

Variance Initiator/Author: Dave Schulz

Title: Superintendent, Brule River State Forest

Supporting Approvals

Property Manager Date: _____

Department Master Planning Manager, LF Date: _____

Regional Forestry Leader Date: _____

Program Bureau Director Date: _____

Approved March 16, 2011

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Variance:

The purpose for the proposed master plan variance is to modify recreation management prescriptions for the lands acquired and designated as part of the Brule River State Forest (BRSF) in 2007. The 5,889.13 acre acquisition was approved by the Natural Resources Board in June 2007. The area which comprises the newly acquired property was planned for in the 2002 master plan as part of a proposed northern boundary expansion and classified to be part of Native Community Management Area 1 – Lake Superior Clay Plain.

Prescriptions proposed to be modified as part of the variance describe access management for the new lands, including providing gravel parking lots at major access points, and maintaining existing hunter walking trails.

Anticipated Primary Benefits of the Proposed Variance:

Modifying two recreation management prescriptions specific to the acquisition area, allows for prescriptions that are fully applicable to this area. The recreation management prescriptions were written based on land ownership at the time the plan was developed. While most current recreation management prescriptions for Area 1 are applicable to the newly acquired property, some may not be entirely compatible with proposed recreation management or do not apply to the new area at all. The modified prescriptions help provide clarity.

Specifically, the current prescription related to maintaining the current size and number of parking lots for recreational access is not compatible with the new acquisition. In the acquisition area, there are issues with too many vehicles parking on town roadsides for hunting access, which has been a safety hazard since there is not an ample road shoulder for cars to pull off onto. This change would allow the development of additional graveled parking areas that will continue to provide public access, but in a safer manner.

Another recreation management prescription which will be modified by this variance is the prescription related to establishing and maintaining a new hunter walking trail in “this area”. At the time this prescription was written, it reflected the ownership in 2002 and the area that comprised Area 1 at that time. There is no intention of creating a new hunter walking trail in the new acquisition area, as it already contains several. This prescription will be changed to reflect maintaining all existing hunter walking trails in the newly expanded Area 1.

Additional Anticipated Benefits:

One benefit of the new acquisition being incorporated into the master plan is that it fulfills the majority of the northern boundary expansion. In addition, the acquisition itself creates several opportunities for the Brule River State Forest, and it should be recognized in the master plan that these opportunities can now be worked toward since the land has been acquired. As stated in the current master plan, “acquisition on the Brule River State Forest emphasizes the acquisition of large tracts of undeveloped lands, parcels with water frontage, and parcels for future recreation sites.” Benefits that will be achieved

through management of the recent acquisition are described in the master plan in the Northern Boundary Expansion Area (master plan, p.30):

- Allow a functional landscape scale restoration of a clay plain boreal forest, a rare ecological community in Wisconsin.
- Preserve a natural and remote recreational setting next to Wisconsin's Lake Superior coastline.
- Protect additional watersheds and fishery habitats that flow into Lake Superior.
- Provide the potential for large-scale demonstrations of silvicultural practices for boreal forest management.

Hunting was also a typical recreational use during previous ownership of the property due to the lands enrollment in the Managed Forest Law program. Public hunting will continue to be allowed and will be accommodated through the maintenance of existing trails for foot access.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts:

The primary negative impact of the newly acquired property is that it will not be open for motorized recreational access. The property was previously used by ATVs, primarily for hunting access, and this use will no longer be allowed. Hunting access will continue to be supported by maintaining trails for walking access. Proper signage has already been posted at major access points indicating that ATVs are not an accepted use.

Compatibility with Statutes, Codes and Department Policies:

The proposed master plan variance is compatible with NR 44.04(a) which reads as follows:

NR 44.04

(1) DEFINITIONS.

(d) "Master plan variance" or "plan variance" means a change in management activity or use described in the master plan that is consistent with the area's land management classification and does not constitute a change in an objective for management or public use of the area as specified in the plan.

Federal Aid Limitations:

There are no Federal Aid limitations.

How the Master Plan Supports the Proposed Variance:

The 5,889.13 acre area was planned for and described in the 2002 master plan on page 30, as a portion of the Northern Boundary Expansion Area. The plan directed that the acquisition would be managed similar to Management Area 1, Lake Superior Clay Plain Native Community Management Area. The acquisition became state property and was approved at the June 2007 Natural Resources Board meeting.

As stated on page 30 of the current master plan, "If acquired, this area would be managed similar to the Area 1 – Lake Superior Clay Plain – Native Community Management Area." Because this acquisition was anticipated to be part of Area 1, there is no creation of a new management classification or sub-classification. Further, on page

56 of the plan, "Approximately 7,000 additional acres could be added to Area 1 if purchased. All management objectives and descriptions [of Area 1] are based on the lands in state ownership at the time this master plan was written (2002)." Although this portion of the master plan references lands in state ownership at the time the master plan was written, the reference that lands within the northern boundary expansion would be managed similar to Area 1 gives clear direction that it is not necessary to create a new management classification for the new acquisition.

The Public Review Process Used:

1. The original variance was presented at the Brule River State Forest annual fall/winter public meeting on December 12, 2009.
 - a. Meeting was advertised in local newspapers, via email, via word of mouth, and via DNR website (events calendar and Brule River State Forest webpage).
2. Information about the original variance was available on the BRSF webpage (webpage link was included in the summary, which was shared at the spring public meeting). http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/Brule/
3. Comments on the original variance were available to be received via e-mail, phone, and written letter to Dave Schulz, BRSF superintendent, from December 12, 2009 to February 12, 2010. The original variance remained on the BRSF webpage through November 24, 2010.
4. A modified variance was presented at the Brule River State Forest annual fall/winter public meeting on December 18, 2010.
5. The revised variance was available on the BRSF webpage http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/Brule/ from November 24, 2010 through present.

Description of the Support and/or Opposition to the Proposed Variance (including reasons for the various positions taken) and Any Unresolved Issues or Concerns:

The original variance received two comments that specifically referenced the recreation components of this variance; both comments were supportive of the proposed modifications. The majority of the comments on the original variance focused on the land management aspects that were included within the original variance. Because of the number of comments seeking clarity on the land management proposals, the Department removed those proposals from the original variance. Additional time will be spent by Department staff to address the appropriate land management for the new acquisition area.

A revised variance, including only recreational access elements, was shared at the December 18, 2010 public meeting at the Brule Town Hall. One comment was received at the meeting. That individual expressed an interest in seeing more active management in the new acquisition area. As discussed above, the land management elements within the new acquisition area will be evaluated at a future date.

In general, there was support for the recreational access elements of the variance.

Brule River State Forest

New Property Acquisition

