

REGIONAL AND PROPERTY ANALYSIS:

WOODBORO LAKES WILDLIFE AREA



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Cover Image: Unnamed lake on the Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area
Photo by Jeremy Holtz

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BCPL	Board of Commissioners of Public Lands
EL	Ecological Landscape
RPA	Regional and Property Analysis
SCORP	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
WA	Wildlife Area
WLWA	Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area
WDNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
WisFIRS	Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF A REGIONAL AND PROPERTY ANALYSIS

A Regional and Property Analysis (RPA) is required by Chapter NR 44, Wisconsin Administrative Code, when developing a Master Plan, plan revision, or plan amendment. The RPA forms the foundation of the master plan, providing the baseline information on the property or property group as well as information on how each property fits into or relates to its larger ecological and social context. Functionally, it identifies the management and public use opportunities and limitations and the most suitable potential future roles or niches for the properties, and highlights those elements of the regional context that are most important to consider when planning the properties.

The **Regional Context section** of this document describes the broader recreational and socio-economic contexts of the Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area. The **Property Description** provides an overview of the property's existing resources, uses, and management, including opportunities and limitations. The **Findings and Conclusions** component is the most important section of the RPA. Based on all the regional and property data in the body of the document, the Findings and Conclusions section outlines the best probable future role or niche for the properties. It helps focus the planning process and becomes the foundation for building the master plan's goals and action strategies.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPERTY

PROPERTY LOCATION AND SIZE

The Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area (WLWA) is located in south-central Oneida County (Map A). It encompasses some 2,632 acres of mostly forested land. A 962-acre Scattered Forest Land parcel directly adjacent to the property has been managed as part of the wildlife area since acquisition, and will be included in the master plan. The Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) holds a forest management easement on 778 acres of this parcel.

STATUTORY DESIGNATION

The scope of use and management of a state property is governed by its official designation. Woodboro Lakes is a Wildlife Area. Wildlife Areas (WAs) are acquired and managed under the authority of Section 23.09(2)(d)3, Wisconsin Statutes, and Chapter NR 1.51, Wisconsin Administrative Code. They are designated to provide places where people can hunt, trap, and fish. WAs also are open for traditional outdoor uses of walking, skiing, snow shoeing, nature study, berry picking, and other low-impact recreational activities. As directed by NR 1.51 and NR 1.61, other recreational uses may be allowed on WAs by the Master Plan if those uses do not detract from the primary purpose of these properties.

INTRODUCTION

The 962-acre parcel directly adjacent to WLWA was purchased as Scattered Forest Land, a statewide program authorizing acquisition of parcels outside of existing project boundaries. This parcel was acquired to protect wildlife habitat and provide for sustainable forest management and public recreation, and is open to all the uses that are permitted on WAs.

REGIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

LAND USE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Much of the available information on land use and socio-economic characteristics for the state is organized by county. The Applied Population Laboratory (APL) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has divided the state into ten regions comprised of various county groupings, and prepared socio-economic profiles for each region. Oneida County falls into Region 2, which also includes Vilas County. The Region 2 profile (APL 2010) is the primary source of information for the following sections.

LAND USE

Region 2 is notable for its extensive forest cover interspersed with many lakes and wetlands, its low amount of cropland, and its high proportion of public recreation land, 55%, more than any other region of the state. Compared to the state as a whole, this region has a high percentage of land developed with residential property, much of it as seasonal residential property dispersed around lakeshores. Over 40% of all housing units in the region are for seasonal use. Lakeshore property values are high and increased rapidly during the early 2000s. Acreage in agriculture declined by almost 18% between 2000 and 2008 and forested acreage declined by almost 5%, with these lands converted to residential uses. Much remaining forest land has been subdivided into smaller parcels.

POPULATION

Region 2 is characterized by very low population density (~1% of the state's population) and a large seasonal population increase in the summer months due to tourist visitors and seasonal homeowners. The population also is more dispersed around lakeshores than concentrated in towns or villages. This region experienced considerable population growth during the period 2000-2008, increasing by 7.2%, greater than the state as a whole (5.8%). Much of this growth was driven by seasonal homeowners retiring to live in the area permanently or for a longer season, a trend that is expected to continue. The Oneida County population is projected to grow by 7% between 2010 and 2040 (Egan-Robertson 2013). In terms of age structure, the Region 2 population is significantly older than that of the state as a whole and is aging rapidly. The population under age 20 is projected to decline and the population over age 65 is projected to increase. By 2040, Oneida County is projected to have between 30-35% of its population over age 65 (Egan-Robertson 2013).

