

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

SUBJECT: White River Property Group Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

FOR: October 2013 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Beth Kienbaum, Wildlife & Fisheries Property Planner

SUMMARY:

This is a draft revision of outdated master plans for public properties covering 15,000 acres of the White River corridor within Bayfield and Ashland Counties. The west property boundary borders the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, where the headwaters of the White River form. The east boundary borders Bad River tribal lands, where the White River joins with the Bad River and empties into Lake Superior.

The White River and its watershed are important recreational and economic resources. It is one of the outstanding inland trout producing streams in northwest Wisconsin, it is also an important tributary to an internationally recognized wetland estuary complex of Lake Superior (Kakagon-Bad River Slough). The properties contain remnant Boreal Forests, steep slopes, and wetlands. They form an environmental corridor along the White River, and with its tributaries, reside almost entirely within the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape.

The plan's proposed actions are not anticipated to result in significant adverse environmental effects. The Department has made a preliminary determination that an environmental impact statement is not required.

The master plan recommendations include: fishery remediation through removal of an undersized culvert, bridge replacement, and streambank restoration; improved angler access and parking; improved hunter access through development of new parking, a new trail system with hunting blinds; and development of a new shooting range.

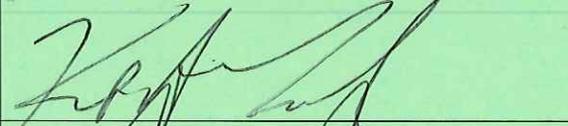
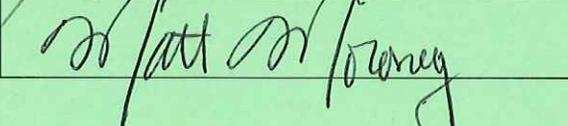
Consultation occurred on more than two occasions between the department and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, including the Voigt Intertribal Task Force, and the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. There are no issues of concern. Public input occurred at two open house meetings and public comment periods, at two annual White River Fish Boil Celebrations, and from email, letters, phone calls, electronic and paper comment forms. Over 350 contacts involved a diverse constituency, including: adjacent property owners, local community (many with generations of involvement), Bayfield Regional Conservancy, Bibon Swamp Advisory Council, Friends of the White River, West Wisconsin Land Trust, Chequamegon Area Mountain Bike Association, Town of Grand View, Trout Unlimited Wild Rivers Chapter and Trout Unlimited WI State Council. The public responded favorably overall.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the revised master plan and environmental assessment.

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

- Background memo
- White River Draft Master Plan Overview
-

The White River Property Group master planning web page is located at:
<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/WhiteRiver/>

Approved by	Signature	Date
Steve Miller, Bureau Director		8-29-13
Kurt Thiede, Administrator		9-13-13
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		10/7/13

DATE: September 2013

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp - Secretary, Department of Natural Resources



SUBJECT: White River Property Group Master Plan & Environmental Assessment

The Department is recommending approval of revised master plans for 3 DNR properties covering 15,000 acres of the White River corridor within Bayfield and Ashland Counties. The draft White River Property Group (WRPG) Master Plan and Environmental Assessment describes how the fishery area, wildlife area and state natural areas will be managed and benefit the public. Wisconsin Administrative Code ch. NR 44 requires the development and revision of master plans for properties managed by the Department. It also requires the use of scientific information and public involvement to develop a master plan. This is the first revision to master plans for these properties since the 1980's.

I. Property Descriptions and Uses

More than 15,000 acres are protected as state managed lands in the White River Property Group. Approximately 1,000 acres are State Wildlife Area; 4,698 acres are Fishery Area, and 9,901 acres are State Natural Area.

