

CHAPTER V: ALTERNATIVES and their ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A. Introduction

Throughout the process of developing this draft master plan, many alternatives and options to meet the property vision and goals were evaluated. There are, of course, numerous small-scale variations to the proposed draft master plan that were examined. For example, different configurations of where to manage for grasslands and oak openings in the Magazine Area or which of the former roads to convert to biking and equestrian trails in the Northeast Moraine. This chapter briefly describes the more substantive alternatives that were considered when developing the draft master plan, their potential impacts, and the reasons they were not incorporated into the draft master plan.

The master plan lays out the Department's plan for managing the property over the next 15 years. Some ideas were evaluated but were not included in the plan because the Department does not have the staff or resources to pursue them at the present time. These options might be appropriate for the property later and are described here with the thought that they might be helpful as an initial list of options to consider in future updates to the plan.

B. The “no action” alternative

Alternative: Given the unique history and condition of the property, if the property is to reach the recreation and conservation potential described in the proposed master plan there is a very large amount of work ahead for the Department. An alternative to the proposed plan is for the Department to simply let SPRA remain “as is” or to undertake just a minimal amount of management work to address any safety issues that emerge. In this alternative, the Department would not invest in habitat management actions to restore and enhance habitats nor would it build and maintain facilities to accommodate visitors.

Potential Impacts: Taking no management actions at SPRA would likely result in several undesirable outcomes. Most obviously from a habitat perspective, the invasive plants (particularly shrubs) that are proliferating through the property would most probably spread throughout the property at increasing densities. This would further degrade the ecological quality of the property and prevent the development of a grassland to forest continuum. In the absence of management, over decades some parts dominated by shrubs may succeed to forests and the property would no longer provide important grassland habitat for birds. Without management, much of the property would become impenetrable thickets of brush.

From a recreation standpoint, SPRA could be “managed” without any facilities or developments. The Department could simply construct a limited number of parking lots around the exterior and require visitors to walk (or possibly bicycle or ride horses) into the property on the former roads, which would presumably slowly deteriorate over time. Without adequate habitat management, the quality of hunting experiences would be greatly diminished.

If the Department doesn't develop and maintain roads, trails, interpretive displays, and other facilities, providing interpretation of the site and educating visitors about the property's unique human and natural history would be very difficult.

Taking a hands-off approach to management would cost far less than the proposed plan, but would also likely result in very little visitation and economic benefit to the area.

Decision: To meet the property's potential and to achieve the goals for which the property was acquired, the Department concluded that the “no-action” alternative was unacceptable.

C. Property and administrative alternatives

1. DIFFERENT VEHICLE ACCESS POINTS

Alternative: Given the configuration of ownership parcels, vehicle access to the property could be via USH 12, STH 78, Keller Road, or at the end of Halweg Road. The Department evaluated options other than the main entrance on USH 12 for a single entry point, as well as the potential to have two or more access points.

Potential Impacts: Having a single entry point in a different location than the main entry gate at USH 12 would likely result in some decrease in visitation. The Department expects some people travelling on USH 12 (possibly on their way to Devil's Lake State Park, the Wisconsin Dells, the International Crane Foundation, the Ho-Chunk casino, or other nearby attractions) to be drawn into visiting SPRA. If there is no entry on USH 12, it is likely many of these potential visitors may continue travelling without stopping at SPRA.

Providing vehicle access at Keller Road, Halweg Road and at some sites along STH 78 could generate a significant and undesirable increase in local traffic patterns.

Incorporating multiple access points into the property may reduce traffic at any specific entry point, but would complicate DNR staff's ability to monitor and control property use. Multiple entry points would also set up the potential for people to use the property as a short-cut connection between USH 12 and STH 78, which could interfere with visitors' enjoyment of the property.

Decision: To improve the efficiency of managing the property and to minimize disruptions to neighboring landowners, the Department concluded that one access point, at the main entry gate on USH 12, provided the best solution for vehicle access.

2. PROPERTY BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

Alternative: The NRB established the SPRA project boundary in 2002 and included the entire BAAP perimeter plus a small area connecting the property to Lake Wisconsin at Weigand's Bay. This boundary includes the lands owned by the following partners: Ho-Chunk Nation (1,553 acres), USDA-DFRC (2,105 acres), Bluffview Sanitary District (164 acres), DOT (60 acres) and Town of Sumpter (3.6 acres). In addition, there are about 80 acres of privately-owned lands within the boundary.