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Retail trade, accommodation and food services, and health care and social assistance are the sectors that employ the most workers in Region 2. Extractive industries (agriculture, forestry, mining, etc.) employ only 2.6% of workers. Retail trade was the only sector to increase in employment between 2000 and 2008. All other sectors showed declines, but

manufacturing and construction showed the largest decreases, particularly in Oneida County. Tourism and recreation are important to the region’s economy. Tourism-related industries, including arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services, employed almost 4,000 workers in 2008 (16% of all jobs). However, employment in hospitality and recreation-related sectors decreased by 3% between 2000 and 2008, much of this in Vilas County. Overall, the economy of Region 2 is transitioning from a production-based to a service-based economy. However, employment in the region’s major industries, particularly those with higher average monthly wages, has been declining in recent years.

RECREATION

The *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)* provides information on status, trends, demand, and needs for outdoor recreation in Wisconsin using a variety of public surveys, interviews, and listening sessions. The 2005-2010 SCORP (WDNR 2006a) divided the state into eight regions representing varying demographic trends, tourism influences, and environment types, and provided recreational profiles for each region. Oneida County falls within the Northwoods Region, which also includes Forest, Florence, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Price, Taylor, and Vilas counties. Table 1 summarizes recreational characteristics for this region.

Table 1. Recreational Characteristics of the Northwoods Region.

High Participation Rate (≥50%), Residents	High-demand Activities, Non-residents	Recreation Issues & Needs Identified by Residents	Regional Nature-based Supply Shortages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk for pleasure • Family gathering • Driving for pleasure • Picnicking • Snow/ice activities (any type) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing • Hiking • Camping • Canoeing • Boating • Downhill skiing 	<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ATV usage & associated impacts • Loss of public access to lands and waters • Noise pollution from motorized activities • Possible loss of silent sport facilities <p>Needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More biking trails • More hiking trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites - electrical • Parks

The 2011-2016 SCORP (WDNR 2012) presents projected statewide trends identifying activities that will show increasing, stable, and decreasing demand over the 5-year period 2011-2016. Table 2 lists nature-based activities in these three categories.

Table 2. Projected Statewide Trends for Nature-based Recreational Activities.

Increasing Demand	Stable Demand	Decreasing Demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed/RV camping • Kayaking • Stand up paddling/paddleboarding • Off-highway vehicle driving • Gardening or landscaping for pleasure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking for pleasure • Running or jogging • Motor boating • Day hiking • Tent camping • Trail running • View/photograph wildlife • Bicycling (road and non-paved) • Snowshoeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunting • Horseback riding on trails

Oneida County offers a wide array of outdoor recreational activities and facilities on federal, state, county, and municipal lands. Activities include hunting; trapping; fishing; biking; hiking; cross-country skiing; snowmobiling; camping; ATVing; wildlife observation; collection of wild edibles; bough cutting; and firewood collection.

Abundant water resources (over 1,000 lakes and 830 miles of streams) offer opportunity for many water-based pursuits such as paddling, swimming, and sailing. A variety of both motorized and non-motorized trails are available on Oneida County lands. Non-motorized trails include 35.5 miles of cross-country ski trails, 16.5 miles of snowshoe trails, 40 miles of hiking/hunter walking trails, and 13 miles of mountain bike trails (5 miles of double-track, 8 miles of single-track). Motorized trails include 214 miles of general purpose motorized trails open to all motorized vehicles year-round, 1,000 miles of snowmobile trails, and over 100 miles of ATV trails that connect to regional trail networks in neighboring counties, including 31 miles of off-road trails and approximately 75 miles of connecting road routes and open town roads (Oneida County and NCWRPC 2014). Additional recreational opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized trails, are available on other DNR-managed lands in Oneida County, including the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, Thunder Lake Wildlife Area, and Bearskin State Trail, on open Forest Crop Law and Managed Forest Law lands, and on the approximately 17,000 acres of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest within the county.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Current State Ownership:	3,594 acres
Wildlife Area:	2,632 acres
Scattered Forest Land:	962 acres
Current Acreage Goal:	2,551 acres
Current Project Boundary:	2,511 acres

