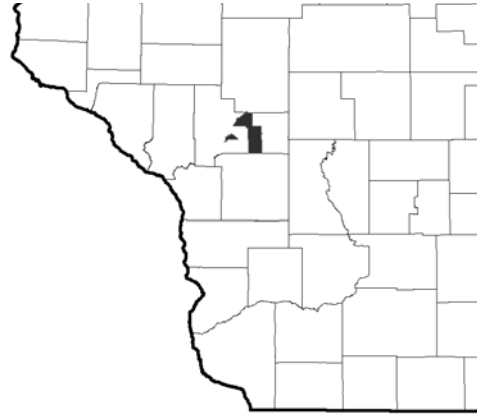


# Black River State Forest

## Draft Master Plan & Environmental Analysis

### Executive Summary - January 2010

The Black River State Forest Draft Master Plan, based on four years of assessment and planning, is designed to sustain the ecological, economic, and social benefits valued by the citizens of Wisconsin. The draft plan defines how the property will be managed and the benefits provided over the next 15 year period. It outlines land management practices, recreational uses, land acquisition opportunities, and other aspects of the property's future use and development.



The Black River State Forest is located in Jackson and Clark Counties, adjacent to the Black River. The property covers approximately 68,200 acres of forest, consisting of a mix of pine, oak, aspen, and wetland/wet forest communities. Management of the property will maintain areas for timber and forest products, protect the property's valuable natural resources, and provide recreational opportunities. Many of the habitats within the Black River State Forest support plant and animal species that are rare, endangered, or threatened within the state, or federally. The property also contains productive forestland and recreational trails that support local economies and offer visitors a place to enjoy the outdoors.

The development of the Black River State Forest Draft Master Plan has been guided by a commitment to sustainable forestry. Recreation is an important component of the state forest, and the draft plan is intended to provide sustainable recreation opportunities by maintaining the wide range of activities that currently draw visitors to the forest, including hunting, fishing, canoeing, ATV and snowmobile riding, hiking, cross-country skiing, cycling, and horseback riding.

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<b>Forest Production Management Areas</b>	<b>46,586 acres</b>
Area 1: Perry Creek Basin .....	3,038 acres
Area 2: Morrison and Levis Creek Basin.....	29,350 acres
Area 3: Robinson Creek Basin.....	14,198 acres
<b>Habitat Management Areas</b>	<b>9,276 acres</b>
Area 4: Jack Pine.....	4,277 acres
Area 5: Dike 17 Wildlife.....	4,999 acres
<b>Native Community Management Areas</b>	<b>9,979 acres</b>
Area 6: Upper Black River*.....	1,909 acres
Area 7: Arbutus Oaks* .....	215 acres
Area 8: Castle Mound Pine Forest* .....	171 acres
Area 9: East Fork of the Black River.....	1,083 acres
Area 10: Ketchum Creek Headwaters* .....	581 acres
Area 11: Paradise Valley Pines.....	669 acres
Area 12: Peatlands*.....	1,203 acres
Area 13: Catfish Eddy Terraces* .....	745 acres
Area 14: Robinson/Millston Pines* .....	626 acres
Area 15: Settlement Road Pine Swamp.....	156 acres
Area 16: Stanton Pines.....	971 acres
Area 17: Starlight Wetlands* .....	1,650 acres
<b>Recreation Management Areas</b>	<b>2,396 acres</b>
Area 18: Overmeyer Hills* .....	2,241 acres
Area 19: Campgrounds and Day Use.....	155 acres
* Includes a designated State Natural Area	

#### Land Management Areas

The Black River State Forest has been divided into 19 Land Management Areas: three Forest Production Management Areas, two Habitat Management Areas, 12 Native Community Management Areas, and two Recreation Management Areas.

Each management area describes a unique landscape or management focus that considers soils, topography, community type and other factors which shape the future management for each area. Each management area has specific long- and short-term objectives that articulate the future desired condition based on the ecological capabilities of the area and property goals.

The general management objective for Forest Production Management Areas is the sustainable production of forest products. However, forest production areas also meet a wide range of ecological and recreation objectives. In these cases, management practices are modified to be compatible with and support these multiple

objectives. In Habitat Management Areas, management activities provide or enhance habitats that support specific species of plants and animals, while still allowing for forest management. The primary management objective for Native Community Management Areas is the representation and perpetuation of native plant communities and other aspects of native biological diversity. Management activities are designed to achieve land management objectives through natural processes whenever possible. Only those areas of highest value for protection or community restoration were selected. Recreation Management Areas are focused on providing and maintaining land and water areas and facilities for outdoor public recreation or education.

