

HORICON-SHAW PLANNING GROUP MASTER PLAN DRAFT MASTER PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS FOR DRAFT MASTER PLAN

The DNR released the HSPG Draft Master Plan and Environmental Analysis for public review on July 19, 2016, with the comment period extending to August 19. A public meeting was held on August 3 at which the public was invited to view informational displays and draft plan documents, hear a short presentation, ask questions during a formal question-and-answer session, speak one-on-one with Department staff, and provide their comments on the draft plan. Approximately 36 people attended the public meeting. The Department received verbal and written comments submitted during and after the public meeting. A total of 23 written comments were received. Public meeting attendees and comment authors represented diverse affiliations including:

- Friends groups
- Conservation groups
- Hunters and hunting groups
- Municipal government
- Local elected officials
- Farmers
- Neighboring landowners
- Federal agency
- Local business
- Local media
- Local community groups

The public involvement timeline is summarized in the table below.

Chronology of Public Involvement

Date	Contact
July 19, 2016	Invitation to public meetings sent to stakeholder list and planning documents posted on WDNR Web site. Statewide WDNR news release sent out announcing public meeting.
July 25, 2016	Hard copies of draft plan sent to WDNR Horicon Service Center and Beaver Dam, Horicon, Hustisford, Mayville, and Waupun public libraries.
August 3, 2016	Public meeting held at Horicon Education & Visitor Center, 5:30-7:30 pm.
July 19-August 19, 2016	Public comment period.
October, 2016	Public comment summary posted on WDNR Web site.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

The majority of verbal and written comments received on the draft master plan addressed specific issues, largely related to recreation management/public use or resource management. Very little general feedback was received.

A summary of comments on specific issues, along with responses where applicable, are listed below, grouped by topic area.

Gold Star Memorial Trail

Numerous comments were received regarding the Gold Star Memorial Trail (GSMT), a non-motorized trail to extend from the City of Mayville to the City of Beaver Dam, and including a connection to the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center (HMEVC). Trail proponents have requested that biking be allowed on portions of existing hiking trails on the Horicon Marsh WA associated with the HMEVC, as the preferred connection between the HMEVC and the City of Horicon. The draft master plan includes two alternatives related to this request: Alternative 1, accommodating bike use on the Horicon WA trails; and Alternative 2, routing bikes along the shoulder of State Hwy 28.

- During the public meeting Q&A, a question was asked: ***Why does the master plan contain only these two alternatives, or why is the alternative relating to using the Horicon WA trails not more detailed about, for example, how conflicts could be mitigated between different users?***

Response: At this point, DNR is soliciting broad public opinion about the bike trail request, rather than describing different implementation scenarios. Also, the bike trail is being developed in phases and the segment between the HMEVC and the City of Horicon is the fifth and final phase. It may not be worked on until years in the future. Without knowing more about potential funding sources, it's very difficult to make the alternative more detailed. Anyone who has a different alternative should submit it in writing as a comment. [Questioner then clarified that even though the trail is divided into numbered segments, segments may be worked on in any order].

- The majority of written comments were supportive of the trail, and specifically of Alternative 1. These comments cited safety concerns as the primary reason for rejecting Alternative 2. Only one comment expressed preference for Alternative 2 due to concern over impacts to wildlife. A comment received from the USFWS Region 3 Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program expressed concern over the bike trail request as a secondary use that could adversely affect the primary uses (wildlife habitat and public hunting) of this property, which was acquired with Pittman-Robertson funds. One comment suggested a third alternative – developing a separate path paralleling Hwy 28, likely via a boardwalk, and then connecting to the Bachhuber trail via the Indermuehle Island trail loop – but noted the likely high

cost and impact to wetlands. One comment was neutral on the bike trail concept but its author opposes any trail south of the Palmatory hill. One comment expressed serious concern about safety hazards to existing users of the trails (particularly wildlife watchers and children participating in educational programs) under Alternative 1. Both this comment and all the comments supporting Alternative 1 suggested and expressed support for various ways to mitigate user conflicts and other safety concerns, including signage; speed limits; closing specific trail segments during special events or high-use times; implementing a “walk-your-bike” section along certain trail segments; and evaluating various routing options (e.g., northern vs. southern portion of Bachhuber trail; Palmatory service road vs. eastern portion of Quick’s Point trail).