OVERVIEW

Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area (WLWA) is a forested property located approximately ten miles west of the City of Rhinelander in south-central Oneida County (Map A). It consists of 2,632 acres of Wildlife Area and an adjacent 962-acre Scattered Forest Lands parcel that was acquired at the same time and has been managed as part of the wildlife area (Map B-1). The property was purchased in 1999 as part of the “Great Addition”, a large purchase of former Packaging Corporation of America lands. It was acquired to protect 1.52 miles of frontage on Little Rice Creek and two miles of frontage on seven small lakes, five of which are completely contained within the property; to provide for wildlife habitat and sustainable forest management; and to maintain public access and provide for public recreation, especially hunting and trail use. In 2002, WDNR granted a forest management easement to the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) on 778 acres of the Scattered Forest Lands parcel.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Geology, Soils, and Hydrology

WLWA is located within the Northern Highland Ecological Landscape (EL). The topography of the Northern Highland EL is undulating, comprised of gently rolling glacial outwash plain containing numerous lakes, wetlands, and bogs as well as remnant moraines and drumlins whose lower slopes are buried in outwash sands. Consequently the soils consist mostly of sands and gravels with thin or no loamy soils. Soil productivity is on the higher end for outwash sands but lower than glacial till (WDNR 2014).

There are an estimated twenty named soils within WLWA. Most fall mainly within three similar associations. The northwest portion of the property lies within the Padus-Pence association, with nearly level to steep, well-drained and moderately well drained, loamy soils on outwash plains and in areas of pitted outwash. The center of the property lies in the Padus-Goodman Association, with nearly level to steep, well drained and moderately well drained, loamy and silty soils on drumlins, moraines, and outwash plains, and in areas of pitted outwash. To the south, the property moves into the Keewenaw-Vilas Association, with nearly level to steep, moderately well drained, well drained, and excessively drained, loamy and sandy soils on drumlins, water-worked moraines, and outwash plains and in areas of pitted outwash. Other soil types present include Sayner, Monico, Worchester and Fordum (Boelter 1993).

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Wet soils occur throughout the WLWA (Map B-5) and are quite extensive in some portions of the property. Other areas have sandy soils. These soils have exhibited low soil strength, wetness, ponding, and rutting, particularly in lowland areas or those with steeper slopes. In other areas, large boulders are located just beneath the surface, barely emerging in some spots. These soils pose limitations for heavy equipment use (i.e., for timber harvesting), motorized access, and trail development (see Map B-6). Some existing roads have had to be crowned and graveled to minimize ongoing maintenance costs associated with rutting and splash-out of material, and boulders have been excavated in some areas and replaced with fill to eliminate hazards to equipment.

WLWA lies within the Lower Tomahawk River watershed, which is within the Upper Wisconsin River Water Management Unit and the Mississippi River Drainage System. The property was named Woodboro Lakes because of the large number of small lakes on the property. The latest surface water inventory (2007) identified four named lakes and 15 small, unnamed lakes, marshes, and bogs contained partially or completely within the property boundary. In addition, Little Rice Creek traverses the southeast corner of the property and Bearskin Creek passes along the northwest boundary. The lakes exhibit a wild character, with undeveloped shorelines and unimproved, foot-only access, and may have potential for designation as wild lakes (NR 44.06 (10)(f)1b, Wisconsin Administrative Code).

Ecological Landscape and Natural Communities

The Northern Highland EL is a region characterized by extensive forest cover and one of the highest concentrations of kettle lakes in the world. The current forest vegetation associated with this EL is primarily aspen, with some white, red, and jack pine, northern hardwood forests on mesic soils, and lowland conifers and peatlands.

WLWA is managed primarily for early-successional forest (aspen and white birch), which is also its dominant vegetation type. However, a variety of other natural community and vegetation types also are represented on the property. There are numerous small stands of mature red and white pine, generally associated with the lakes that occur throughout the property and with Rice Creek; some of these exhibit robust regeneration. To the southwest, there is a large stand of red oak that is currently being managed by BCPL for oak regeneration. Several small stands of Northern Wet-Mesic Forest dominated by northern white cedar occur near the southern boundary of the property, adjacent to Rice Creek. Rice Creek is a slow-moving, sandy-bottomed Warm-water Stream that flows south from Hancock Lake to Gary Lake and supports emergent vegetation and alder along its banks. In the northwestern portion of WLWA, there is a large mosaic of wetland communities, including Alder Thicket and Tamarack (poor) Swamp. The Alder Thicket is dominated by tall shrubs, especially speckled alder, with an herbaceous understory layer. The Tamarack (poor) Swamp is dominated by a broken-to-closed canopy of tamarack and sometimes contains a dense understory of speckled alder. Throughout the property there are numerous, high-quality ephemeral ponds, small depressions that hold water for a period of time following spring thaw, flourish with a