This master plan proposes to remove the Ho-Chunk Nation lands from the SPRA project boundary. As noted in the Introduction, when the initial project boundary was established it was unclear which lands would be transferred to the Ho-Chunk Nation and which might come to the Department. This issue has now been resolved and in recognition that the Ho-Chunk Nation is a sovereign nation the Department is proposing to remove their 1,553 acres from the SPRA project boundary.

The DNR does not seek to own any of the other lands within the boundary and staff evaluated the option of further reducing the project boundary to correspond with the intended DNR ownership being transferred from the GSA/NPS (3,385 acres).

Potential Impacts: Reducing the project boundary to correspond with the intended DNR ownership would remove any misinterpretation that may exist that the DNR seeks to acquire lands from the partners. Although at some point in the future the DNR may wish to establish a trail to connect the Weigand's Bay parcel with the main part of the SPRA property, it does not propose a connection now. Removing the privately-owned lands would also make this apparent.

However, at some point in the future, the DNR may seek to exchange or trade lands with partners inside the proposed project boundary. Or, similarly, if a landowner inside the boundary no longer wishes to own

or manage some of their property, the DNR may want to take on the ownership or management responsibilities of these lands. And if there is a demand for a connection to Weigand's Bay, the DNR may wish to pursue acquiring a narrow strip of land to the main part of SPRA. Modifying the existing boundary as part of this master plan could potentially require making another modification later.

The existing ownership arrangement was agreed to by the Badger Intergovernmental Group³³ and reflects the DNR's and its partners' desire to work together on issues of joint management interest and concern. Further, the public was informed in 2002 of this boundary, and little has changed in terms of ownership issues (other than the Ho-Chunk Nation receiving their land) to necessarily trigger a further boundary change. Finally, it may be premature to modify the boundary before the DNR has a better understanding of operation and management issues that may emerge in the future.

Decision: The Department concluded that it was most appropriate to propose to remove the Ho-Chunk Nation land from the project boundary but to retain the remainder of the boundary for now.

3. LONG TERM USE AND MAINTENANCE OF BUILDING 207

Alternative: Building 207, near the main entrance gate, is neither a particularly notable example of BAAP construction nor in good condition. Yet, it is one of the few buildings remaining from the plant complex and as such is one of the last links to the BAAP and could be part of "telling the story" of the property. The Department evaluated options for maintaining the building for long-term use by staff, as a visitor center, or for the Badger History Group.

Potential Impacts: The cost of addressing the near-term repairs needed to prevent further deterioration of the building and to bring the building into ADA compliance is estimated to total approximately \$100,000. The cost to restore the building and bring it to an acceptable standard for long-term use by staff or the public is far greater and exceeds currently available funds.

The Department consulted with the Badger History Group about their potential long-term use of Building 207. The group does not have the fiscal resources to take on repair and maintenance costs to upgrade the building for long-term use. Both the DNR and BHG reached concurrence that the building does not meet either party's long-term needs and it was appropriate to look to other solutions.

Decision: The Department concluded that it is appropriate to make necessary repairs to Building 207 as described on page 86, to ensure short-term use but that the structure should ultimately be removed.

4. LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

Alternative: Four of seven land management classifications are proposed at SPRA. SPRA could be classified entirely as a recreation management area, entirely as a habitat management area, or could have more or less native community management area. Or, a different combination of recreation management area, habitat management area, special management area, and native community management area could be implemented than what is proposed. Alternatively, other land management classifications (forest production area, scenic resources management area, wild resources management area) could be assigned, although these classifications do not appear to be appropriate fits for the property.

³³ The BIG included representatives from: GSA, Army, DFRC, Ho-Chunk Nation, Governor's Office, DNR, DOA, Sauk County, and the Towns of Sumpter and Merrimac.

Potential Impacts: As stated earlier, many recreation and habitat outcomes are authorized and possible under all land management classifications. From a practical standpoint, what is far more relevant than the land management classification is the suite of recreation facilities and habitat management actions that are proposed in the master plan. That is, since a variety of habitat and recreation outcomes are possible under land management classifications, the title of the classification is less critical than the content of the actions proposed.

Decision: Although the Department considered classifying the entire property either recreation management area or a habitat management area, in the end it concluded that a combination of classifications was most appropriate. The Department strongly emphasizes that restoring and managing high quality grassland and savanna habitats throughout SPRA and the development and operation of recreation facilities to provide high quality recreation experiences throughout SPRA are concurrent and compatible goals.