Response: The Department is willing to accommodate bike use on Horicon Marsh WA only under certain conditions. These conditions are due to the statutory designation of the property as a Wildlife Area and to the fact that it was acquired with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration grant funds. Horicon Marsh WA’s primary purpose is to provide wildlife habitat and public hunting; any secondary recreational uses may not detract from this primary purpose. Necessary conditions for accommodating bike use on Horicon Marsh WA address trail routing, acceptable modifications to existing trails, trail standards and maintenance, funding, and the need for agreements between the Department and the GSMT. These conditions will take precedence over contrary conditions that may be attached to potential trail development funding sources.

Proposed Changes to Closed Areas

Several questions and comments were received regarding proposed changes to closed-restricted areas.

- Question: ***Why is the master plan proposing only non-motorized hunting in the part of the Migratory Bird Closed Area that is being eliminated? If a formerly closed area is being opened up everyone should be able to access it, including people who can no longer get around in skiffs.***

Response: This area is currently posted as non-motorized and the proposal is maintaining that as a compromise for those more traditional hunters that prefer to hunt in boats without motors. There is already a process in place for disabled persons to gain access to areas that are closed to motorized access via a permit.

- Question: ***Is the master plan making the Fourmile Island SNA refuge a year-round closed area?***

Response: No. The master plan is not proposing any changes to that refuge. It will remain a seasonal no-entry refuge to protect nesting birds.

- One written comment requested that the area south of the current boundary of the migratory bird closed area and east of the main ditch be opened to non-motorized waterfowl hunting.

Response: This is precisely what is being proposed.

- One written comment expressed opposition to opening up closed areas to waterfowl hunting because ducks and geese will not have any areas to rest or feed. One comment asked whether access to Cotton Island Pond would be affected. Several comments from neighboring residents expressed opposition to archery hunting in the Palmatory area due to safety concerns, and one comment author is opposed to any hunting (even archery-only) at Indermuehle Island because of its proximity to the HMEVC facilities and perceived conflicts with other users.

Response: The change to the migratory bird closed area was proposed because the area is no longer functioning as an effective refuge. The neighboring Horicon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge provides an extensive refuge for waterfowl. Access to Cotton Island Pond will not be affected. The master plan is proposing changes; however, the closed-restricted areas are defined in Wisconsin Administrative Code and any proposed changes have to go through the rule-making process to become implemented. Should the proposals become implemented, the Department will post signage prohibiting discharge of weapons within 100 yards of a residence. Regarding Indermuehle Island, it is likely that any archery hunters would concentrate their effort in the interior of this area away from trails, thus minimizing potential conflicts with other users.

Motorized Boat Access/Mud Motors

Several written comments addressed motorized boat access and mud motors (also known as “surface drive” or “pro drive” motors), with some comment authors requesting no additional restrictions on the use of motors and other authors expressing concerns about the effects of these motors on wildlife and wetland vegetation, and the need to regulate them. One comment proposed that all boats be restricted to the main ditch from April 1 to August 15 to protect breeding wildlife.

Response: The Department currently lacks documentation on the frequency of use of these motors and any effects on wildlife or vegetation. For this reason, the property-specific section on Horicon Marsh WA in the master plan contains a prescription to document the use of these motors on the property and to assess their effects on habitat and wildlife. Regarding the proposal to restrict boats to the main ditch, the Department does not have the authority to restrict access to navigable waterways of the state.

Palmatory Recreational Facilities

Several written comments addressed development of public use facilities at Palmatory Street. One comment proposed a substantial development of a community-center-type

building containing a scenic overlook and extensive meeting space, at an estimated cost of \$1.8 million which the proposal suggested should largely be state-funded. Another comment indicated that the facilities currently there are not well-maintained and that any additional developments should be modest and simple. One comment was opposed to the picnic shelter/flush toilet building proposed in the plan or to anything that would draw additional visitors to Palmatory Street.

Response: The establishment of the HMEVC, with its large size and many amenities, represents the Department's investment in a substantial recreational/educational facility for the Horicon Marsh WA, a development which enjoys a high level of public support. Prior to the master planning process, the Department solicited public input on facility development at Palmatory Street and the consensus from that process was for modest facilities only. The proposal in the master plan, for a small picnic shelter/flush toilet building is consistent with the Recreation Management Area, Type 3 setting land classification, providing opportunity to enjoy the area while keeping development and maintenance simple.

Non-toxic Shot

Two comments regarding the use of non-toxic shot for upland game hunting on Horicon WA were received, including one from a representative of the neighboring Horicon National Wildlife Refuge which shares a boundary with the state wildlife area. Both comments expressed disappointment that this issue was not addressed in the master plan despite previous input. Both comments noted that lead is well-known to be toxic to wildlife; and that non-toxic shot is already required for all bird hunting on federal refuges and waterfowl production areas, including upland areas. Because of the shared boundary, the state land should have the same requirement for the sake of consistency.