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

variety of common wetland plants, and then typically dry out in mid-to-late summer. These seasonal water features are critically important to the lifecycles of many species of invertebrates and amphibians.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2006b) identified the best ELs in the state for sustaining various natural communities. The Northern Highland EL presents “major” or “important” opportunities for sustaining 18 different natural communities. Of these, four occur on the WLWA:

- Northern Dry Forest
- Northern Wet-Mesic Forest
- Alder Thicket
- Ephemeral Pond

See WDNR (2006b) for more detailed descriptions of these natural communities.

Habitats and Vegetative Cover

The majority of the forest types on WLWA are comprised of early successional species, especially aspen. Stands of oaks or pines typically follow ridges or hills throughout the property. The lowest portions of the property contain wetlands that typically have a few scattered tamarack or spruce and a narrow rim of speckled alder surrounding a lowland grass fringe. Most of the shallow lakes have little if any vegetation, save for a few broad-leaf cattail, lily pads or water shield plants around the shallows. True to its name, Little Rice Creek hosts stands of wild rice as well as some floating-leaf and emergent wetland vegetation along the shoreline. Stands of speckled alder grow along the edges of the creek and the drainages that empty into it. The topography lends itself well to ephemeral ponds which can be found throughout the property. Invasive exotic plants found on the property include common buckthorn, honeysuckle, spotted knapweed, reed canary grass, spotted tansy, hoary alyssum, birds-foot trefoil, sweet clover, bull thistle and Canada thistle.

A breakdown of generalized cover types for WLWA based on the Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS) is given in Table 3. Cover types are shown on Map B-4.

Table 3. Woodboro Lakes WA Cover Types.

Cover Type	% Cover
Forest	93
Lowland Brush	2
Lowland Grass	3
Muskeg Bog	1
Upland Brush	<1
Upland Grass	<1

Forest Resources

According to current WisFIRS data, there are 3,100 forested acres on WLWA, accounting for 90% of the total property acreage. Primary forest types on the property include aspen (56%), oak (13%), red maple (10%), and red and white pine (10%). Northern hardwoods, tamarack, black spruce and white birch comprise the remainder (24%). BCPL holds a timber management easement on 788 acres of the Scattered Forest Land parcel directly adjacent to the wildlife area's southwestern border.

Wildlife Resources and Habitat Management

WLWA hosts a diversity of game species including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and snowshoe hare. Large carnivores including black bear and gray wolf are commonly found on the property, and smaller furbearers such as bobcat, coyote, raccoon, fox, beaver, muskrat, mink, and otter utilize the property's various habitat types as well. Waterfowl use the property heavily for production as well as for migratory staging and stopover. Species recorded on the property include teal, wood duck, mallard, American black duck, ring-necked duck, and hooded merganser. A multitude of non-game species also occur on WLWA, including herptiles, small mammals, invertebrates, and especially birds. Species observed range from red squirrel, bats, and snapping turtle to golden-winged warbler and chestnut-sided warbler, great blue heron, osprey, and bald eagle. There is one osprey nest currently on the property and given the numerous large red and white pines, potential exists for bald eagle nesting.

Detailed studies have not been conducted on this property to determine the presence of Threatened, Endangered, and Special Concern species. However, according to WDNR's Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) data and biologists, important wetland and aquatic resources occur in association with Rice Creek in two locations. Specifically, NHI data records show a wetland element occurrence on Rice Creek in the southeast corner of the property and an aquatic element occurrence also along Rice Creek just south of the property. Rice Creek and its associated riparian corridor, as well as the mosaic of wetland communities in the northern portion of the property, have potential to host state-listed Endangered or Threatened Species and Special Concern Species. A biotic inventory to document the occurrence of such species is planned for spring and summer 2015.

Habitat management on WLWA has focused mainly on early-successional forest management. The property's blocks of aspen and oak are well suited to this kind of management, and it was managed as working forest prior to WDNR acquisition. Management primarily consists of periodic timber sales. Managing the red oak well beyond normal rotation and the scattered small old white pine and red pine stands for old-growth are high priorities. The aspen and white birch are managed for ruffed grouse and woodcock habitat according to stand size and rotation recommendations from Best Management Practices (BMPs) for American woodcock (Wildlife Management Institute 2009) and golden-winged warbler (Golden-winged Warbler Working Group 2013). In

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aspen clearcuts for ruffed grouse habitat, the prescription has been to retain all the red oak and conifers as well as scattered clumps of mature aspen for beneficial composition and structure. No-cut zones of various widths have been established around the small lakes during timber sale operations. Trail maintenance and forest openings work also are employed to benefit wildlife that depends on this kind of habitat. Wildlife staff also conduct invasive brush and tree removal work and employ chemical spot treatments for exotic invasive vegetation.

