nichols Creek Wildlife Area specifically;
- Ducks Unlimited has donated significant funds for waterfowl management at Theresa Wildlife Area;
- Trout Unlimited, the Windway Corporation and the Sheboygan County Stewardship Fund were instrumental in restoring the Onion River trout fishery;
- The Ice Age Trail Alliance has developed and maintains a popular trail segment at LaBudde Fishery Area;
- An active collaboration has occurred at Cedarburg Bog State Natural Area with the UW-Milwaukee Field Station, the Friends of the Cedarburg Bog and the Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust,
- The Doty Hunting and Fishing Club stock pheasant at Mullet Creek Wildlife Area,
- Local snowmobile clubs have built and maintained trails and bridges on several properties.

This list does not include the valuable contributions of other local units of government, land trusts, sporting groups and individuals.

**Public Participation** – Three open houses were held during this planning process.

1. Regional and Property Analysis Open House - Twenty six people attended the open house held on Tuesday, October 30, 2012 at the Campbellsport High School Library. The comments favored habitat and species management be continued as presently conducted, maintain the undeveloped character of the properties, encourage greater restoration of more trout streams similar to Onion

River efforts, maintain snowmobile access, protect Cedarburg Bog, and expand project boundaries to include parcels that would enhance the resources and recreational opportunities on these properties.

2. The draft master plan was released to the public on September 10, 2014 and the comment period closed on October 10, 2014. Two open houses were held to receive public comments on the draft master plan. Fourteen people attended the September 25, 2014 open house at the DNR Plymouth Service Station and 30 individuals attended the Washington County Annex Building open house on September 26, 2014. A total of forty two written comments were submitted via email, at the open houses or on-line. In addition, staff recorded verbal comments received at the open houses. See the attached summary of comments on the draft master plan.
3. A stakeholder team consisting of individuals representing local and state hunting groups, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, the Friends of the Cedarburg Bog, the UW-Milwaukee Field Station, birding interests, and department staff was assembled to address unresolved boardwalk and boat storage issues at Mud Lake. The stakeholder team was convened in December 2015 and recommendations were forwarded to the department in January 2017.

The public was provided a 21 day review period to comment on the recommendations. Twenty five comments were submitted and there was nearly unanimous support for the proposed primitive boardwalk and designated boat storage area at Mud Lake.

The stakeholder recommendations have been incorporated into the draft master plan.

**Recommendation:** The department recommends Natural Resources Board approval of the Northern Kettle Moraine Region master plan and environmental analysis.

**TABLE 1: Overview of Real Estate Recommendations for the Northern Kettle Moraine Region Properties***\*These changes are outlined in the Draft Master Plan on the Real Estate Action Items map for each property*

| <b>Property</b>                                   | Existing Project Boundary | Proposed Project Boundary | <b>Change in Project Boundary</b> | Existing Acquisition Goal | Proposed Acquisition Goal | <b>Changes in Acquisition Goal</b> | Parcel Re-designation | Proposed Land Sale |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Theresa Wildlife Area                             | 33,025.8                  | 33,486.8                  | 461                               | 5,990.13                  | 6,490.13                  | 500                                | None                  | None               |
| Allenton Wildlife Area                            | 1,720                     | 1,825                     | 105                               | 1,591.45                  | 1,591.45                  | 0                                  | None                  | None               |
| Jackson Marsh Wildlife Area                       | 28,047.7                  | 28,037.7                  | (10)                              | 3,173                     | 3,173                     | 0                                  | None                  | None               |
| Mullet Creek Wildlife Area                        | 2,672.7                   | 3,029.7                   | 357                               | 2,744                     | 2,744                     | 0                                  | None                  | None               |
| Nichols Creek Wildlife Area                       | 1,046.3                   | 1,251.3                   | 205                               | 1,012.34                  | 1,172.34                  | 160                                | None                  | None               |
| Kiel Marsh Wildlife Area                          | 1,176.7                   | 1,952.7                   | 776                               | 1,071.91                  | 1,571.91                  | 500                                | None                  | 3                  |
| Onion River--<br>Statewide Stream Bank Protection | 4,771.1                   | 5,077.1                   | 306                               | 0                         | 0                         | 0                                  | None                  | None               |
| LaBudde Creek Fishery Area                        | 487.6                     | 547.6                     | 60                                | 504                       | 504                       | 0                                  | None                  | None               |
| Cedarburg Bog State Natural Area                  | 2,600                     | 3,299                     | 699                               | 2,250                     | 2,500                     | 250                                | None                  | None               |
| <b>Total (acres)</b>                              |                           |                           | <b>2,959</b>                      |                           |                           | <b>1,160</b>                       |                       |                    |