The White River Property Group lies within a 350 square mile watershed of wetlands, woodland, fields, streams and rivers that drain into Lake Superior in a predominantly remote, forested setting in Bayfield and Ashland Counties. The White River is one of Wisconsin's least developed river systems, highly scenic, historically known as a premier wild brown trout fishery in Bayfield County and attracts anglers from all over the Midwest. It is one of only eight rivers in Wisconsin with over 40 miles of Class I or Class II trout water. A 15-mile river segment between the Sutherland and Bibon Road bridges is the longest reach of high quality trout water in Wisconsin inaccessible by public road – a rare canoe fishery for wild brown trout. The Bibon Swamp (15 square miles) has been recognized numerous times as a priority aquatic conservation site.

The White River and watershed are important recreational and economic resources. The system's headwaters are located in the Drummond-Delta area of western Bayfield County; from there the White River flows east and north through the 10,000 acre Bibon Swamp, through the village of Mason, into a flowage formed by a hydroelectric dam, then ultimately to a confluence with the Bad River at Odanah, on the Bad River Reservation of the Lake Superior Ojibwe Tribe in Ashland County. In addition to being an outstanding inland trout producing stream in northwest Wisconsin, it is an important tributary to an *internationally* recognized wetland estuary complex of Lake Superior (Kakagon-Bad River Slough). The properties form an environmental corridor along the White River, and with its tributaries, reside almost entirely within the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape.

II. Master Plan Summary

The revised White River Property Group (WRPG) Master Plan and Environmental Assessment is attached for review and approval. A WRPG Master Plan Overview is also attached.

Highlights of the WRPG Master Plan include:

Scenic Resources Areas

These management areas contain the headwaters of the White River, numerous springs, seeps and ponds among a mature conifer forest, and the meandering river stretch that includes Sajdak Springs State Natural Area and continues to the border of the vast Bibon Swamp State Natural Area.

Management includes protection and restoration of the headwater springs, maintaining the Exceptional Resource Water river designation, providing quality classified trout streams, restoring riparian areas, providing additional walk-in river access, and continuing to provide conditions where users may feel they are in a secluded setting. Objectives and management prescriptions also include restoring or replacing educational signage, offering nature interpretation materials, and enhancing user awareness, safety, and appreciation of the natural resources.

Native Community Areas

The Native Community Management Areas include Bibon Swamp wetlands and uplands, the largest non-coastal wetland in the Lake Superior Basin. Additional areas include Boreal Forest and Mesic Floodplain Terrace plant communities along the steep banks of the White River, largely restricted to far northern Wisconsin and considered rare or imperiled.

Management prescriptions generally include removal of invasive plants, especially buckthorn, and allowing only natural processes to shape a matrix of wetland communities and old growth forest.

Habitat Areas

These management areas provide a full range of traditional outdoor recreation and education opportunities. Hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing are significant draws for users.

Management objectives seek to provide increased access for disabled users by constructing accessible hunting blinds, accessible trails, and a single ADA accessible 100-yard shooting range.

Proposed Developments

- 1) Improve/restore fish passage as a result of removing a culvert and restoring the streambank in the fishery headwaters area. A popular artesian well would continue to have public access with construction of a new bridge.
- 2) Provide increased user access that maintains the wild character of the properties.
- 3) Improve angler access and parking off Sutherland Road attributable to a donation offered to DNR.
- 4) Improve access for mobility impaired individuals and improve hunter access in the Wildlife Area by development of new parking, a new trail system, and hunting blinds.
- 5) Establish a new 100-yd shooting range on the White River Wildlife Area.
- 6) Partner with local townships to develop accessible fishing structures for the mobility impaired.

Proposed Boundary Re-Designation

A project boundary re-designation of 628 acres from Fishery Area to the adjacent Wildlife Area in Ashland County is proposed to consolidate new habitat and trail management.

Proposed Acquisition Authority within Current Boundary

Two changes to acquisition authority within the established boundary of Bibon Swamp State Natural Area are recommended. One change contracts the existing boundary by 252 acres, where lands are no longer conducive to natural area management. The other changes the acquisition goal to include all remaining lands within the existing boundary, most of which are owned by Bayfield County. DNR remains committed to cooperative management jointly with Bayfield County and this change allows flexibility in land trades.