WLWA contains all or part of 4 named lakes, 15 unnamed lakes, and a portion of Little Rice Creek. All of the lakes have wild shorelines with undeveloped walk-in access, except for Indian Lake which has a developed walk-in trail. Indian Lake is the largest of the lakes at 38 acres and also the deepest at 7 feet, and is reported to contain largemouth bass and panfish. However, it's likely that winterkill occurs on all these lakes due to the shallow water depth. Little Rice Creek likely supports a warmwater fishery. It reportedly supports spring spawning runs of northern pike and muskellunge from Gary Lake, a shallow 47-acre lake located south of the property. More detailed fisheries information is lacking, and no fisheries management activities are planned for the property.

RECREATION

Hunting is the top recreational use of WLWA. The property is heavily used by hunters, especially for ruffed grouse hunting which is the number-one use. Bow and gun deer hunting, bear, turkey, small game and waterfowl hunting also are popular. Other uses include trapping, bird-watching and wildlife observation, hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing, kayaking, and berry-picking. A snowmobile trail traverses the property from southeast to northwest. Mountain bikers have been known to access the property via Oscar Jenny Road and then take the snowmobile trail south and off the property, and it's likely that there also is some bike use along hunter walking trails in the interior of the property, both by hunters and non-hunters. The various small lakes scattered throughout the property are considered largely fishless, and fishing opportunity is limited.

ATV riding is popular in the Woodboro area. A local ATV route (on local roads) abuts the WLWA on the east, extending north and south. There is some local demand for extending the miles of motorized routes and trails. A local ATV club has requested that a connector trail be routed across a portion of the WLWA.

ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITIES AND ACCESS

There are two gravel parking lots and 4.5 miles of gravel road on WLWA for public access. Both parking lots and 2 miles of the gravel road were graded and re-graded in 2012 using a Conservation Infrastructure Grant. A small amount of funding from segregated funds is allocated for access maintenance each year. A network of logging roads runs throughout the entire property but historic access was limited to high-clearance and four-wheel-drive vehicles (ATVs are not permitted). Almost 16 miles of hunter walking trails have been developed on the property in cooperation with the Ruffed

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Grouse Society. Recent work has focused on improving some trails for greater vehicle access and maintaining others for foot traffic. Twelve gates on the property allow maintenance access to the hunter walking trail system and snowmobile trails but keep motor vehicles off these trails. A Forestry Training Course on the property has 0.5 miles of trails and 3 acres of open grassland that double as wildlife openings and hunter walking trails. Dispersed camping is allowed on the property between September 1 and December 31. There are six designated camp areas with no developed facilities, two of which are located in the back of the two parking areas. A bridge in the southeast portion of the property crossing a small feeder creek that flows into Little Rice Creek is currently maintained by the local snowmobile club. Infrastructure is shown on Map B-2 and existing motorized access is shown on Map B-3.

The property can be accessed from the north via County Highway K, from the east via Oneida Lake Road, from the south via Oscar Jenny Road (which runs through the property on the south end), and from the west via Jennie Lake Road.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Archaeological surveys have been limited in this area. Because of this, only one recorded archaeological site, an extensive Historic Potawatomi village site bordering Lake Hancock to the east of the WLWA, is known to be co-incident (in very limited area) with the property. No historic structures have been recorded. However, the many lakes and wetlands characteristic of the area suggest a very high potential for the presence of other, as yet unrecorded sites within the WLWA. State Statutes (44.40) as well as Manual Code (1810.10) require that any activities with the potential to disturb archaeological sites will only be undertaken after consultation with the Department Archaeologist.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes the regional and property-specific data contained in this RPA, including recreational use and ecological significance, and presents findings and conclusions that highlight WLWA's public use and habitat management opportunities and limitations. These findings and conclusions will help guide the development of the future master plan by setting the stage for a reasonable range of management and public use alternatives that may be considered during the planning process.

