

# Master Plan Amendment Proposal

**Property Name:** Black River State Forest

**Date Current Master Plan was Approved:** January 2010

## Proposed Change to the Master Plan

The proposed amendment to the master plan would convert an equestrian campground and associated equestrian trails, into an outdoor group camp available on the reservation system.

**Attachment A** contains the specific master plan amendment language describing the proposed change.

**Attachment B** is a map showing the current location of the equestrian campground and horse trails.

**Attachment C** lists the equestrian camps and horse trails in the vicinity of Black River State Forest and includes a map of those facilities.

**Attachment D** contains photographs of the equestrian campground and horse trails at Black River State Forest.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### Purpose and Need for the Proposed Plan Amendment

The Black River State Forest currently provides 17 miles of designated horse riding trails along with a 12 unit rustic equestrian campground (Attachment B). The equestrian campground, constructed shortly after the approval of the 1989 master plan has had low use for several years likely due to a combination of factors including recent improvements to other more developed horse campgrounds in the surrounding area (Attachment C), a large biting insect population and undesirable trail connectors along stretches of road rather than fully forested horse trails. These roadside trails are necessary in order to avoid a number of wetlands in the area.

Attendance figures have been recorded for the equestrian campground since 2005 and show a significant declining trend. The majority of the use is in the spring and fall with very few campers from June through August. The past two years (2011 and 2012) were particularly low.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Campsite nights*</u>
2005	141
2006	128
2007	126
2008	90
2009	116
2010	94
2011	34
2012	40 (through September)

\* One campsite night equals one campsite rented one night

While demand is low for the equestrian camping and horse trails at Black River State Forest, there is a high demand by the public for group camping options. The state forest offers an indoor group camp that is heavily used including every weekend year round and almost every weekday in the summer. There is also interest in using the current indoor group camp for RV's and trailers which the site cannot accommodate. Currently 31 group camps that can be reserved are present in the Wisconsin State Park and Forest System. These sites tend to be very popular and in use most weekends. The proposed change to the equestrian campground to a group camp would likely significantly increase visitation and revenue.

The horse camp amenities already include a new vault toilet building constructed in 2009, a well, firewood bin, 12 camp sites with hitching posts, parking for day riders, and a large fire pit area where groups can gather, so it would be a low cost to convert to a group campground. Current management of the horse camp and trail includes 12-15 campground mowings per year, two trail mowings, vault toilet cleanings, maintenance, and pumping, twice annual trail and camp inspections, sign maintenance, trail brushing, and miscellaneous repairs to associated facilities. This is estimated to cost \$6,000 per year. The closure of the horse trails would reduce management costs to half of its current price. Staff time and maintenance dollars could then be redirected to other high priority uses on the property.

The campground conversion would be implemented for the 2013 season and would be available on the reservation system mid-April through December 1.

**Anticipated Primary Benefits of the Proposed Amendment:**

Anticipated benefits include the development of a new niche for the Black River State Forest. While there are multiple equestrian camping opportunities in the surrounding area, there are no other rustic group camping opportunities available. This new niche is likely to significantly increase visitation and revenue to the state forest.

**Additional Anticipated Benefits of the Amendment:**

- Increased revenue due to increased visitation
- Decreased maintenance costs due to closure of horse trails
- Redirection of staff time and maintenance costs to higher priority needs

**How the proposed plan amendment is consistent with or relates to the master plan's vision and goals:**

The proposed plan amendment is consistent with the master plan's goal to *“provide a range of quality outdoor recreational activities and settings, both motorized and non-motorized, ranging from primitive to developed, consistent with resource capabilities.”*

**Compatibility with Statutes, Codes and Department Policies:**

The proposed development is compatible with Statutes, Codes and Department policies. The proposed plan change needs to comply with NR 44 master plan amendment procedures. This is a Type III Action under NR 150.

**Federal Aid Limitations:**

There are no Federal Aid limitations involved with the proposed plan amendment.