III. Tribal Consultation and Public Involvement

Formal and informal consultation occurred between the DNR and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, including the Voigt Intertribal Task Force, and the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. There are no outstanding issues.

Public input occurred at two open house meetings, during public comment periods, and at two annual White River Fish Boil Celebrations in the form of conversation, email, letters, phone calls, electronic and paper comment forms. Over 350 contacts involved a diverse constituency, including: adjacent property owners, local community (many with generations of involvement), Bayfield Regional Conservancy, Bibon Swamp Advisory Council, Friends of the White River, West Wisconsin Land Trust, Chequamegon Area Mountain Bike Association, Town of Grand View, Trout Unlimited Wild Rivers Chapter and Trout Unlimited WI State Council. The public responded favorably overall. The regional community has been a valuable partner in both planning and management. Most comments emphasized conservation and protection of the outstanding trout fishery ecosystem, protecting the native ecological communities, and preserving the perception of a wilderness environment. A long-range Memorandum of Agreement with the Friends of the White River is included in the master plan appendices.

IV. Environmental Analysis (EA) Conclusions and Department Recommendations

The Environmental Analysis describes the range of potential environmental impacts potentially associated with the actions recommended in the master plan.

The Department of Natural Resources concludes that:

- 1) The Department, under s. 1.11 Wis. Stats., and ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code, has the responsibility to comply with Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act, and the authority to determine its compliance with that Act.
- 2) The Department, under s. 23.09(2) Wis. Stats., and Administrative Code ch. NR 1.51 has the authority to acquire, plan and manage state wildlife and fishery areas.
- 3) The Department, under ss. 23.27-29, Wis. Stats., and Administrative Code ch. NR 1.32 has the authority to acquire, designate, and protect State Natural Areas.

DECISION: The Department Recommends Natural Resources Board approval of the White River Property Group Master Plan and Environmental Assessment.

Att.

WHITE RIVER PROPERTY GROUP DRAFT MASTER PLAN OVERVIEW

Contents

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Master Plan Timeline and Public Input

- Open House July 2012
Northern Gt Lakes Visitor Center
- Fish Boil August 2012
White River at Mason Park
- Open House June 2013
Northern Gt Lakes Visitor Center
- Comments received on comment forms, via US mail, email, electronic web form, and in person.

Natural Resource Board meeting and approval of the draft master plan

Oct 23, 2013

THE WHITE RIVER PROPERTIES

The draft White River Property Group Master Plan continues to be available for public review. Management, use and development plans for the next 20 years are outlined.

The properties exist within a 350 square mile watershed of wetlands, woodlands, fields, streams and rivers that drain into Lake Superior in a remote, forested setting in Bayfield and Ashland Counties.

One of Wisconsin's least developed river systems, the White River is a highly scenic, historically known, premier wild brown trout fishery in Bayfield County, that attracts anglers from all over the Midwest. It is one of only eight rivers in Wisconsin with over 40 miles of Class I or Class II trout water.

A 15-mile segment near the headwaters provides the longest reach of high quality trout water in Wisconsin inaccessible by public road – a rare canoe



Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters of the White River

fishery for wild brown trout.

The White River and watershed are important recreational and economic resources. The headwaters are located in the Drummond-Delta area of western Bayfield County. The river flows east and north through the 10,000 acre Bibon Swamp, through the village of Mason, into a flowage formed by a hydroelectric dam, then ultimately to a confluence with the Bad River at Odanah, on the Bad River Reservation

of the Lake Superior Ojibwe Tribe in Ashland County. It is a tributary to the internationally recognized wetland estuary of Lake Superior, the Kakagon-Bad River Slough.

Properties include:

- White River Fishery Area: 4,698 acres
- Bibon Swamp State Natural Area: 9,872 acres
- White River Wildlife Area: 1,000 acres

PROPOSED LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

Management of DNR properties is described by a specific land management classification per Chapter NR 44 that indicates the primary management objective for a particular area within the property. Lands covered under this plan fall into the following land management classifications:

Property Name	Native Community acres	Scenic Resources acres	Habitat acres
White River FA*	466	3,553	129
White River WA	575	0	693
Bibon Swamp NA	9,872	0	0
Total	10,913	3,553	822

* White River FA has an additional 222-acre hydroelectric dam and flowage zone, and approximately 100 acres of easement for public access to the White River, primarily for fishing, with no management privileges. Values reflect re-designation of 628 acres from FA to WA.