5. WISCONSIN ARMY NATIONAL GUARD USE OF THE SAND AND GRAVEL BORROW PIT

Alternative: The Wisconsin Army National Guard has a variety of training needs, including practicing take-offs and landings in sandy, dusty conditions. The Department, in consultation with the Guard, considered allowing the Guard to use of the sand and gravel borrow pit as a training site and to close the site to public access.

Potential Impacts: Use of the site as a helicopter training site could affect visitors to this portion of the property. The take-offs and landings would generate considerable dust that would affect air quality in the immediate area. The noise generated would also be significant. The Guard would need to take appropriate steps to ensure that visitors to SPRA were kept at a safe distance during take offs and landings.

Some visitors may find the training exercises an interesting event to watch and these events would add to their satisfaction with their trip to SPRA. Other visitors may have an adverse reaction to the training exercises. In particular, horseback riders in the vicinity of the training site may be at risk to horses being spooked by the helicopters.

Decision: The Guard evaluated the sand and gravel borrow pit and concluded that the site had some benefits as a training site but that, at the present time, the Guard would not pursue use of the area. If the Guard decides in the future it would like to use the borrow pit for training, the Department will work with the Guard to determine if, and how, use of the site could be compatible with the primary purposes of the property.

The 25-acre sand and gravel borrow pit will be classified as a special management use area in this master plan to reflect that the Department may excavate sand and gravel from the site for use on the property (e.g., to fill the reservoirs or the lower level of the former pump house). If the Guard uses the site for training in the future this would be consistent with the site's classification as a special management use area.

6. ADDITIONAL VEHICLE ACCESS DURING THE NINE-DAY DEER GUN SEASON

Alternative: The Department considered opening the service road running along the southern boundary of the Rocket Area to vehicles during the nine-day deer gun season to make it easier for hunters to retrieve deer.

Potential Impacts: Temporarily opening these routes would result in all areas of SPRA being within about a 600 yard (3/8th of a mile) walk of a vehicle.

Temporarily opening the service road and trail to cars and trucks could impact other visitors who wish to hunt in more remote settings. It may also impact other visitors to SPRA that are using the trail for hiking, biking or horseback riding. Adjusting the management of the property to accommodate a particular user group (in this case deer hunters) could also result in other user groups requesting similar treatment.

Decision: At over 3,400 acres SPRA is a relatively large property for southern Wisconsin. However, its configuration combined with the proposed road network results in the most remote part of the property being slightly less than three-quarters of a mile from the nearest road. This distance is in line with other large DNR properties in the southern part of the state. The Department concluded there were not adequate benefits or justifications to temporarily providing more vehicle access to the property during the nine-day deer gun season.

7. MAINTAIN THE EAST RESERVOIR

Alternative: The Department considered leaving the east reservoir in its current condition (and the six foot chain link fence encircling the reservoir) and leaving the neotenic salamanders in place.

Potential Impacts: Leaving the east reservoir would provide visitors with access inside the chain link fence with the opportunity to potentially see the neotenic salamanders as well as for all visitors to see a remaining piece of infrastructure from the days of the BAAP operation. This would likely add to many visitors' overall experiences and levels of satisfaction with their trip. Leaving the east reservoir would also maintain the population of neotenic salamanders, as well as other life forms in the water.

However, it is unknown how long the reservoir will continue to hold water. The west reservoir has apparently developed cracks that limit its depth to about three feet; it is likely that the east reservoir will also develop cracks over time.

The reservoir has steep-sloped sides that, should someone accidently fall in, are very difficult to scale. As a consequence, it poses a significant drowning hazard. The Department could attach ladders along the sides, position life rings around, and install other safety devices. These improvements would likely require only a modest investment. More importantly, the Department does not have the resources to monitor and prevent visitors from inadvertently or intentionally harming the population of neotenic salamanders. The overlook site here is likely to be the most popular spot at the property and it is probable that the reservoir would also end up collecting a substantial amount of trash over time. Maintaining the east reservoir would also limit the Department's ability to restore the site and convert it to a focal point for visitors.

Decision: The Department supports efforts to maintain neotenic salamanders for research and educational purposes and has funded research on issues related to transporting the animals, metamorphosis, and husbandry. However, the Department believes the reservoirs are not an effective or appropriate place to maintain these animals. As a result, after all the institutions have received the desired number of neotenes and funding is available, the Department proposes to drain the reservoirs, crack the bottoms, fill them with material and then develop and restore the site as a day use area with an overlook, picnic area, amphitheater, and parking lot.