**Unavoidable Adverse Impacts:**

No significant adverse impacts are expected from the proposed changes. There will be a minimal impact on equestrian users.

### **Summary of Alternatives Considered:**

#### **Alternative #1: Preferred Alternative Outlined Above**

**Alternative #2:** Convert site to group camp but retain horse trails and allow group camp to be usable by groups with and without horses. This would allow horse riders to continue to use the site for camping. However, it would require the elimination of the day use parking area for horses. This would still require the property to maintain 17 miles of horse trails for a clientele with a long history of low use. It would also mix two user groups that may not be compatible. For example a non-horse rider group following a horse riding group experience could be adversely affected by the presence of horse manure.

This proposal would likely increase visitation. Management costs would not change under this scenario.

**Alternative #3:** Close campground and all horse trails. This would eliminate all management costs associated with the area. This would also require us to abandon the well and the newly constructed bathroom building.

**Alternative #4:** Add additional amenities such as electrical sites, reservation system, etc. to the campground that may make it more desirable to users. This alternative may increase use slightly, and would incur additional development and management costs, that may or may not be recouped. This likely would have limited impact on usage though as it does not impact the issues of high bug populations on the trails and the use of roads as trail connectors within the property.

**Alternative #5:** Keep campground and trails as they are. This would not address the issue of low visitor use. Management costs would remain the same.

#### **The Public Review Process:**

A 30-day comment period from November 1st – 30th will be open for the public to comment on a preferred alternative and/or provide alternative solutions.

In addition, the following outreach mechanisms will be utilized:

- News release concurrent with the beginning of comment period to the same media sources used during master planning.
- Email from superintendent to partners who currently receive the property's annual work plan.
- Update on current conditions page – over 2,225 subscribers will receive notification
- Notice on property's webpage
- Personal contact made by Superintendent to Wisconsin Horse Council – this would be made just prior to the news release.

#### **Description of the Support and/or Opposition to the Proposed Plan Amendment (including reasons for the various positions taken) and Any Unresolved Issues or Concerns:**

**Attachment A:** This language will be removed from or inserted into the approved January 2010 Black River State Forest Master Plan.

**Page 92:** Table 2.24: Rename “*Equestrian Campground*” to “*Rustic Outdoor Group Camp*”.

**Page 94:** Remove 7<sup>th</sup> bullet under “Area Specific Recreation Management Prescriptions” regarding the Equestrian Campground

**Page 106:**

Change 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> bullets under “Recreation Management Objectives” to:

- *Provide modern, rustic, primitive, and group camping opportunities.*
- *Provide a system for aesthetically pleasing, sustainable trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking that offer opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the forest.*

Revise first paragraph under “Camping” as follows:

*The Black River State Forest provides a variety of camping facilities from rustic to modern. Amenities include three family campgrounds, two group camps, two canoe campsites, and backpacking by permit.*

Table 2.26: Revise the “Horse Camp” entry to read:

Name	Camping Type	Acres	Current		Planned	
			# of sites with electricity	Total # of sites	# of sites with electricity	Total # of sites
Rustic Outdoor Group Camp	Rustic	15	0	12	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 wheeled units</li> <li>• 50 people max in tent area</li> </ul>