**Productive Forest Land**

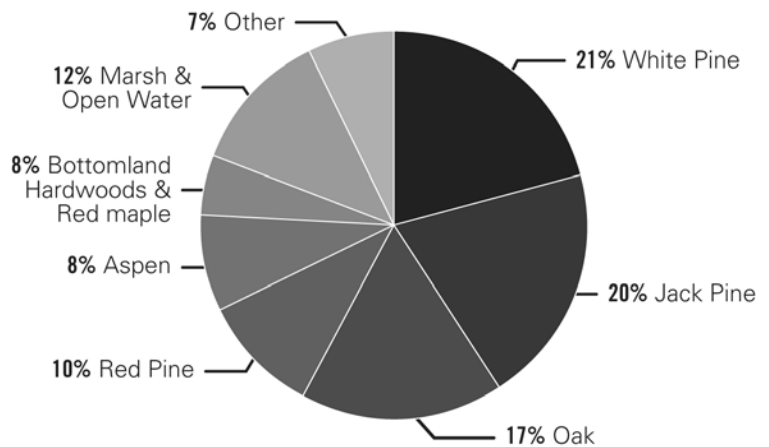
Under the proposed plan, 92% of the property's forested acres (52,500 acres) will be available for active sustainable forest management to produce forest products. This equates to 77% of the entire property. Eight percent, or 5,240 acres, of the entire property is designated to be passively managed allowing natural processes to predominate. Some of the passively managed areas are forested, but many have not been actively managed in the past due to their lack of merchantable timber, or their steep, wet, or otherwise inaccessible nature. The designation of some forested acres as passive management equates to approximately 6-8% of the forested acres on the property being removed from management. Non-forested areas, such as open water and wetlands, account for the balance of acreage unavailable for forest management.

For the near-term the forest will continue to produce pulp and sawtimber in similar proportions that it does today. As the forest matures over the next 50 to 100 years, there will be a corresponding shift to more sawlog and lumber products rather than pulpwood.

**Changes in Forest Cover**

Currently, pine species dominate the Black River State Forest. This includes white, jack, and red pine. Oak and aspen are also prominent forest types. Other species include those adapted to the lowland and swamp conditions, such as swamp/bottomland hardwoods, tamarack and black spruce. Aspen is predicted to stay relatively stable, while jack pine and oak are expected to decrease slightly. Red maple and white pine are expected to increase.

Forest production areas will be managed to maintain a strong component of aspen in some areas, promote longer-lived species such as oak and pine in other areas, and promote conversion to native cover types such as white pine-red maple mixes where appropriate.



Current forest cover on the Black River State Forest.

Within the two habitat management areas, current forest composition and age structure will not change dramatically. In the Jack Pine Habitat Management Area, jack pine barrens habitat and associated rare species will be maintained and increased. Within the Dike 17 Habitat Management Area, the open landscape will be maintained through timber harvest and prescribed burning.

Native community management areas have the greatest potential for change in forest composition and age structure. One of the primary objectives for these areas is to maintain and develop older, closed canopy forests. This includes promoting later successional species and encouraging characteristics of old growth forests, including more closed canopies, longer-lived tree species, and increased coarse woody debris.

**State Natural Area Designations**

Ten State Natural Areas (SNAs) have been proposed on the Black River State Forest; nine within Native Community Management Areas, and one within the Overmeyer Hills Recreation Management Area, totaling nearly 5,000 acres.

Of the ten SNAs, six are new, and four are existing SNAs with proposed expansions.

Sites were chosen that contribute to critical habitat for rare species, provide ecological reference areas, or which contain significant geological or archaeological features. In many cases, the Black River State Forest offers the best representations of these unique attributes within the central sand plains ecological landscape and in the state.

## Recreation

Current recreational facilities serve a wide user-base and provide opportunities for camping, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, and a variety of motorized and non-motorized trail activities. The draft master plan will maintain most of the existing recreational amenities; however, some changes are proposed to address environmental issues and changes in use. Changes are designed to meet the demands of today's forest visitor and to improve the quality of the state forest's amenities. Proposals addressed in the draft plan include increasing the number of electrical sites and constructing a new shop and office building at the modern campground, and enhancing the motorized trail system to address environmental concerns, increased usage, and trail connectivity.



