

# Foreword

*Finding an appropriate balance among our inter-related needs for a healthy environment and a strong economy is difficult. Part of finding that balance requires knowing where the places that will be critical to meet future conservation and recreation needs are located.*

Dear friends,

*The people of Wisconsin have always been connected to the land and water of the state. From the northern forests to the mighty Mississippi, from the central sands to the mix of wetlands and rich farmland in the south, our lands and waters provide a great variety of environmental, social, and economic benefits. Wisconsin is recognized around the country as a leader in resource stewardship. We understand that a healthy, sustainable environment is essential to our prosperous economy. We also recognize that the opposite is equally true: a vibrant, growing economy is essential to a well-managed and well-protected natural resource base. Together, our environment and economy allow Wisconsinites to enjoy an exceptional quality of life.*

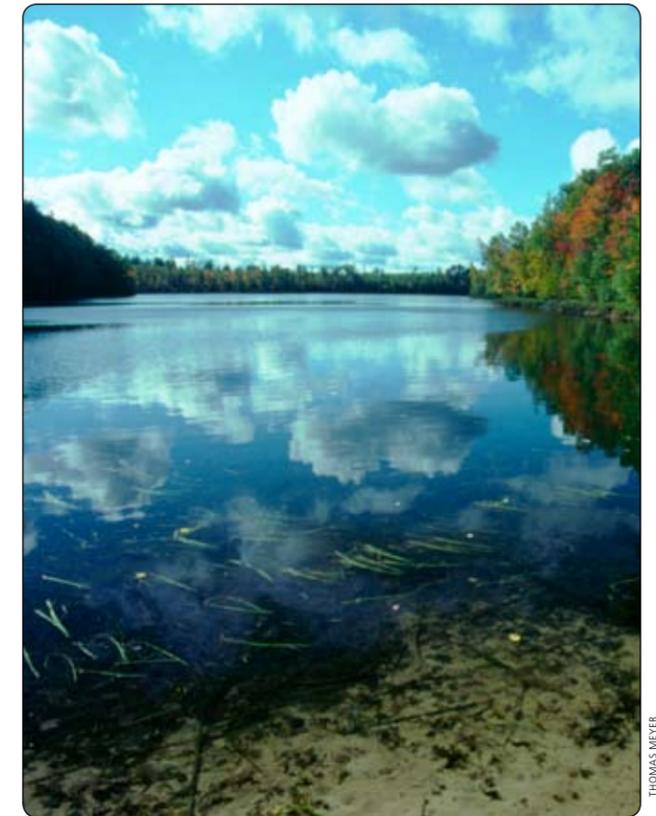
*To be sure, our landscape has been shaped by the strong stewardship ethic of generations of private landowners, local conservation and recreation groups, and public agencies. Equally certain, however, is that lands and waters essential to meet our conservation and recreation needs are under pressures unknown only a generation ago. Private lands that once supported high quality farmlands, forests, and wetlands are now being converted to a variety of other uses. Our rural countryside is being fragmented into smaller parcels as an increasing number of people can afford a 10, 20 or 40 acre private “getaway.” Often, this “parcelization” is self-fulfilling—the more that areas become fragmented, the more pressure there is to subdivide remaining parcels.*

*Similarly, during the last thirty years there has been an explosion in the number of lakefront houses.*

*Our federal, state, and county-owned public conservation lands, most of which were isolated and remote when originally acquired, are increasingly surrounded by and interspersed with development. These changes often cause conflicts, not only with the land and water’s ability to support ecological functions, but also with recreation opportunities and enjoyment.*

*Clearly, we need to build houses, roads, schools, industrial structures, commercial districts, and the many other facilities that support our growing population and expanding economy. But we must ensure that our developed infrastructure does not impair either our environment—and the natural ecological processes that support it—or our farm, forest, recreation, and tourism industries. Finding an appropriate balance among our interrelated needs for a healthy environment and a strong economy is difficult. Part of finding that balance requires knowing where the places that will be critical to meet future conservation and recreation needs are located.*

*At the request of the Natural Resources Board, the Department of Natural Resources undertook a study to assess the state’s protection needs for conservation and recreation lands over the next fifty years. Some of the questions asked were: of the lands and waters that will be critical for conserving our plants and animals and their habitats, which remain unprotected?*



Day Lake State Natural Area in Vilas County

THOMAS MEYER

## Foreword

*Although it is the culmination of over three years of work and public input, this report is really just the beginning of a dialog that we look forward to having with the people of Wisconsin about the landscape we will leave our children and grandchildren.*

*What gaps exist now (and will likely emerge in the future) in providing abundant and satisfying outdoor recreation? How can we most effectively build upon the state's existing investment in protected lands to fill conservation and recreation gaps? What special places will our children and grandchildren wish we had protected? The study focused on identifying what of our state or regionally-significant "green infrastructure" remains to be protected. This Wisconsin Land Legacy Report summarizes the results of the study.*

*Our hope is that this report, by identifying a fifty-year vision, will help the Department and others interested in perpetuating our land and water resources maintain focus on our long-term needs as we address short-term opportunities. How we react and respond to short-term opportunities will, of course, influence generations to come. Although our children and grandchildren will evaluate their own conservation and recreation needs, our actions today will influence both their attitudes towards land and water conservation as well as the opportunities they will have to use and enjoy Wisconsin's natural resources. Hopefully, the vision laid out here can help ensure that those who follow have adequate options to choose from when assessing their land use needs.*

*A growing number of Wisconsin residents no longer have a direct relative who owns a farm or a forest. As a result, far fewer of us spend Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July at a grandparent's dairy farm or an aunt and uncle's forest cabin hearing how their lives are affected*

*by the price of milk, regulations to protect water quality, the spread of invasive species, and the changing nature of our rural countryside. As our population grows increasingly urban and suburban, we risk losing a connection to the natural world and an appreciation for its complexity, wealth, and fragility. To paraphrase Aldo Leopold, it is easier than ever for our children to think that food comes from the grocery store, water from the faucet, heat from the furnace, and that waste disappears down the drain and into the garbage truck. Maintaining the conservation and environmental ethic of our citizenry goes beyond the Department's capability and the scope of this report. We will need to work with many others to achieve that goal. It is our hope that this report will be one part of keeping our population engaged in outdoor recreation, exposed to natural resource issues, and involved in finding solutions to the challenges that lie ahead.*

*Even over a fifty-year period, it is likely that the Department can help protect only a portion of the lands and waters identified in this report. Others involved in resource protection must continue to play vital roles in maintaining our natural heritage. Historically, federal, state, and local funding levels to support conservation efforts have generally reflected economic conditions; rising in good times and falling in hard times. As this report goes to print, the State is facing extraordinarily challenging economic issues. Now, more than ever, the Department will need the*

*public's help to develop new ways to help "keep Wisconsin Wisconsin"—possibly creating new kinds of incentives for landowners, working more closely with local units of government in their efforts to craft land use plans, or offering different types of technical assistance. Thankfully, Wisconsinites of all walks of life and political perspectives have never lost focus of the importance of protecting critical places.*

*Although it is the culmination of more than three years of work and extensive public input, this report is really just the beginning of a dialog that we look forward to having with the people of Wisconsin about the landscape we will leave our children and grandchildren.*



Scott Hassett, Secretary  
Department of Natural Resources



Darrell Bazzell, Secretary (former)  
Department of Natural Resources