

## Summary of Public Comments/Responses on the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Lower Chippewa River Properties

The following is a summary of the comments received during the comment period by mail, e-mail, or at the public meetings. Generally, comments were very positive. There was strong support for preserving the properties natural character, scenic quality, and ecological features.

A short response follows each comment.

- **Air boats:** Several of those commenting reported that air boats running on the main channel of the Lower Chippewa and the Lower Red Cedar Rivers are causing significant conflict with other boaters (especially non-motorized boaters) and may be impacting wildlife and creating bank erosion along the channel. They feel airboat use is incompatible with the river and should be eliminated. One comment supported air boats and justified their use for search and rescue and offered that voluntary operational guidelines could be used to reduce their impacts.

Response: While air boat use is acknowledged, the extent of the type and level of impacts has not been well documented and further study would be needed before any recommendations could be made. Regulation of air boats (or any type of boat) is a complicated issues involving broad navigation rights on public waters and multi-jurisdictional issues. The legislature has given counties and towns limited authority for boating regulations (i.e. adoption of no wake zones, speed restrictions, time of operation, etc.) that could be applied. The air boat issue is an important and complex issue beyond the scope of the property master plan.

- **Train use in Tiffany:** One comment considered train use on the Tiffany Wildlife Area as intrusive with the potential to grow if a rail connection is made into Durand.

Response: The rail corridor through Tiffany is privately owned and as such is not under the control of the Department. If the corridor were available, the Department would be interested in acquisition to consolidate ownership. While the current use of the corridor is mentioned in the plan, no position is taken on its use.

- **Bank erosion, river access sites, and signage:** A number of general concerns were voiced on these topics. The sites referenced were not on state land.

Response: As these comments do not relate to issues on state owned lands no change was made in the plan.

- **Meridean landing:** The Rock Falls Sportsmen's Club is interested in exploring the development of an alternative to the Meridean landing as sand deposits have made it all but unusable.

Response: This landing nor nearby alternative sites are on state wildlife or natural area lands. Therefore, this landing is not a part of the LCRP plan. However, the Department is interested in securing adequate public access on the Lower Chippewa and would work cooperatively with the club in that regard.

- **Highway 35 Chippewa River boat access site:** Comments stated that this river access in the Tiffany WA access is difficult to use due to low water and sand deposits and needs improvement.

Response: This summer the river was particularly low due to limited precipitation and sand deposits have built up which has reduced the utility of this landing. The Lower Chippewa is a dynamic system with shifting sands and significant variations in flow dependent on precipitation in the drainage and discharge variation from upstream hydropower dams. While the conditions at landings on the Chippewa can be expected to vary over time, it is agreed that if conditions at the Highway 35 landing do not improve with more normal water flows that alternatives may need to be explored. This is included in the plan.

- Real estate tax impacts: There were some comments/questions on the impact of the state purchase of lands on real estate taxes.  
Response: This issue is discussed in the Environmental Assessment. Due to the aids-in-lieu-of-taxes paid by the state the acquisition of additional lands would not have a significant impact on local tax revenue.

- Boundary expansion of Big Swamp and Tiffany WAs: It was suggested that an additional 60 acre wooded tract be added to the boundary of the Tiffany WA which, if acquired, would extend the property out to a road. For the Big Swamp WA, a proposal was made to add an approximately 70 acre tract of agricultural/forest land to the boundary.  
Response: The proposed 60 acre Tiffany expansion has been added to the proposed boundary. The Big Swamp suggestion was not considered to be a critical addition for access or management purposes, no change to the proposed boundary was made.

- Pheasant stocking at Dunnville: One comment questioned the need/wisdom of continued pheasant stocking in Dunnville WA.

Response: Put and take pheasant stocking provides a very popular hunting opportunity. While parts of Dunn County contain habitat that support significant populations of naturally reproducing populations of pheasants, the Dunnville Area does not. The planted birds provide a significant hunting opportunity without impacting Dunn counties "wild" pheasant population.

- Beaver on Tiffany: One comment that some beaver should be removed from Tiffany due to tree damage (the commenter also acknowledged their value on the property).  
Response: The closed area for trapping beaver/otter on Tiffany is a longstanding closure that is functional in keeping beaver on the property to provide important habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. In this location, the positive impacts of beaver activity is considered to outweigh any negative impacts. The plan continues to suggest the continuation of this closed area.

- ECEL Energy lands: A few comments emphasized the resource management value of the large block of land owned by XCEL Energy that is located across the Chippewa River from Dunnville WA.  
Response: It is agreed that portions of this 4,000 acre block of land have outstanding resource management value and that fact is included in the plan narrative. Detail on the resources located on this block of land (and other private lands) are not included in the plan.

- Camping: Several comments concerned the lack of clarity on whether canoe camping is allowed on state owned lands along the Chippewa River.  
Response: This issue is addressed in the draft plan. A change in Administrative Code is proposed that will allow camping on state owned sandbars on the Lower Chippewa River Wildlife Areas.

- Dead Lake: A comment stated that the Dead Lake area on the Pepin County side of the Tiffany WA should be referred to in the plan as the "Dead Lake Bottoms".  
Response: It would be confusing to rename a portion of the Tiffany WA to another name. The plan was not changed; however, future signing within this area can be labeled as Tiffany WA Dead Lake Bottoms Area to acknowledge the local reference.

