



# Interim Forest Management Plan

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## Property Identifiers

Property Name: **Western Prairie HRA – Johnson Wildlife Area**

Property Designation or Type: **Wildlife Area**

DNR Property Code: **8840**

Forestry Property Code(s): **5608**

Property Location: **St. Croix County**

Property Acreage: **214**

Master Plan Date: **N/A**

Property Manager: **Ryan Haffele**

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## Property Assessment

### General Property Description

- **Ecological Landscape and Property Context**

The Western Prairie HRA (WPHRA) Johnson Wildlife Area is located in the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape (WPEL) and the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape (FTEL) in Stanton Township. The property lies within the WPHRA, a landscape-scale project focused on restoring 20,000 acres of prairie and wetlands in St. Croix and Polk Counties, and is located 2 miles west of Deer Park and 7 miles northwest of New Richmond. Land Type Associations found on the property include 222Md08 (Deer Park Prairie) and 212Qa01 (Late St. Croix Moraines). The Deer Park Prairie is characteristic of undulating outwash plain with well drained silty soils, while the Late St. Croix Moraines are associated with rolling collapsed moraines with outwash terraces and moderately well drained sandy loam soils. The dominate land use in the area is agriculture.

The Johnson Wildlife Area is split into 2 tracts 1 mile apart from each other; an 84 acre parcel of restore prairie and wetlands and a 130 acre parcel consisting of restored prairie, restored wetlands, degraded oak savanna, cool season grasses, and a mixed pine plantation. The property contains gently rolling hills associated with the last glaciation. Ecological management opportunities on the property include surrogate grasslands, mesic prairie, oak savanna maintenance/restoration, and management/protection of wildlife, fish, and herptiles and invertebrates associated with these habitat types.



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- **History of Land Use and Past Management**

Pre-settlement vegetation consisted of aspen and oak woodlots with areas of sumac and witch hazel. After settlement, the majority of the landscape was cleared for agricultural production. Past management was dominated by row crops with grazing likely being a minor use. Before acquisition, the property was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and converted to cool-season grasses as well as two separate pine plantings. The property was obtained by the DNR in 2001 under the WPHRA acquisition authority to help meet the goals and objectives of the landscape-scale project. After acquisition, the DNR abandoned an old degraded manure pit on the property and restored several small pothole wetlands. Additionally, DNR staff converted 32 acres of cool-season CRP grass into native prairie to benefit wildlife. Currently, the Johnson Wildlife Area is dominated by a mix of restored prairie, pine plantation, and wetlands. Primary management of the property has been the conversion of agricultural lands into native prairie and restoration of wetlands. Invasive species control is conducted as needed on the property by Wildlife staff.

## Site Specifics

- **Current forest types, size classes, and successional stages –**

Upland Grass – 154 acres (73%)  
Red and White Pine – 46 acres (22%)  
Wetland – 10 acres (5%)

- **State Natural Area designations –** None present
- **High Value Conservation Forests (HCVF) or other resources/natural community types limited in landscape –** None present
- **Biotic Inventory Status –** A biotic inventory has not been conducted on this property.
- **Deferral/consultation area designation –** None designated
- **Rare Species –** The NHI database indicated 1 state endangered bird, 1 bird species of special concern, and 1 community type in the wildlife area or surrounding buffer. Negative impacts to these species will be avoided by following DNR's Species Guidance Documents. In cases where species guidance documents haven't yet been developed, avoidance to rare species will occur via practices such as time of year restrictions, modified harvest boundaries, and/or consultation with rare species experts. For species of Greatest Conservation Need, see below under "Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Opportunity Areas."
- **Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA), Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and Priority Conservation Actions –**
  - COA:** This property is located within the WPHRA which is specifically identified in the Wildlife Action Plan Implementation document for the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape (WPEL) as being located in the Prairie Potholes COA which is of statewide significance for pothole lakes, surrogate grasslands, and oak opening, all of which occur on the property. Specifically, surrogate grasslands are noted as a High Priority for this ecological landscape.

**SGCN:** Species of Greatest Conservation Need listed within this COA are: Blanding's Turtle, Pickerel Frog, American Golden Plover, Black Tern, Blue-



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winged Teal, Bobolink, Brown Thrasher, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Dickcissel, Dunlin, Eastern Meadowlark, Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Northern Harrier, Red-necked Grebe, Short-billed Dowitcher, Short-eared Owl, Trumpeter Swan, Western Meadowlark, Willow Flycatcher, Franklin's Ground Squirrel, and Prairie Vole.

**PCA:** Priority Conservation Actions that fit well with this property that are listed for the WPEL are:

- Promote agricultural practices that are compatible with grassland management, such as rotational grazing, greater use of small grains and hay crops and later harvesting of grass hay.
  - Restore temporary and seasonal wetlands.
  - Develop incentives for private landowners to maintain native prairies and shortgrass habitats.
  - Partner with prairie and savanna restoration groups to more efficiently accomplish habitat management.
  - Actively manage appropriate patches for oak savanna and woodland restoration using prescribed fire.
  - Develop education tools and demonstration/training areas that promote prescribed fire and other prairie/savanna management practices.
- **Invasive Species** – Reed canary grass, wild parsnip, buckthorn, and honeysuckle are known to occur on this property.
  - **Soils** – Soil types are dominated with silt loams and loams with some sandy loam and loamy sand soils present. Most soils are well drained with isolated areas of poorly drained soils. There is no evidence of artificial drainage on the property.
  - **Cultural and Recreation Considerations**
    - **Cultural**

No archeological or historic sites are known to exist on this property.
    - **Recreational**

This property receives significant hunting, trapping, and outdoor recreational use pressure, especially during the gun deer and pheasant seasons. Other uses include hiking, dog walking, and other forms of nature-based recreation.



