Form 1100-1
Rev. 5-91

NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD AGENDA ITEM Item No. 3.B.10

SUBJECT: ACREAGE GOAL MODIFICATION – GLACIAL HABITAT RESTORATION AREA – FOND DU LAC, WINNEBAGO, DODGE AND COLUMBIA COUNTIES

FOR: MAY 2007 BOARD MEETING

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Richard Steffes

SUMMARY: In 1990, the Board approved establishment of the Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (GHRA) in Fond du Lac, Winnebago, Dodge and Columbia Counties. The acreage goal, which totals 28,400 acres, was established as 7,400 acres for fee-title and 21,000 acres for easements. The fee-title portion of the goal has been met and there remains a substantial unmet easement acreage goal.

The original Stewardship program identified Habitat Restoration as one of its key elements for conservation emphasis. This project has met with good success and wildlife habitat is improving. However, the Department is finding that fee-title is the better tool, as it provides public access as well as wildlife habitat.

To date, the Department has 14,920 acres in fee-title and easements and 13,480 acres remain from the total goal of 28,400 acres. The Department would like to combine the fee-title and easement goals established in 1990. This will allow a primary focus on fee-title purchases in the future. We expect more success with landowners in fee-title transaction instead of easements. In addition, this approach expands the land base for public hunting and other outdoor recreation.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approve an acreage goal of 28,400 for the Glacial Habitat Restoration Area to be used primarily for fee-title land purchases.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:

No ☒	Fiscal Estimate Required	Yes ☐	Attached
No ☒	Environmental Assessment of Impact Statement Required	Yes ☐	Attached
No ☐	Background Memo	Yes ☒	Attached

APPROVED:

R E Steffes — 4-3-07
Real Estate Director, Richard E. Steffes - LF/6 — Date

Laurie Osterndorf — 4/3/07
Administrator, Laurie Osterndorf - AD/5 — Date

Scott Hassett — 4/3/07
Secretary, Scott Hassett - AD/5 — Date

cc: S. Miller – LF/6
R. Steffes – LF/6
L. Ross – AD/5
T. Hauge – WM/6
L. Eagan – SCR/Fitchburg
R. Kazmierczak – NER/Green Bay

State of Wisconsin

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 3, 2007

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Scott Hassett Scott

SUBJECT: Glacial Habitat Restoration Area Acquisition Authority

I am requesting your approval to modify the acreage goals for the Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (GHRA) program, but first, let me give you some background and a status report on the Department's success with the project. The GHRA is a landscape scale approach to resource management. The project focuses on wildlife management activities to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl, pheasant and grassland songbirds. Initiated in 1990, the goals of the program are to restore 11,000 acres of drained and degraded wetland and 38,600 acres of grassland in key areas to specifically benefit wildlife populations. These habitat goals were anticipated through both state land control and partnership and landowner activities. The project area consists of 530,000 acres within 24 townships in parts of Columbia, Dodge, Fond du Lac and Winnebago counties and was selected due its rich agricultural background and historically high pheasant and waterfowl production. The original Stewardship law identified Habitat Restoration as one of the key elements for conservation emphasis.

In order to accomplish the established habitat goals, the GHRA has taken a multi-facetted resource management approach, which focuses on various private lands' initiatives and permanent habitat protection. The private lands' initiatives have focused largely on encouraging and promoting federal farm bill programs, concentrating conservation organizations' efforts through broad partnerships, and meeting one-on-one with private landowners to discuss wildlife habitat management. The permanent habitat protection aspects of the program are accomplished through the purchase of conservation easements with private landowners and by acquiring property through fee-title purchases for habitat development and public use.

Overall, the project is widely accepted and supported by hunters, local landowners, non-profit conservation organizations and other outdoor recreationalists. To date, more than 7,060 acres of drained or degraded wetlands have been restored, accomplishing approximately 64% of the 11,000-acre goal. In addition, the conservation community in the area has restored over 24,100 acres of grassland, or 62% of the 38,600 acre goal. (Note, for clarification, the 11,000 acres of wetland and 38,600 acres of grassland are project habitat restoration goals and are not coincidental with the Department's acreage goal for land control, which totals 28,400 acres. The difference between these amounts reflects partner and landowner habitat restoration.) Coupled with the habitat accomplishments, WDNR wildlife management staff has helped more than 145 landowners permanently protect their property.

DNR's land acquisition program has been a key factor in the success of the project. Driven by the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and aided with matching North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants, more than 12,300 acres have been protected within the GHRA. An additional 2,620 acres were state-owned prior to 1990, the start of the GHRA, bringing the total state land control to 14,920 acres at this time. At the start of the program, the importance of a two-pronged acquisition program became clear. When the program started in 1990, the only option available to landowners was a conservation easement with public access. This limited option never succeeded as landowners were not interested in giving up most of the rights to their property, yet still be required to pay the taxes on the property. In an attempt to match the needs and desires of the public with the options available to landowners, the Department modified the acquisition program, and soon fee-title acquisitions and easements without public access became available. Once these two options were added to the acquisition toolbox, the program and habitat restoration in general, took off. Of the original NRB approved acquisition goals of 7,400 acres of fee-title acquisition and 21,000 acres of easement acquisitions, the Department has protected 9,006 acres through fee-title ownership and 5,914 acres through easement acquisition. As mentioned above, some of the fee-title state ownership occurred prior to formation of the GHRA.