D. Recreational use and opportunity alternatives

1. DOG TRAINING AND TRIALING

Alternative: The Department received requests to consider incorporating a Class 1 dog training and/or dog trialing area at SPRA. The Department also considered prohibiting all other recreational uses in a Class 1 or 2 site (which can be done at state recreation areas, but not state wildlife areas).

Potential Impacts: Class 1 training and trialing sites are open all year to anyone holding a dog training/trialing license. Releasing captive animals and shooting are authorized year-round. Two of the five designated Class 1 training and trialing sites in the state are within 15 miles of SPRA (Pine Island Wildlife Area and the Mazomanie Unit of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway). Class 1 training and trialing grounds are typically hundreds of acres in size.

Previously, there had been a bigger difference in the operation and function between Class 1 and Class 2 dog training grounds. Now, through a streamlining effort by the Department, there is less distinction between these sites. Under the new system, anyone holding a dog training license can access any Class 2 dog training ground (license holders no longer need to seek approval to use individual sites). The Department is also undertaking an effort to expand the number of Class 2 training grounds throughout the state.

Decision: Dog trialing events can occur at SPRA under a special event permit. The master plan proposes that the Magazine Area be used to host a limited number of special events and the area appears well-suited to host a dog trialing event. The establishment of the proposed 72-acre Class 2 site will accommodate dog training all year and will function very much like a Class 1 training site. The area will be located at the southern end of the property with the expectation that this will help reduce conflicts with other visitors. Thus, the Department concluded that a designated Class 1 dog training or trialing ground was not warranted at SPRA since the goals of providing dog training and trialing will be accomplished by the proposed master plan.

2. LARGER AND MORE ELABORATE VISITOR CENTER

Alternative: The Badger History Group has many more items and documents related to the construction and operation of the BAAP than can be displayed in the current museum space in Building 207. The BHG would like to display its materials in a larger space than is being planned in the proposed visitor center.

Potential Impacts: A significantly larger visitor and interpretive center, while potentially attracting a larger number of visitors, would require significantly more funding. A larger center and associated visitation could also lead to increased impacts to habitats and species.

Decision: State funding for a visitor center, regardless of size, is likely to be limited for several years and any new facility would also compete against other capital development projects throughout the state. The Department is likely to prioritize a visitor center at Devil's Lake State Park (in collaboration with the National and State Ice Age Trail) ahead of a facility at SPRA.

The Department believes a modest visitor center would compete favorably for state funds, but will likely take 8 to 10 years to work through the capital development process. If private funds for a more elaborate visitor center at SPRA can be collected to supplement state funds, the Department could evaluate how to best leverage these funds.

3. DEDICATED MOTORIZED RECREATION AREA

Alternative: The Department evaluated the possibility of designating part of SPRA as a motorized recreation area for ATV, UTV, motorcycle, and/or four-wheel drive truck use. In addition, the Department evaluated combining a designated motorized recreation area with a longer motorized use trail, generally around the perimeter of SPRA.

Potential Impacts: Including a motorized recreation area at SPRA would likely generate considerable use and potentially increase overall visitation to the property. This could increase the economic impact of the property.

The increased noise and dust associated with motorized use could adversely affect other visitors to the property, as well as impact nearby residents. The Department listed motorized activities as a potential use in the Magazine Area in one of the three conceptual alternatives presented to the public in 2013. The public was overwhelmingly in opposition to including an area for motorized use at SPRA.

The use of part of SPRA for a motorized recreation area would also impact wildlife in the immediate and surrounding area. The noise and dust generated could result in displacement of desired species, including rare and declining grassland birds.

Decision: The Department recognizes there is significant demand for motorized recreation opportunities in southern Wisconsin. While SPRA meets some of the NRB-approved criteria for locating a motorized recreation area, in addition to the site's ecological values, there was strong local opposition to siting a MRA here during the most recent public comment period. Opposition was also voiced from the Department's primary neighbors here, the Ho-Chunk Nation and the Dairy Forage Research Center.

The Department concluded that SPRA is not well suited to host a concentrated motorized recreation area but rather could host a limited number of special events for motorized recreation with minimal impact. In evaluating demand for different types of motorized recreation and existing opportunities throughout the region and state, the Department concluded that an acceptable use of SPRA would be to allow dual-sport motorcycles up to six days a year on roads and biking and horseback riding trails.