OVERVIEW

The Woodboro Lakes Wildlife Area (WLWA) is a 2,632-acre property located approximately 10 miles west of the City of Rhinelander in south-central Oneida County (Map A). A 962-acre Scattered Forest Land parcel is located directly adjacent to the west and is managed as part of the wildlife area. The property is mostly (93%) forested, dominated by early-successional aspen and white birch interspersed with stands of oaks and pines. There are areas of conifer wetlands containing scattered tamarack or spruce and stands of alder, several small, shallow lakes, and a portion of Little Rice Creek.

WLWA is embedded in a landscape of extensive forest cover interspersed with an abundance of lakes and wetlands. This region is characterized by many seasonal residential properties dispersed around lakeshores and the highest proportion of public recreation land in the state. Population density is low and there is a large seasonal population increase in the summer due to tourist visitors and seasonal homeowners. The region's population grew significantly over the past decade, largely driven by seasonal homeowners retiring to live in the area permanently or for a longer season, a trend that is expected to continue. The population is older than that of the state as a whole and is aging rapidly, such that a third of the population is projected to be over age 65 by 2040. Economically, the region is transitioning from a production-based to a service-based economy, and employment in many of the region's major industries has been declining in recent years.

RECREATION

Recreationally, this region is notable for its high proportion of public recreation land, abundant water resources, high seasonal home ownership, and influx of retirees influencing recreation demand. The area has long been known as a vacation destination. Large federal, state, and county land holdings provide a wide array of outdoor recreational opportunities, including both motorized and non-motorized trails. Vilas and Oneida counties are considered primary providers of silent sport activities and camping in northern Wisconsin. In terms of recreational needs and issues, recent trends suggest the region is not meeting demand for biking and hiking trails, and that there is increasing concern over conflicts with ATV use and with loss of public access to lands and waters.

The traditional outdoor pursuit of hunting is the top recreational use on the WLWA. Ruffed grouse hunting tops the list, and large- and small-game, waterfowl, and turkey

hunting also are popular. Trappers also make use of the property. A network of hunter walking trails across the property and several seasonally-available dispersed camping sites cater to this primary use. WLWA is used to a lesser extent for other nature-based activities such as hiking, bird-watching, paddling, cross-country skiing, biking, and berry-picking. A snowmobile trail that connects to a regional trail network traverses the property.

ECOLOGICAL AND HABITAT SIGNIFICANCE

WLWA is located in the Northern Highland Ecological Landscape, a region notable for extensive forest cover and a high concentration of kettle lakes. WLWA is largely forested, with early-successional aspen, white birch, and oak types dominating. A detailed inventory to determine presence of rare species and natural communities has not been conducted on the property (one is planned for 2015). Currently-available information suggests the property may offer some opportunity to manage for several wetland types, including alder thicket and tamarack-dominated conifer swamp in the northern part of the property, emergent vegetation, alder, and white cedar associated with Little Rice Creek in the southeastern portion, and ephemeral ponds throughout. There also is some potential for mature red and white pines in upland portions of the property. These sites have the potential to host state-listed Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern species.

WLWA hosts a variety of wildlife species including large carnivores and other furbearers, bats, herptiles, birds, and invertebrates. The current focus on managing for early-successional forest types provides excellent habitat for game species such as white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, and wild turkey and also benefits uncommon or rare species such as American woodcock and golden-winged warbler. Ephemeral ponds are especially important for breeding amphibians and invertebrates. Large pines have the potential to attract nesting bald eagles.

CONCLUSION

WLWA's large blocks of aspen and oak are well suited to early-successional forest management. This habitat management focus closely compliments the property's top recreational use of hunting by providing excellent habitat for game species, particularly ruffed grouse. The property offers some opportunity to manage compatibly for regionally significant or rare communities, especially conifer wetlands, ephemeral ponds, and mature pines.

Recreationally, the traditional consumptive uses and other nature-based activities currently available on WLWA are the best suited to the property's primary purpose and are compatible with the property's current management focus and physical characteristics. There may be opportunity to provide carry-in boat access for paddlers to Rice Creek where it passes close to the snowmobile trail, where access previously existed prior to the addition of gates between Oscar Jenny Road and Cruiser's Lane. WLWA offers very limited opportunity to address regional trail shortages identified for the

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Northwoods Region in the 2005-2010 SCORP (WDNR 2006a). The existing network of hunter walking trails already provides hiking opportunity. There also is some bike use of the property, though this is along public roads and on existing trails that are not designated for biking use (snowmobile trail; hunter walking trails). Wetlands and wetland soils throughout large portions of the property may present challenges for siting additional designated trails.

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