### *Motorized Trails*

The state forest's motorized trail system for snowmobiles, ATVs and licensed dual-sport motorcycles is an integral part of a several hundred mile region-wide trail network. Currently, much of the motorized trail system on the Black River State Forest is experiencing environmental challenges due to the significant number of wetland crossings and sandy soils which are extremely prone to erosion. Many of these issues date back to the initial development of the trails, which were originally designed as snowmobile trails for use in winter months. ATVs have become increasingly popular on the state forest, and the trails have experienced a subsequent increase in use since the late 1980s. Because the trails are

now heavily used in the summer months, trail degradation has greatly increased over the past several years.

The draft master plan attempts to address these environmental concerns to ensure a safe and sustainable motorized trail system through implementation of the following objectives:

- Meet Department trail standards while establishing a sustainable trail system
- Upgrade and maintain the existing trail infrastructure
- Minimize water quality and wetland impacts
- Reduce soil erosion
- Increase rider safety
- Maintain and improve connectivity to the regional trail network
- Decrease user conflicts by separating incompatible uses

### *Motorized Trail Changes - Highlights from the Draft Plan*

In general, changes to the motorized trail system will focus on improving trail tread, improving wetland crossings, reducing erosion and rutting, and protecting water quality, while improving rider experience and safety. The trail width in some locations will be narrowed where it has expanded from its original size due to heavy use in recent years. Restoration of vegetation in these areas will create a more natural appearance along the trail. Changes also focus on reducing user conflicts while maintaining or improving connectivity to the regional trail network. More specific proposals in the draft plan include:

- Participate in and coordinate the cooperative effort to identify and authorize an ATV trail that connects the Town of Millston to the existing Jackson County ATV trails leading to Black River Falls.
- Maintain the existing 33 miles of ATV trails on the property in the short-term, and close 7.9 miles of the Wildcat Trail to ATV use when the new trail connector in Millston is authorized for use.
- Close a 1.8 mile snowmobile only loop to reduce user conflicts with the silent sports area.

- Remove horse access on the motorized trail system, except for a 1,500 foot segment.
- Re-route a short section of the trail west of Stanton Creek Road to address erosion issues.
- Change 4.3 miles of ATV trail near Castle Mound to a summer only trail to be consistent with the designation of the adjacent Jackson County Trails.

### **Wildlife Management**

The Black River State Forest supports a great diversity of wildlife species, including game, non-game, furbearer, and bird species common to Wisconsin. The state forest also has numerous endangered, threatened and rare species, and several Species of Special Concern. Wildlife management focuses on maintaining diverse and healthy wildlife populations by managing the composition and structure of forested and non-forested habitats. Wildlife habitat values are further assured by the wildlife biologists working with foresters on timber sales and other land management activities.

The Karner blue butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*) (Kbb) was listed as a federally endangered species in December of 1992. The Kbb inhabits oak/pine barrens, a globally rare vegetative community that exists on the Black River State Forest. A Karner Blue Butterfly Recovery Plan was published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2003. That plan designates recovery properties across the Kbb range and assigns population goals for each property. The Black River State Forest is included in that listing with a goal of one population with at least 3,000 Kbb (as stated in the 2003 Recovery Plan). Several potential recovery sites have been identified on the forest. When additional information has been collected on Kbb populations and management potential, a Recovery Implementation Plan will be developed. The property will follow the most current version of the Kbb Recovery Implementation Plan, along with the Karner Blue Butterfly Habitat Conservation Plan.

### **Boundary Expansion**

The draft master plan proposes an expansion of the project boundary for the Black River State Forest by approximately 19,800 acres. Seven expansion areas were selected based on their ability to sustain additional ecological, economic and social value for the property and region with respect to forest and watershed health, recreational opportunities, and improved forest access. If the boundary expansion were acquired in its entirety, the property would encompass approximately 88,000 acres.

### **Environmental Analysis**

The Environmental Analysis (EA) assesses the potential impacts of actions recommended in the Black River State Forest Draft Master Plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to forest management and operation. The EA also includes an examination of the management alternatives considered and the public review process used during the development of the master plan.

The EA for this plan concludes that the implementation of the master plan provides positive, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region with minimal adverse impacts.

### **Public Participation**

The public has been involved in the Black River State Forest master planning process at key points within the past four years. Public involvement included mailings, a dedicated website, open house meetings, and correspondence with local and county governments, tribes, interested organizations, user groups, and individuals. The Department engaged the public through the master planning stages of issue identification, vision and goals, alternative concepts, preferred alternative, and the Draft Plan and Environmental Analysis.