Response: It is outside the scope of master planning to address this issue. Horicon WA has a unique situation in sharing a boundary with a federal refuge, yet DNR has wildlife areas all over the state. This is a statewide issue; the Department cannot set property-by-property standards.

Real Estate Recommendations

Several questions and comments were submitted regarding the real estate recommendations in the master plan. One comment expressed support for the Sinnissippi Extensive Wildlife Habitat recommendations.

- Question: ***Why not more boundary expansions? The master plan is supposed to be a long-term document; DNR says 15-20 years for the life of a plan (although the previous plan is 30 years old already). If these areas are not identified and included in a boundary, partners can't work on them.***
- Question: ***If you tally up the acres of contractions vs. expansions, the change is actually net negative. Is this a new DNR policy?***

Response: Acquisition is a good tool for land protection. However, the Department recognizes that resources are limited and is currently focusing on acquiring lands already within project boundaries and doing a good job managing what is already owned. The Department is also committed to improving the process of updating master plans so it isn't such a long time between when a plan is approved and when the plan is updated or re-done. Master plans can also be modified after they are approved through the variance or amendment process.

- Question: ***Did you consider streams or waterways in the process of analyzing/deciding on boundary changes, and what might be happening to them farther upstream in the watershed (e.g., pollution)?***

Response: We did look at areas where water is flowing into the marsh during the process of deciding on boundary modifications. We understand that what is occurring outside of our boundary impacts our management and that likewise what we are doing impacts people outside of our ownership. We took a strategic approach to adding properties to the project boundary, adding parcels that we felt would complement or assist in our management goals.

Horicon Dam

- Question: ***Does the master plan address the Horicon Dam, and specifically the issue of a portage?***

Response: The Horicon dam is mentioned on page 38 of the draft master plan. This portion discusses the feasibility of repairing or replacing the dam. We did not directly address a portage around the existing structure but any discussion regarding replacing the existing dam would include discussion of a portage opportunity. We have worked with adjacent landowners to discuss the possibility of a portage around the dam. Under current management prescriptions for the state Wildlife Area and our current ownership, there is no feasible, safe place to put a portage at the existing structure. Currently, users can use Kiwanis Park and Legion Park to portage around the dam.

General Resource Management

- One written comment expressed concern over water level management at Shaw Marsh WA, specifically any changes that would raise water levels in Park Creek.

Response: There are no plans to raise water levels on Shaw Marsh.

- One written comment requested some treatment in the master plan of improving and enhancing fishing on Horicon Marsh and adjoining Rock River areas, including stocking of panfish and removing rough fish.

Response: Fisheries management is described in the master plan on pages 10-11; both stocking and rough fish control are specifically mentioned.

- One written comment expressed support for the proposal to restore historic water flow in the East and West branches of the Rock River through Horicon Marsh WA.

General Public Use

- One written comment stated that boat access areas need to be dredged.
- One written comment indicated that the main ditch needs to be cleared of fallen trees.

Master Plan Process

- Question: ***When a master plan contains language about ‘assessing’ or ‘doing research’ or ‘looking into’ something, what about any action that might follow from that? How can it be done if it isn’t in the plan?***

Response: There often are different options for pursuing an action as well as uncertainties about when and how something might get done (e.g., whether funding can be found, etc.). Master plan language contains some flexibility to allow for situations where outcomes are not certain or when we need more information before we can make a decision or take action. We also recognize that things may change or unforeseen events may happen during the lifetime of a plan. The variance and amendment provisions allow a plan to be modified after it’s approved.

- Question: ***What happens after the comment period ends on August 19?***

Response: After the comment period ends, all the comments submitted will be compiled and a public comment summary will be prepared and posted on the plan webpage. All subscribers to our contact list will be notified when the comment summary is available. We will then prepare a final draft of the master plan, taking into account all the public input received, and get it ready for presentation to the NRB. Once the plan gets on the agenda for an NRB meeting, there is another opportunity for public comment.

- One written comment expressed concern that standards for a public hearing were not met at the August 3 meeting because attendees could not make statements and have their comments recorded, and were asked to submit their comments in writing.

Response: There is a difference between a public hearing and public meeting. Public **hearings** are held in instances where they are required by state statute (e.g., for rule proposals), and are typically recorded. Master planning public input sessions are usually public **meetings**, which are informational in nature, less formal, and are generally not recorded. Department staff urge attendees to submit their

comments in writing in addition to stating them verbally because this ensures that the comments say exactly what the person wants them to say; it is very difficult for a staff person who may interact and speak with many different members of the public at a meeting to accurately remember every comment that is made.