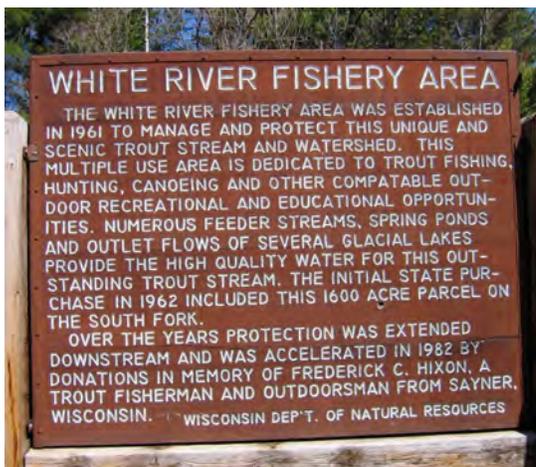
NATIVE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AREAS

The Native Community Management Areas include Bibon Swamp wetlands and uplands, the largest non-coastal wetland in the Lake Superior Basin. Additional areas include Boreal Forest and Mesic Floodplain Terrace plant communities along the steep banks of the White River, largely restricted to far northern WI and considered rare or imperiled.

Management prescriptions for these areas generally include removal of invasive plants, especially buckthorn, and allowing only natural processes to shape a matrix of wetland communities and old growth forest, without timber harvesting.



SCENIC RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AREAS



These management areas contain the headwaters of the White River, numerous springs, seeps and ponds among a mature conifer forest, and the meandering river stretch that includes Sajdak Springs State Natural Area and continues to the border of the vast Bibon Swamp State Natural Area.

Management objectives include protection and restoration of the headwater springs, maintaining the Exceptional Resource Water river designation, providing quality classified trout streams, restoring riparian areas, and providing conditions where users may feel they are in a secluded setting. Objectives also include enhancing user awareness, safety, and appreciation of the natural resources.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT AREAS

These management areas provide a full range of traditional outdoor recreation and education opportunities. Hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing are significant draws for users. Management objectives seek to provide increased access for disabled users by constructing accessible hunting blinds, accessible trails, and considering a single ADA accessible 100-yard shooting range.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

DNR seeks your comments on the following proposed developments:

- The Fishery Area headwaters are in need of fish passage remediation through removal of an under-sized culvert, bridge replacement, and streambank restoration. An historically popular artesian well will continue to have public access with construction of a new bridge.
- Providing increased user access that maintains the wild character of the properties is an objective of these recreational facility developments. Current recreation and habitat management activities will largely be retained.
- Improved angler access and parking off Sutherland Rd will result from a donation offered to DNR.
- The plan recommends improved access for mobility impaired individuals and better hunter access in the Wildlife Area by development of new parking, a new trail system, and hunting blinds.
- A new 100-yd shooting range alternative is proposed on the White River Wildlife Area.

Proposed Developments with Estimated Costs

Activity	Total Cost
FA Parking area Gravel Resurface	\$5,000
FA Culvert Removal and Site Preparation	\$8,000
FA Clear-Span Vehicle Bridge	\$60,000
FA Culvert area Habitat Restoration	\$54,200
FA Angler Access & Parking – Sutherland Rd.	\$10,000
WA Parking, Accessible Hunting Blinds and Trail Development	\$294,300
WA Accessible Trail Maintenance (~5 mi)	\$1,000
WA Shooting Range Development	\$20,000

Accessible Fishing Partnerships - DNR also seeks comments on the feasibility of adding one or more fishing structures for the mobility impaired, in partnership with local units of government. The cost of adding hand-icap accessible fishing is estimated between \$5,000-\$10,000 not including the accessible path, estimated at \$500 (\$5 per linear foot). This plan recommends the following sites on township land be reviewed:

