

Summary of Public Involvement and Comments on the draft Powell Marsh State Wildlife Area Master Plan and Environmental Analysis - September 2016

- The draft plan and Environmental Analysis was released for public review from August 18, 2016 through September 9, 2016.
- A public meeting was held on Monday, Aug. 29 at Manitowish Waters to review the plan and receive public comments.

Comments were received from a total of 29 persons, and government agency and local government officials. Twenty three people attended the public meeting, eight people offered formal oral testimony. Written comments were submitted at the public meeting and by postal mail, email and on the web site. Below is a summary of comments received.

Public access

Overall, commenters indicate they want the existing character of the property to remain unchanged. They particularly like the quiet, vast open, unique landscape and the solitude it affords. Some refer to the PMSWA as having a wilderness-like atmosphere and do not want to see the area “degraded” by motorized access. A common theme heard was the outstanding opportunities on the property for birding and for providing habitat for rare birds. One commenter stated: “Powell could/should be a key recreational attraction in the Northwoods. It already is a significant stop for hundreds of birders and nature enthusiasts, hunters, trappers, berry pickers, skiers, birders, nature photographers.”

Strong support was given to all aspects of the recreation and public access of the draft plan, except for the proposed .9 mile public extension of public access on Powell Marsh Road and the construction of two new parking lots on that new open road segment. Overwhelmingly commenters feel the road extension is not needed and that putting vehicles into the interior of the marsh would disrupt wildlife as well as visitors, destroying the remote character of the marsh. Over half of those who commented on the plan voiced strong opposition and only one was in support. Several references were also made to the charrette and the fact the participants did not want to increase motor vehicles in the interior of the property; the charrette did not recommend any changes in the current level of vehicle access. One other comment relating to road access was received; asked that the management road to a grassy hill near Sherman Lake opened to public vehicles.

In summary, of the 19 comments received on the .9 mile Powell Road public access extension and its new parking lots, one person supports the proposed extension, 17 are strongly opposed, and one supports a shorter extension (.4 mile) as far as the Homestead Road intersection.

Representative comments on recreation

Property Character

Preserve the property as undeveloped as possible. Keep the unique open habitat and wilderness-like atmosphere and solitude; focus on non-motorized use.

Trails and wildlife viewing enhancements

Many people voiced strong support for the designated trail loop. They stated it was a good addition that provides improved opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing as well as better ADA access. One person stated that bicycles should not be allowed on walking trails. The addition of an ADA viewing blind, a boardwalk to get visitors out into and close to the marsh, and resting benches along the trail were also supported. Adding an elevated viewing platform was also mentioned. One comment was received in opposition to trail development.

Refuge changes

All who commented on the refuge support the proposed changes, which will allow year round hiking around the Vista Flowage. Several people specifically mentioned they supported the proposed new refuge open/closed dates. No comments were in opposition to the refuge changes.

Information and education

A number of people offered comments in support of a strong, expanded information and education program on the property; indicating it will expand visitor's enjoyment and appreciation for the property and its unique habitat.

Suggestions include:

- Provide brochures listing wildlife and plant species present and seasons for viewing.
- Install high quality interpretive information kiosk to tell the complete story (success and failures) of what happens when a wetland is manipulated.

Habitat and its management

A substantial number of comments received focused on maintaining the existing, expansive open wetland habitats by as proposed in the plan. Of paramount importance is maintaining the current open landscape and its wildlife and bird populations. One commenter offered a counter opinion, favoring abandonment of all the dikes, ditches and flowages to restore the marsh to an unmanaged, natural condition.

Additional habitat management specifics offered:

- A number of people want property managers to provide substantial mud flats during the spring and fall bird migrations.

- One person would like to see more areas of the marsh opened up using prescribed fire.
- One commented that non-native plants on the uplands should be removed and replaced with native species where possible.

Water quality and water management

A number of people commented that the water quality of DPL is getting worse every year and that something must be done about it. Commenters strongly support efforts to improve the quality of the water flowing off the PMSWA and improved water quality in Dead Pike Lake. Specifically, nearly all commenters support the flowage/water management actions proposed in plan, which was developed through the Charrette process.

Additional water management points offered:

- Support for attempting to improve the filtration capability of the marsh by managing to favor plants species that take-up more Phosphorus and iron.
- Independent scientific back-up review and monitoring of progress in improving water quality of Dead Pike Lake is needed.
- Conduct more research on the sources of phosphorus on the property.
- The marsh (PMSWA) should be fully restored to its original unaltered, natural functioning wetland condition for the health of the overall ecosystem as well as DPL.
- Supports increasing water flow [in the ditches] to help reduce the iron problem.
- A cranberry operator called for not removing the dam on the ditch at Little Trout Lake; concerned it will draw water from the lake, reducing lake levels.
- The plan must include specifics on how the “adaptive management” decisions will be made, as well as a timeline for implementing the water management changes.
- Full baseline data and clear scientific protocol is needed for a means of evaluation as well as for setting goals for improvement. The data and protocols need to be part of the master plan.
- The plan should specify a maximum limit for iron in water discharged to Dead Pike Lake; suggesting the iron limit used for the abandoned mine in Ladysmith be applied.
- Seechi disk monitoring of Dead Pike Lake should be included in the master plan to track in-lake changes.
- Ditches should be fully filled-in, not just plugged as ditch plugs will not curtail the amount of iron-rich ground water pushed into Main Ditch.

- A cost/benefit analysis of the long-term maintenance of the ditch/dike system should be developed comparing it to the cost/benefit of restoring the marsh to its original undeveloped condition.
- The plan should include a protocol for releasing water to Dead Pike Lake during excessive rain events.
- The Dead Pike Lake Association should be an active, on-going participant in the implementation phase of the master plan.

Comments on the impact analysis

Request the impact analysis include an analysis of the economic impacts on the property owners of Dead Pike Lake by the DNR's management of the marsh.

Plan Changes Made in Response to Comments Received

A number of minor editorial changes made for clarification purposes, and one substantive change was made to the draft plan related to the proposed extension of Powell Marsh Road.

The proposed .9 mile extension of public vehicle access on Powell Marsh Road and the two new parking lots associated with it are no longer proposed in the plan. Public vehicle access will remain as currently exists.