

# **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

## **Coulee Experimental State Forest**

### **Overview**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) recognizes the Coulee Experimental State Forest Master Plan must reflect the people it serves, and encourages citizen input throughout the plan development process. This report outlines the public participation strategy for soliciting public review and input into the development, evaluation, and adoption of the revised Coulee Experimental State Forest Master Plan.

Master Plan development will be based on and be influenced by, existing statutes, administrative codes, scientific data, capacity of the forest resources, surveys, judgment of forest management experts and public opinion. The local and regional recreational supply, economy and social conditions also will be considered. Management alternatives for the property are influenced by these factors with the approved master plan representing a balance of key benefits.

The master plan process is guided by the following state regulations:

- A. The Master Plan for the Coulee Experimental State Forest will be developed within the parameters of Administrative Code NR 44, which governs Master Planning for DNR properties and requirements of WEPA (Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act).
- B. The Coulee Experimental State Forest will be managed and developed as a State Forest as outlined in state statutes 28.04 Wis. Stats.
- C. The state forest will be managed and developed in accordance with Administrative Code NR 1 (Natural Resources Board Policies).
- D. Public use activities on DNR properties are governed by Administrative Code NR 45 (Use of Department Properties).

### **Planning Process**

The Master Planning process is divided into three primary phases:

#### Phase 1

Phase one is the preparatory work. Reliable, current information on the property's resources, public uses, as well as on regional demands and opportunities are needed as a foundation for the planning process. Prior to the announcement that planning is starting the Department is busy updating natural resource and recreational use data for the forest and collecting regional data in order to better understand the state forest's current and potential functional role in the region.

#### Phase 2

Phase two is plan development. It begins with a formal announcement that the state forest's master plan will be revised. This is soon followed with a process to identify important issues to be addressed in the planning process and establish draft property vision and goals that will help focus the planning effort. Then alternative management and use strategies will be developed and evaluated. The last step of this phase, is to develop the draft, revised master plan and the environmental impact assessment. The public is a valued partner with the Department in each step of the plan's development. How the public can give input into these activities is discussed below.

#### Phase 3

Finally, phase three, is presentation of the draft, revised Master Plan to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

## **Opportunities for Participation in Planning**

The Department's goals for public involvement in master planning are to offer the public meaningful ways to be involved in shaping the future management and use of their favorite properties, and to provide a means for interested people to stay informed about the property and planning progress.

Public review and comment will be formally sought at key milestone points during the plan's development and approval process (planning phases 2 and 3 discussed above). However, it should be noted that public comments are welcomed at any time. The formal public input points in the process are:

- The identification of important planning issues and the formulation of the property vision and goals.
- Review and comment on plan alternatives,
- Review and comment on the draft plan and the environmental impact analysis of the proposal, and
- Lastly, the Natural Resources Board also offers the public an opportunity to provide input to them when they consider the plan's approval.

## **Ways You May Make Your Voice Heard**

Public Meetings: DNR staff will hold informal public meetings at key points of the master-planning process (described above) to present and discuss information on the property and plan proposals, and to listen to your comments and suggestions. These meetings will be held in the vicinity of the property and in other locations as appropriate.

Other ways to comment: If you are unable to attend a meeting, or if you think of comments you want to give after the meeting you may submit comments to the planning team by e-mail, postal-mail or by phone. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.

## **How the Department will Provide Planning Information to You**

### **A. Issue Press Releases**

Press releases will be issued at key stages of the project to announce public meetings, provide information updates and to solicit public comments.

### **B. Direct Mailings (regular and e-mail)**

A mailing list will be developed which includes landowners, user groups, sporting clubs, environmental groups, service groups, local government, state officials, and affected Indian Tribes. This list will be used to keep interested parties informed about upcoming events and discussions. Local and state newspapers and electronic news media will also be kept informed. Mailings will be done at key points in the planning process, to provide valuable information about the property and planning issues; and to announce meetings, decisions, and other planning developments. You may sign up for the mailing list by contacting the Department at the address or phone number listed at the end of this document.

### **C. Provide a Web Page**

The Department will set up a special state forest master planning web page where information about the property, the planning process, draft plan documents, notices, planning progress reports and other important planning information will be posted.

### **D. Newsletters or Planning Reports**

After each formal public input step the Department will send out a newsletter or other type of planning report to communicate the results of the review. Additionally, when needed, a progress

report will be prepared to keep you informed on the status of the plan's development. These will be sent to everyone on the planning mailing list and posted on the master planning website.

**E. Conduct Special Meetings if Needed**

Additional public meetings may be held, if needed, at various stages of the planning to discuss specific issues in depth. All meetings will be publicly announced ahead of time. Focus group meetings may be held with selected representatives to work through special management issues or other concerns that may arise.

**F. Consultation with Other Governmental Units**

The master planning team will also be consulting with local governments, state and federal agencies, and affected Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis on mutual planning issues throughout the planning process.

**How Decisions will be Made**

To develop an effective property master plan, the Department listens to many voices. Recreation users, commercial interests, neighboring landowners, conservation groups, elected officials, other government agencies, and tribal representatives, and other interested persons or groups are all encouraged to participate. Input received at each major step in the planning process will be considered as the Plan is developed.

Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the Plan will be made based on the type of property, its capabilities, and the best role of the property in its local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of DNR staff. Further, the plan must comply with applicable Federal Laws, State Statutes, Administrative and Department Codes, and facility design standards.

While the a broad range of interests will be listened to and considered in developing a proposed master plan, the final decision-making responsibility and authority on the master plan rests with the DNR's citizen policy-making Natural Resources Board.

**Contact Information:**

To give comments or suggestions on the planning process and review materials, or to sign up for the planning mailing list contact:

James Dalton, Property Manager, Coulee Experimental State Forest  
3550 Mormon Coulee Rd.  
LaCrosse, WI 54601  
(608) 785-9007  
James.Dalton@wisconsin.gov