

Summary of Public Comments on the April 2009 Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

The following is a summary of the ~60 written comments received during the comment period, either, via mail, e-mail, or at the public meeting.

Generally, comments were very positive about the Draft Master Plan, the master planning process, and specifically the public involvement process. They ranged from a couple of sentences to three typed pages. As in the June 2008 public comments, there was strong support for preserving the property's natural character, scenic quality, and ecological features.

Major Recurrent Themes

The following major recurrent themes are presented in the general order of higher to lower number of comments received.

- Nearly one third of the comments received wanted to see the Project Boundary¹ expanded. Some wanted it expanded southeast to include land on either side the Straight River down to Highway 48 or as far as Round Lake, to preserve the glacial tunnel channel feature and to facilitate development of the Ice Age Trail. Others wanted it expanded to the east 2.5 miles to link with McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area. And some wanted both.

Response:

Regarding the comments suggesting that the park boundary should be extended down river to include more of the tunnel channel – these lands would not be added to the park but acquisition could occur as an Ice Age Trail area program acquisition. The proposed large expansion to connect with the McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area is well beyond the scope of the Straight Lake master plan, but it could be studied when the McKenzie Creek WA plan is revised. No change was made to the plan.

- There was strong support for developing horse trails on the property on the basis that it would be compatible with the non-motorized, low impact type of recreational uses and would increase the supply of equestrian facilities needed to meet demand as identified for the region in the SCORP. Many of the comments were from nearby horse-property owners who wished to be able to ride to, and on the Park and Wildlife Area. There were also a few comments that opposed horse trails on the basis that they are incompatible with the primitive hiking experience or would introduce invasive plant species.

Response:

Additional evaluation and discussion by the team reaffirmed(as stated in the 2008 response to comments) that the Straight Lake properties had the potential to provide only very limited horse riding opportunities because of the size of the properties, extensive wetlands and steep slopes, and abundant

¹ The "Project Boundary" serves, solely, to identify adjacent lands that would be suitable as future additions to the Straight Lake State Park & Wildlife Area property, if they were to become available; through donation, easements or through acquisitions from willing sellers.

sensitive habitats. Abundant riding opportunities are provided 20 miles away on the Gov. Knowles State Forest. No change was made to the plan.

- Many respondents felt the Park was overdeveloped and expressed strong support for generally keeping the development of new recreational facilities, such as; internal roads and parking areas, to a level that retains the natural character of the land. Some stated that the level of facility development being proposed was inconsistent with the “original vision” of the property expressed in the “2002 Feasibility Study” as a “low-impact”, “wilderness”, “primitive” recreation type property and as stated in the Vision Statement and Property Goals in the Draft Master Plan.

Response:

The final plan's development proposal is reduced from what was proposed in the April Draft Master Plan. Particularly, the level of road development and the day-use area developments are reduced to a minimal level.

Additional comments included:

- Support for a footbridge for Ice Age Trail hikers to cross Straight River.
- Support for dedicating the Ice Age Trail corridor, but nearly an equal number of comments expressed concern about the implications of dedication on other recreational users, such as hunters.
- Support for maximizing hunting opportunities on the entire property / opposition to the proposed reduction in Wildlife Area acreage.
- Support for preserving and interpreting the property's unique historic, geologic, and ecological features
- Support for better access by vehicle for disabled or elderly visitors to view Straight Lake or launch a small boat and fish on Straight Lake.
- Support for limiting recreational uses to non-motorized only (no ATV's or snowmobiles)

Responses:

No changes were made to the plan in response to these comments.

A few comments expressed opinions on issues outside of the scope of the master plan.

- The town chairmen and town supervisors of Luck and Bone Lake Townships strongly urged DNR to find funding to pave 120th St. north from Hwy 48, and 270th Ave. west from the main entrance into the state park.
- There was a proposal to connect a biking trail between Straight Lake and Interstate State Parks.

Consideration of Public Comments:

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 other interested persons or groups have all been encouraged to

participate. Input received at each major step in the planning process was considered as the next step of the Plan was developed.

Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the Plan ~~will be~~ were made based on the type of property (e.g. state park or state wildlife area), 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 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 (NRB).

The Department would like to express its' sincere appreciation to those who took the time to attend the meeting or to submit comments. They are greatly appreciated.