4. ESTABLISH A YEAR-ROUND OFF-LEASH DOG PARK

Alternative: The Department considered the possibility of designating an area for visitors to have their dogs off-leash year-round. Two areas were considered: (1) about 50 acres in the northeast part of the Magazine Area, and (2) a portion of the Southern Link unit east of STH 78.

Potential Impacts: In state parks, dogs are required to be on a leash not more than eight feet long at all times. On most other state properties, dogs are allowed off-leash except for the period from April 15 to July 31 (to protect ground nesting animals).

Allowing dogs to be off-leash year-round in an area would displace many mammals and birds from the area and could significantly reduce the reproductive success of animals that nest on or near the ground in the site.

The Department, and in particular the Parks & Recreation program, receives many requests throughout the year from people looking for places to have their dogs off-leash. A common request from visitors to Devil's Lake State Park is for a place their dogs to run off-leash. The closest public dog park is in the City of Baraboo. It is likely that a designated area in SPRA for dogs to be off-leash year-round would be very popular and heavily used.

Although many dog parks in cities are fenced, not all are. Unfenced dog parks can have issues with dogs and their owners leaving the designated boundaries. Fencing can be expensive, especially for a larger park. In addition, staff costs to monitor and address issues at dog parks can be sizeable.

Decision: The Department concluded that although there is likely adequate demand to justify a dog park in SPRA, establishing one is not feasible because financial and staff resources are not currently available. As such, the Department dropped consideration of designating a dog park at the property.

E. Habitat, species and land management alternatives

1. DESIGNATION OF STATE NATURAL AREAS AT SPRA

Alternative: Two areas in SPRA were identified as Primary Sites in the Rapid Ecological Assessment. The information in the REA is meant to be considered along with other information when identifying opportunities for various management designations during the master planning process. The Primary Sites in SPRA were delineated because they generally encompass the best examples of: (1) rare or representative natural communities, (2) documented occurrences of rare species populations, and/or (3) opportunities for ecological restoration or connections. These sites warrant strong consideration during the development of the property master plan for protection or restoration. In some cases, areas identified as Primary Sites that are not already State Natural Areas are designated as SNAs in the master planning process.

The REA also identified two areas as high priority grassland areas and one area as a high priority shrubland area. A sizeable portion of one of the high priority grassland blocks occurs on land that is being transferred from the Army/GSA to the Ho-Chunk Nation. These high-priority areas were identified because they currently provide high quality surrogate habitats that support diverse and large populations of grassland and shrubland birds. In terms of habitat quality, these areas do not rise to the level of being a Primary Site because they are ecologically degraded or in some cases planted. However, these sites do offer significant management and restoration opportunities for maintaining and enhancing viable populations of grassland and shrubland birds.

Potential Impacts: The SNA program follows well established criteria in determining whether sites should be designated or dedicated as State Natural Areas.³⁴ In evaluating SPRA, staff from the SNA program concluded that neither the Primary Sites nor the high priority grassland and shrubland areas met the criteria for inclusion into the SNA program. Thus, staff did not include a proposal to designate these parcels as State Natural Areas as part of this master plan.

Not following the criteria for SPRA would set a precedent of including areas in the SNA program that do not meet established ecological values. The Department believes that this would de-value future SNA designations and the SNA program as a whole.

Decision: The Department concluded that it was most appropriate not to designate any areas within SPRA as State Natural Areas. The highest quality portion of the Prairie and Savanna Primary Site (the portion that includes the Hillside Prairie) is proposed to be classified as a native community management area.

³⁴ See <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/documents/EstablishCriteria.pdf>

2. MAINTAINING MORE LAND IN FOREST COVER

Alternative: The proposed management plan calls for much of the early to mid-succession forest that has grown up since the BAAP was established in 1942 to be harvested (with oaks and some other savanna tree species such as hickory to remain) and converted to oak opening habitat. In addition, the forest along the south bluff of the Baraboo Hills is proposed to be thinned to convert it to an oak woodland habitat over time. Both the proposed oak woodland and oak opening habitats are what occurred on these areas prior to Euro-American settlement. An alternative considered was to manage these areas, or portions of them, as forest blocks following conventional forest management practices.

Similarly, the existing conifer plantations are proposed to be removed, some before they reach full maturity. An alternative considered was to maintain all the plantations to full stocking capacity.

Potential Impacts: Managing blocks of the property as forest is feasible, but inconsistent with the DNR's goal for the property and would not take advantage of the unique opportunity here to manage a large block of land for an ecological transition. Further, managing blocks of the property for forest resources would miss the opportunity to manage for a native community type, oak opening, that is among the rarest in the state and country.