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Funding for habitat restoration and land acquisition has historically been provided by the Stewardship program and NAWCA grants. To date, project staff have brought in over 5.5 million dollars of NAWCA and other grant funds to the project. These funding sources appear to be stable over the next 10 years and could allow the project to complete its habitat restoration and acquisition goals.

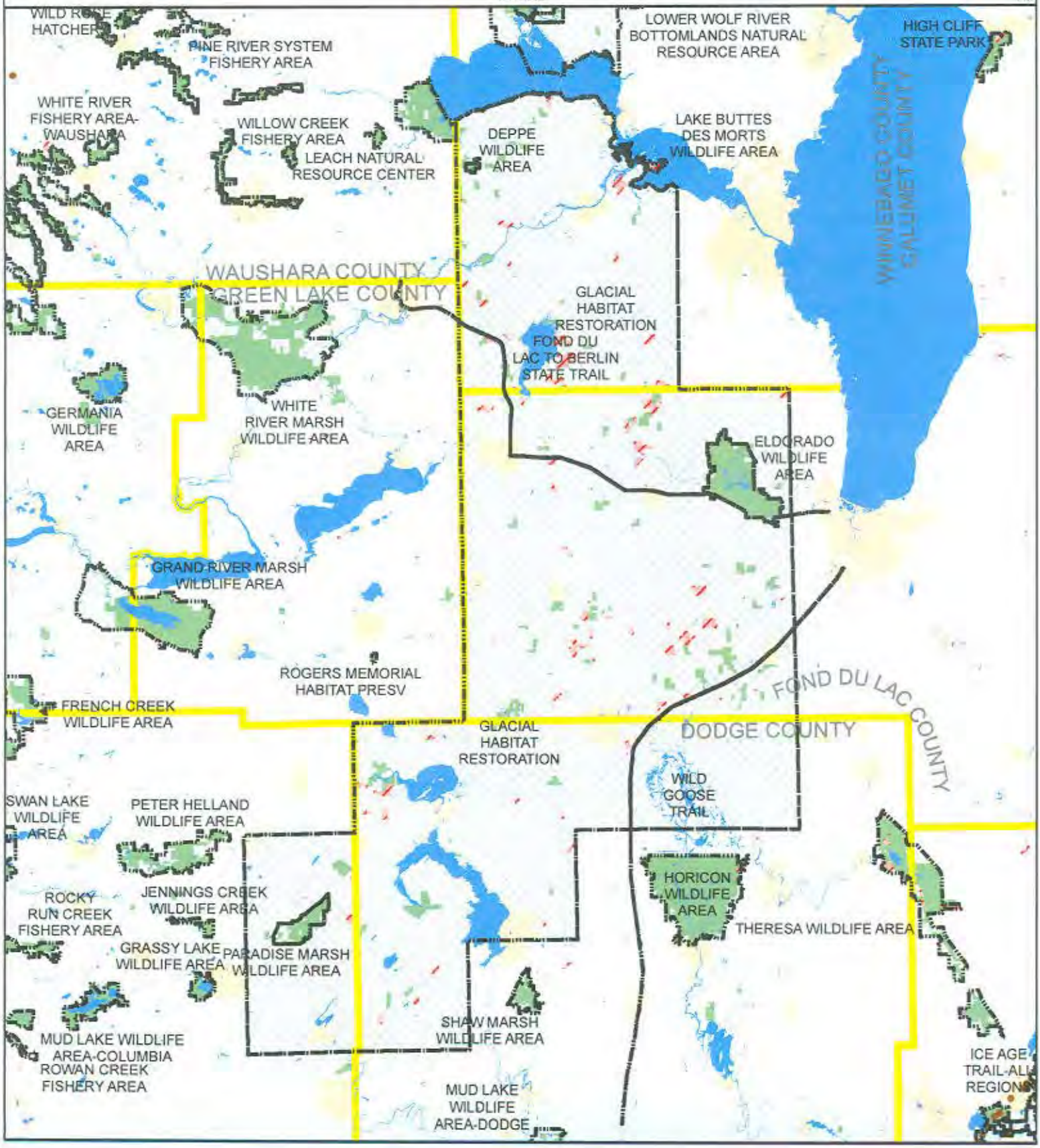
However, given the distribution of the acquisition authority, the time has come for additional changes to the GHRA acquisition goals. Currently, my staff have achieved and exceeded the original fee-title acquisition goal of 7,400 acres, but there still is a large acreage of easement acreage goal remaining to be acquired. Many obstacles exist, which limit landowner interest and prevent significant progress towards the easement acquisition goal including use-value assessment, subdivision of property, escalating land values and general desire by landowners to restrict public access on eased lands.

Therefore, I am requesting Board approval to combine the easement and fee-title acquisition goals into one all-encompassing goal not to exceed the original total of 28,400 acres for the entire project area. Since 14,920 acres are already under state fee-title or easement control, this action will allow the Department to acquire an additional 13,480 acres. Provided with this modification, the GHRA program will continue the historical trend of success towards the habitat goals that the program has experienced.

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES | Jan 29, 2007 | BUREAU OF FACILITIES AND LANDS

GLACIAL HABITAT RESTORATION

Owned Land
Project Boundary
Eased Land
Ice Age Trail
Leased Land

0 3.5 7 14 Miles

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