Trout fishing – Pike River Road Township Park access to the White River
 Trout fishing – Mason Park access to the White River

Regional Partnerships - include authors of the 2004 White River Watershed Management Plan: the Bad River Watershed Association, Friends Groups, Townships, University of Wisconsin-Extension, West Wisconsin Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, Bayfield Regional Conservancy, National Forest Service, Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission, National Park Service, School communities, USDA-NRCS, and the City of Ashland. The Friends of the White River and Bibon Swamp Advisory Council regularly participate in management efforts with the Department.

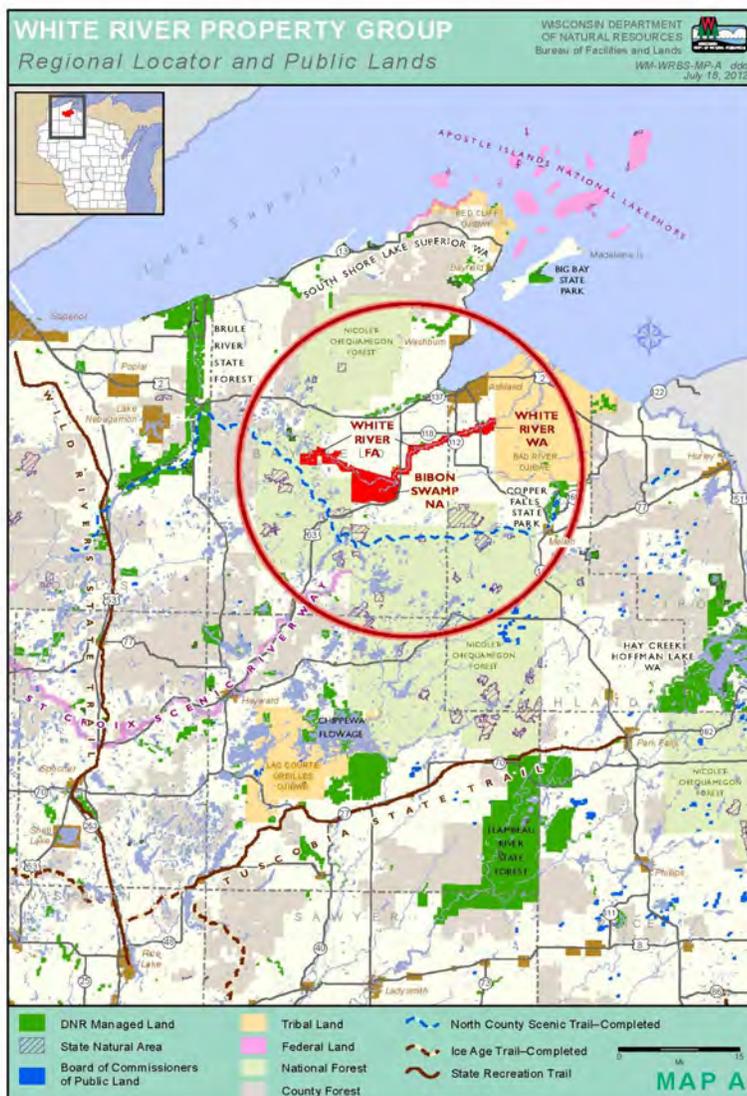
To view the master planning documents, visit:

<http://dnr.wi.gov> key words: “[master planning](#)” Click the [White River](#) link.

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PLEASE CONTACT US FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION!



Invasive Species

Invasive species are a significant threat to our native plant and animal communities.

To address this growing concern, this master plan recommends that invasive species inventory, monitoring and control actions be included in annual property planning for each property.

Guidance is provided in the Property Managers Handbook www.dnr.gov key words: invasives, control.

See also:

- Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin
www.ipaw.org

- Forestry BMPs
www.council.wisconsinforestry.org

