

## **VI. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PLAN & THEIR IMPACTS**

### **A. Project Boundary, Land Acquisition and Ownership Goals**

The department has three project boundary alternatives: the boundary could be limited to current department ownership around the flowage, boundary expansion goals could be reduced, or boundary expansion goals could be increased.

A project boundary that only included lands presently owned by the department would eliminate future acquisition costs but would likely result in future degradation of flowage resources. Intensive development or management of undeveloped lands visible from the flowage would diminish the scenic qualities of the flowage, surrounding wetlands and critical wildlife habitats would not be protected, and department lands would remain inaccessible in some areas of the flowage. The potential for conflicts with adjoining private landowners would remain high and would increase with expanded public use of the flowage due to the irregular "patch work" configuration of the property.

Reducing the proposed project size would reduce future acquisition costs but would result in some of the same problems outlined above. For example, the citizen advisory committee considered excluding the large patterned bog (patterned peatland) on the southeast side of the flowage. However, the department's Bureau of Endangered Resources has identified this wetland type to be extremely rare in the state and in need of protection.

Opportunities to increase the project size are limited because national, state and county forests, as well as a state wildlife area, surround the flowage. The department considered expanding the proposed perimeter boundary in several areas but barriers exist: most of these lands are subdivided or contain substantial capital developments such as cabins, homes and resorts, would be expensive to purchase, or would not significantly further project goals.

Twelve distinct blocks of private lands were excluded from the proposed boundary because of substantial acquisition costs. This was done even though some developments, particularly those on points visible from large areas of the flowage, detract from the natural shoreline aesthetics.

A four-mile strip of mostly undeveloped land south of the flowage, west of state Highway 182 and Flowage Road, is almost entirely in private ownership. Expanding the boundary to the highway would improve administrative and public access to project lands, reduce potential conflicts with private landowners, and further protect the aesthetic qualities of the backlands area.

A block of land south of the proposed boundary and north of state Highway 182, including Boot Lake, French Lake, Ess Lake, Stone Lake, Teal Lake, and three small unnamed lakes, is privately owned and contains significant capital developments. This block could expand the boundary to the highway and add shoreline on eight lakes but would provide only marginally better administrative and public access.

A tract of undeveloped private land on the southwest corner of the proposed TFSWA next to the Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake Wildlife Area and the Chequamegon National Forest would block the boundaries of these three projects but would serve no other significant project purpose. This area

would more appropriately fit into the management plans of the Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake Wildlife Area because access is limited, and this area would not fit with the primary objectives of the TFSWA.

A tract on the southeast corner of the proposed project boundary between the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest (NH/ALSF) and state Highway 182 would bring the entire southeast boundary out to the highway. This area does not meet the primary objectives of the TFSWA Master Plan. This area would best be administered as part of the wilderness area in the NH/ALSF.

## **B. Resource Management and Land Classification**

The department has a wide range of resource management and land classification options on the TFSWA. It would be impossible to describe all the variables that are part of the reasonable scope of department responsibility. It might be best to describe the alternatives as a sliding scale with less intensive resource management, Wilderness Area classification and natural succession on one side of the scale, and active intensive resource management to achieve a few specific objectives (e.g., maximizing timber production or developing a major campground to maximize recreational access to the TFSWA) and Resource Development Area classification on the other side of the scale. In between these extremes are other paths with greater or lesser amounts of development, management or conservation.

### **1. Less Intensive Resource Management**

With less intensive resource management, more protective land classification options (e.g., Wilderness, Natural, and Wild Area designations) could be used across the TFSWA. Timber harvesting could be reduced or prohibited and forests could be allowed to follow natural successional patterns. Ultimately, the area would be dominated by later successional species, such as maple, spruce/fir, white and red pine, and scattered pockets of swamp hardwoods and hemlock. Without active management, early successional forest species (such as aspen and birch) and edge habitat species would also decrease.

Wildlife disturbance and roads and trails could be reduced. Interior wildlife species that require lack of disturbance, large blocks of forest, closed canopy, cavity and snag tree development, and large trees would benefit. Woody debris on the forest floor would provide for plant and animal species that require decaying wood and would allow nutrients to recycle naturally. Amphibian and reptile species would increase in abundance.

These options would provide recreational settings for wilderness camping, canoeing, hunting and fishing. Camping could also be prohibited or reduced on project lands but this would affect a traditional and very popular recreational activity on the flowage and would limit opportunities for the public to enjoy and appreciate this unique resource.