**Page 107:**

Remove “Equestrian Campground” section

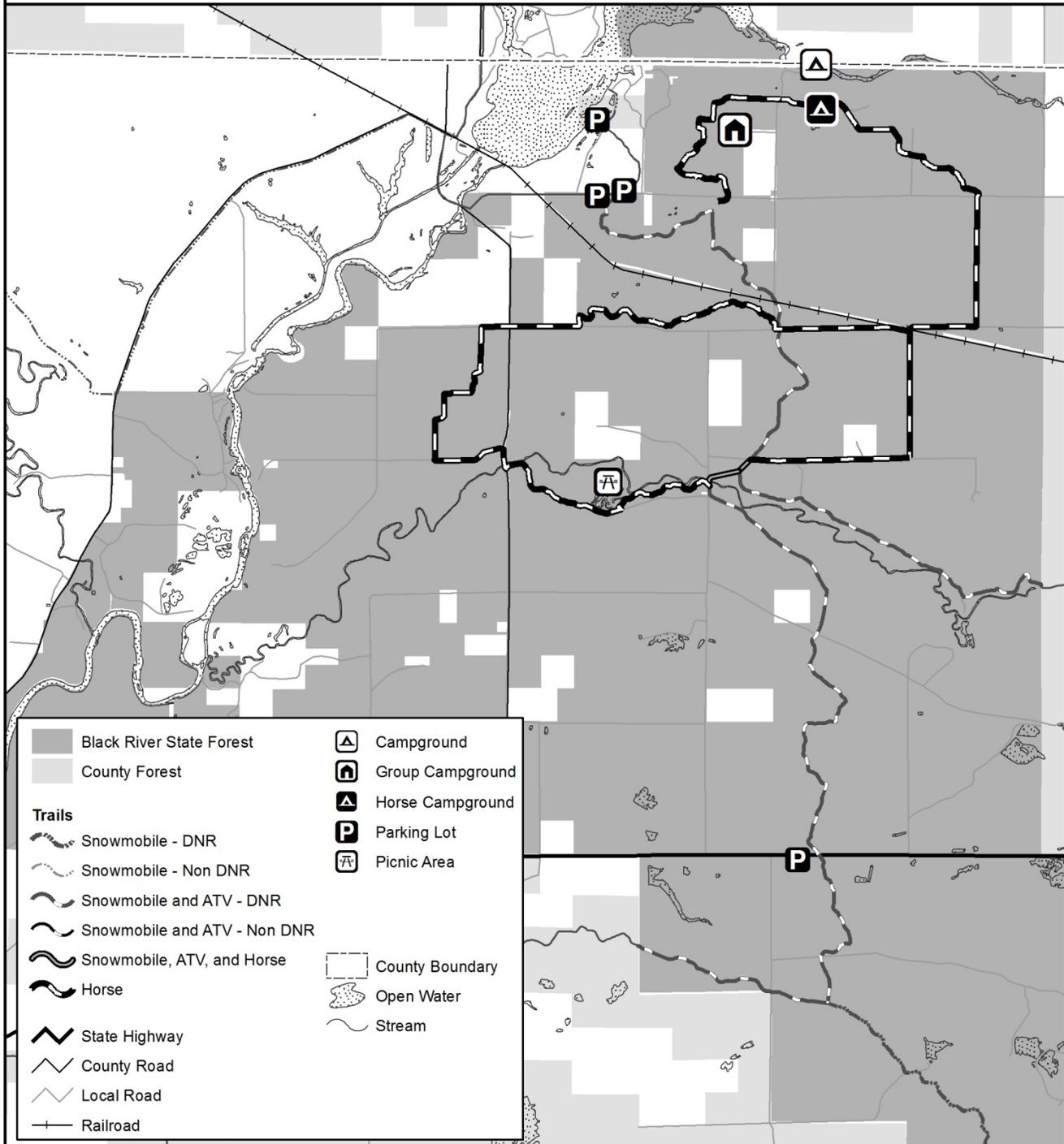
Change Section Heading from “Group Camp” to “Group Camps” (page 107) and add text as follows:

*A second rustic group camp will replace the former Equestrian Campground at the north end of the forest. This location will have 6-8 gravel spurs for parking a maximum of eight wheeled camping units and an additional area for tents to accommodate a maximum of 50 people. Each site has a picnic table, fire ring, and a large group fire ring is also available. The campground has vault toilets and a seasonally powered solar pump for water. Electricity is not available. The campground is not plowed during the winter months.*

**Page 109:** Table 2.28: Remove all “Equestrian Trails”

**Page 110:** Remove “Equestrian Trails” section

# Black River State Forest



2 Miles

2.5 Kilometers

The delineation of recreational infrastructure is a general representation of those facilities. More detailed delineation will be produced at the discretion of the department where authorized activities, management or improved on the ground information is available.