Decision: The Department concluded that it was most appropriate to manage SPRA for the community types native to the property and to take advantage of the unique opportunity here to manage a transition of habitat types from forest (in DLSP) to oak woodland to oak opening to grassland.

3. ESTABLISHING A BISON HERD

Alternative: There is a desire to return much of the SPRA property to the conditions and ecological processes that existed before Euro-American settlement. As such, consideration was given to including a resident bison herd on SPRA.

Potential Impacts: Incorporating bison on the property would likely be a draw for visitors and would provide a unique opportunity on public property in Wisconsin to showcase and educate the public about bison and their impact on natural and human history. Bison herds on private and public conservation lands elsewhere in the Midwest are popular attractions, serve important management roles, and can provide some economic return. As large grazers, bison can also play a key role in habitat management.

Depending on the number of bison and where they were located on the property, their presence could restrict or alter recreational use. One potential option would be to confine a herd to a portion of SPRA (enclosed by a substantial fence) and only provide vehicle access to the area (i.e., visitors would have to stay within their car or truck as they drove through) or provide viewing opportunities around the perimeter of the area (for example a viewing tower outside the fence). A second option would be to fence a larger area and allow visitors to walk, bike, horseback ride, cross country ski and snowshoe on trails through the area. This would be potentially feasible if the herd size and the visitor numbers were small enough to reasonably avoid public safety issues. Hunting deer, turkeys, and other game species could potentially be compatible with the second approach but would likely not be compatible with the first.

The areas where bison were located would need to have adequate fencing, which is typically 6-8' in height and designed for strength, as well as access to water and appropriate loading facilities.

Decision: The Department concluded that bison may be appropriate to incorporate into the use and management of the property later, but the funds required to build and maintain the facilities that would be needed are not currently available. Further, the Department wishes to evaluate visitor use patterns before

making decisions that would significantly affect the recreational opportunities at the property. Also, it may be most appropriate to evaluate options to manage a bison herd on the property in partnership with the DFRC and the HCN. As such, the Department will defer decisions regarding establishing a bison herd until the pattern of recreational use and partner interest is better understood.

4. PERMANENTLY CONVERTING LAND TO ROW CROPS

Alternative: The soil in several portions of SPRA has not been significantly altered. If the brush and early successional trees that currently grow on many of these areas were cleared, these sites could likely support row cropping and other forms of active agriculture.

Potential Impacts: Permanently converting portions of SPRA to conventional row crops such as corn and soybeans or other farming practices could provide some ongoing income to the Department, which it could use to fund habitat restoration and management of other lands. However, cropland does not provide the habitat benefits of restored grassland and oak openings and would restrict recreational use during the growing season. As such, permanent cropland is not consistent with the intent or purpose of the SPRA property.

A benefit of row cropping is that, when different crops are grown over a series of years, weed species are dramatically reduced. This can significantly improve the success of grassland restorations when native grasses and forbs are planted.

Decision: As described in Chapter II, the Department will temporarily convert lands with appropriate soils to row crops as a means to reduce weed growth and prepare soils for replanting to native species, but will not convert land to permanent row crop use.

5. MANAGEMENT OF NEOTENIC SALAMANDER POPULATION

Alternatives: The Department evaluated options for the future of the neotenic salamanders in the reservoirs. One option would be to simply leave the salamanders in the reservoir until the structure developed cracks, leaks, or for other reasons no longer held water. Another alternative, which the Department initially planned to follow, would be to release the salamanders into various ponds and wetlands in the local area.

Potential Impacts: As noted in the above discussion related to maintaining the east reservoir (page 133), the structure presents a serious safety and long-term management issue and there are not practical alternatives to maintaining either of the reservoirs.

The plan to release the salamanders back into the local population was removed from consideration when a health analysis determined the animals in the east reservoir harbored diseases not known to occur in the local population. If subsequent studies indicate that the diseases present in the salamander population in the east reservoir are also present in the local wild population, then the animals in the reservoirs may be released locally.

Decision: As described on page 40, the Department recognizes the research and educational value of these salamanders. The Department is identifying institutions (e.g., museums, aquaria, zoos, schools, and research organizations) that are interested in receiving neotenic salamanders for research, education, or display purposes. Potentially beginning in 2015 or 2016, the Department plans to capture and distribute the requested number of salamanders to these institutions.