Decreased forestry products would negatively affect county and private industry dependant on forest fiber production. Work force and operational costs would decrease and visitation by traditional users would also decrease.

Motor vehicle access could be limited on project lands so lower impact recreational activities would predominate. Snowmobile trails could be closed and only foot traffic allowed into the interior of the property. Motorboats could be prohibited to create a more "wild" type experience for flowage users.

Currently, however, the department does not have the authority to regulate watercraft by class or to ban motors on the flowage without statutory authorization from the state Legislature. Development costs at public boat landings would be reduced but flowage access would be restricted. This option would be unacceptable to traditional flowage users.

Except for natural fluctuations in the abundance of some species, the fishery at present is relatively stable. These fluctuations would continue, but no long-term improvements in quality would likely occur. If fishing pressure increases significantly in the future, the first noticeable impacts might be an overall decline in quality (size structure) of key species such as walleye, or a decline in both quality and numbers of other species such as crappie. The lake sturgeon population may eventually disappear if no attempt is made to rehabilitate the population.

Eliminating the Dead Horse Lake-Ruffed Grouse Demonstration Area would eliminate benefits from previous management efforts. More importantly, a valuable educational tool to demonstrate a range of management alternatives would be lost. Grouse, deer and woodcock would decrease in abundance.

Several conservation groups and individuals have asked the department to establish a Wilderness Designation in the eastern end of the TFSWA. The proposal would include water, shoreline and upland areas. The proposal was considered but rejected by the Citizen Advisory Committee based on strong local opposition to any limitation on motorized uses of the flowage.

## **2. More Intensive Resource Management**

With more intensive resource management, Resource Development and Recreation Area classifications would be more common. Management could emphasize timber production, game species and/or recreation. This alternative would require more staff and operational costs, but would result in higher visitation to the flowage.

Wildlife openings and early successional forest species -- such as aspen, oak and birch -- could be maximized to promote game species. Aspen and birch could be managed on short rotation cycles of 40-45 years. Oak stands could be managed on a 100-140 year rotation to maximize acorn production. Additional openings would be created to provide grazing areas for wildlife. Hunters would benefit from maximum game populations and local proprietors would gain from increased hunting-related sales. Public access would reach maximum acceptable levels. Clear cuts would be the primary management tool. Opportunities for viewing wildlife that prefer young forests and edge habitat would be maximized and maximum economic benefits would be realized by state, local and private incomes dependant on logging. Maximum wood products would be produced to support the wood industry.

Maximum timber production could emphasize the best quality timber possible through thinning and Timber Stand Improvements (TSI). TSI treatments and thinning would remove low quality snag and den trees. Rotation lengths would be based on economical maturity of each forest type. Wildlife and scenic values would be secondary considerations. "No-cut," managed old-growth and maximum rotation management would not be implemented. Forest and wildlife diversity and the aesthetic qualities of the flowage would decrease. Suitable habitat for "interior" species, and snag and den trees would also be reduced.

Trails and logging roads could be left open to motor vehicles but user conflicts would likely develop, particularly where vehicles could access campsites used by boaters and canoers. Additional motor vehicle access would also reduce the "wild" type aesthetics that can now be found in some areas of the TFSWA and would result in erosion problems or disturbance of critical habitat.

Management that would increase boat numbers, size, speed and type would increase the potential for conflict and detrimental effects on the wildlife. For example, nest abandonment and mortality of young birds increase as disturbance levels increase. Increased boat size and speed would result in increased wave size and strength which may destroy fragile nests created by black terns, loons, grebes and shorebirds. Management of jet skis, airboats or hovercraft would enable recreationists to penetrate deeper into the wetlands and marshes, thus disrupting many nesting and young rearing activities required by all wildlife species.

The number of camping sites could be expanded to other islands and the backlands area. This would promote public use of the flowage but would result in increased environmental impact and reduce the "wild" character of the flowage and increase management costs.

Management emphasis could be shifted from walleye to other species to diversify the fish community more than the present walleye-dominated fishery. Many anglers have expressed interest in catching other species more often, particularly panfish. There has never been public support, however, for a plan to reduce walleye. Because of walleye's abundance and tendency to dominate the fish community through predation, it would be difficult to diversify the fish community without a long-term reduction in the walleye population. Continual maintenance stocking can artificially boost numbers of other species. However, on such a large body of water it is usually unrealistic and costly to stock enough fish to make an impact except with low density species like muskellunge. Changes in water level management could alter fish community structure by changing habitat to favor or discourage certain species. Significant changes in the water level regime, however, would likely conflict with operating practices by the owner of the dam.