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## IFMP components

Management Objectives: (Outline primary forest management objectives):

1. **Sustainably manage open landscapes to provide habitat for grassland birds**
  - Habitat: Provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and plants, especially grassland species.
  - Aesthetics: Encourage the growth of large diameter long lived savanna oak species to enhance oak savanna habitat.
  - Forest Health: Apply Forestry Best Management Practices for Invasive Species to manage invasive plant and animal species.
  - Water quality: Apply Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality to sustain the water resources.
  - Recreation: Maintain quality grassland habitat that sustains and enhances hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, etc.
  - Education and research: Provide opportunities for interpretation, education, and scientific research.

Property Prescriptions (Identify specific and pertinent prescriptions by area or forest type, including passive management areas, extended rotation, and other information that will help achieve the objectives)

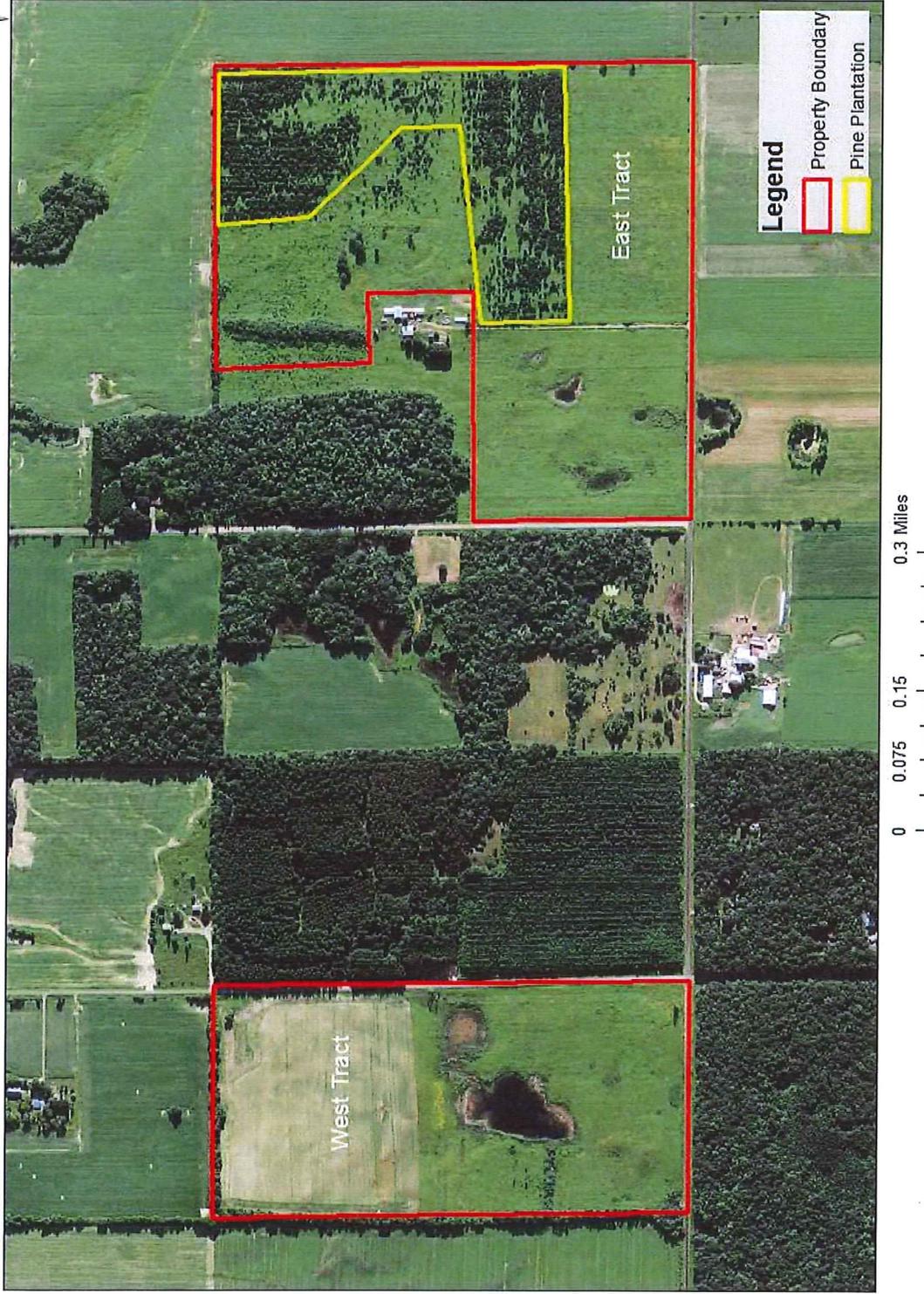
1. Pine Plantations - Pine plantations on the property will be clear cut as soon as merchantable and lands will be restored to native prairie to meet the goals and objectives of the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area.
2. Grasslands – Grasslands will be maintained by periodic prescribed burning, grazing, haying, or mowing.
3. Oak Savanna – Savanna habitat will be restored through chemical and mechanical treatment to remove unwanted woody species. Savannas will be maintained through periodic prescribed burning, mowing, and grazing. Bur oak plantings will be considered on suitable sites.
4. The property will continually be monitored for invasive plant species and control practices such as prescribed fire, hand pulling, chemical and mechanical control will be implemented to eliminate or reduce negative impacts.

Summary of Public Involvement and Comments Received



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## Johnson Wildlife Area





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**PREPARED BY:**

Ryan D Heffele  
Property Manager

8/5/15  
Date

**APPROVED:**

Harry Hahn  
Area Program Supervisor

8/5/2015  
Date

**REVIEWED BY:**

Val Kuc  
Forester

8-10-15  
Date

Dean Edlin  
District Ecologist

8-5-15  
Date