September, 2012

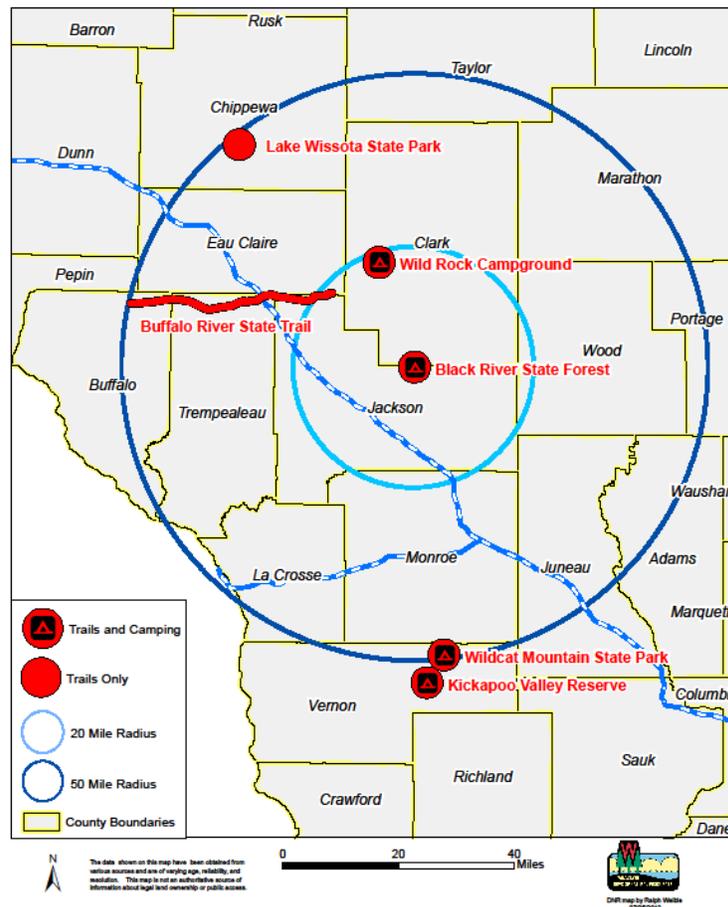
## Attachment C: Equestrian Campgrounds and Horse Trails in the Vicinity of Black River State Forest

There are several other horse riding and camping options in the region. There are at least five other public properties within 50 miles of the Black River Area:

1. **Wildcat Mountain State Park** - 15 miles of trails, and 24 campsites. Half of the campsites have electric hook-ups and all are on the reservation system. The campground is full most weekends and it is one of the most popular destinations in the state for horse riders.
2. **Kickapoo Reserve** – 37 miles of trails, and 25 campsites all rustic. The Reserve’s trails are connected to Wildcat Mountain’s system. Also a very popular destination for horse riders.
3. **Wild Rock Park and Campground, Clark County** – 41 miles of trails and 35 campsites. This is a semi-rustic with seven electric sites, a dump station; sites cannot be reserved, rustic campground. This property receives a medium level of use but considerably higher than the state forest’s facilities.
4. **Buffalo River Trail** – 36 miles of trails. The trail receives light horse usage as it is linear and shared with other users.
5. **Lake Wissota State Park** – 7 miles of trails and no camping. Lake Wissota’s trails receive a fair amount of use with most users being local residents.

In addition to these public facilities there are five private facilities within 50 miles of the Black River State Forest that offer horse riding recreation.

Area Horse Trails and Campground Facilities



**Attachment D: Photographs of current Equestrian Campground and Horse Trails at Black River State Forest**



Equestrian Campground Overview



Equestrian Campground Overview



Equestrain Campground Bathrooms



Equestrian Campground Group Fire Ring



Equestrian Campground Site



Equestrian Campground Water Station



Firewood Station



Horse Trails Signage



Horse Trails



Horse Trails