



Big Rib River and Rib River Fishery Area Interim Forest Management Plan

Property Identifiers

Property Name and Designation: Big Rib River Fishery Area and Rib River Fishery Area

County: Lincoln, Marathon and Taylor

Property Acreage: 982.77

Forestry Property Code(s): 3524 - Big Rib River FA, 6101 – Rib River FA

Master Plan Date: Master Plan Conceptual Phase Draft, 1985

Property Assessment

The Big Rib River Fishery Area is located in Lincoln and Marathon Counties and is a corridor of land consisting of approximately 723 acres on both sides of the river. The land was donated from The Nature Conservancy in 1981 and is managed as a Fishery Area. The fish population includes brook trout and brown trout, smallmouth bass and forage species. The majority of the property adjacent to the river is wooded and wild. Outside the Fishery Area, the land is primarily wetlands or wooded with scattered low density residential and agricultural uses.

The Rib River Fishery Area is located in Taylor County and is approximately 260 acres in size. Land for the project was first acquired in 1969 to protect important spawning areas, allow habitat management, and provide for public access. The project includes that portion of the Big Rib River and several small feeder streams located in eastern Taylor County for trout fishing and other recreational and educational uses such as hunting and trapping. The Rib River Fishery Area includes the most productive segment of the entire Big Rib River in terms of trout and overall fisheries diversity and, therefore, offers some of the finest trout fishing in all of Taylor County. A portion of the Big Rib River in Taylor County is classified as Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW).

LANDSCAPE AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

The property lays in the Forest Transition. This region in Wisconsin is characterized by a mix of forest, agriculture and swamp. This region is bounded to the north by the end moraine of the Wisconsin glacial period. The region consists of plains bisected by many small rivers and streams creating a dendritic drainage pattern. Vegetation is mainly northern hardwood forest dominated by sugar maple and hemlock with some yellow birch and white pine. The major land uses are agriculture and forestry.

Hydrology:

The Big Rib River originates from Rib Lake in Taylor County and flows southeasterly through Taylor, Lincoln and Marathon Counties. It eventually joins the Wisconsin River at Wausau. The river varies in width from 50'-125' and averages 10"-18" deep. Some deep pools of four feet or more are found within the property reach of the stream. The stream bottom is predominantly rubble and gravel with lesser amounts of sand, boulders, and silt present. The watershed is approximately 50% forested and 50% agricultural. Water levels fluctuate greatly and lowland flooding is common.

Historical Vegetation:

Data from the original Public Land Surveys are often used to infer forest composition and tree species dominance for large areas in Wisconsin prior to widespread Euro-American settlement. Public Land Surveys for the area comprising the Big Rib River FA and the Rib River FA were conducted during 1851 and 1861, respectively, and identify the uplands as being dominated by mixed forests of eastern hemlock,



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sugar maple, yellow birch, eastern white pine, and red pine. Scattered wetland pockets in the area contained swamp conifers of white cedar, black spruce and tamarack.

Current Land Cover:

The current land cover consists of agricultural land or open grass areas, scattered forest lands primarily of northern hardwoods and aspen, with smaller amounts of oak and lowland hardwoods, and other areas with small amounts of hemlock and swamp hardwoods.

HISTORY OF LAND USE AND PAST MANAGEMENT

This area was first harvested in the mid to late 1800's removing white pine and red pine. Around 1900 to 1930's logging progressed to first remove the hemlock for its bark and logs, progressing finally to the northern hardwood saw timber. Once cut, many lands were allowed to go tax delinquent. Large blocks of delinquent forestlands were eventually acquired by timber companies to be managed for forestry and production of pulpwood for paper making.

Lands presently in the existing Big Rib River Fishery boundary and surrounding the Fishery Area were bought and sold many times by individuals interested in timber and mineral speculations. Some of these lands were purchased in 1939 by the Fromm Brothers of Hamburg, WI and were fenced for the raising of fox. In 1964, Fromm Brothers sold the lands to American Can Company who removed much of the timber. In May 1981, the American Can Company Foundation donated the lands to the Nature Conservancy of WI and in July of 1981, the Nature Conservancy donated the land (approx. 720 acres) to the Department as the Rib River Fish Area. Deed restrictions placed on the property by the Nature Conservancy restrict development to only minimal facilities to accommodate the public such as parking and sanitary facilities.

The classification of the majority of the property as a scenic area dictates that timber production shall be of secondary consideration. However, it is recognized that the removal of mature trees is essential to maintain a vigorous, healthy and aesthetically pleasing forest cover. Maintenance of grassy forest openings and some brushy areas are desirable for wildlife species. Vegetative management techniques are directed toward perpetuating an aesthetic forest cover while incorporating techniques to encourage an abundance and variety of wildlife.

Management has included conducting an improved thinning of red pine and implementing aspen regeneration harvest. Currently blown down aspen is being salvaged. The red pine has been marked for a third improvement and is under contract along with 15 acres of mature aspen mixed with a failed spruce plantation that will regenerate the area to aspen with some spruce reserve trees.

CURRENT FOREST TYPES, SIZE CLASSES AND SUCCESSIONAL STAGES

Big Rib River Fishery Area

This property consists of 85% productive forest land and 15% non-forested areas including water, upland brush, road right-of-ways and grass. The 619 acres of productive forest land consist of 38% aspen, 32% northern hardwoods, 21% bottomland hardwoods, 6% red pine plantation, with small amounts of hemlock and swamp hardwoods.

The aspen (237 acres) is evenly distributed geographically on the property with this timber type occurring all across the property but the aspen is not evenly distributed by age class. Most of the aspen on the property is mature or over mature with 157 acres over 50 years of age, 33 acres are between 40 and 50 years, and 47 acres is 12 years of age. One hundred and thirty acres of the oldest aspen was damaged



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by a windstorm in June of 2012 resulting in 10 to 90% of the trees being blown down. These damaged areas pose a significant risk to hunters and fishermen as many hung up trees, piles of downed timber mixed with upland brush and holes from the root balls of tipped trees limiting access and posing risk of injury.

Northern Hardwoods occupy 195 acres of uplands. The majority of these stands are large saw timber in size (113 acres) and the balance in small saw timber sized trees (82 acres). All of the northern hardwood stands have a strong pole timber component and many have a strong understory of upland brush including hazel, honeysuckle, dogwoods and maple regeneration.

The third most prevalent timber type on the property is bottomland hardwoods (129 acres) that are large saw timber in size and mostly poorly stocked. This timber type occurs immediately adjacent to the main river on low terraces and alluvial benches. This timber type is mostly silver maple with some bur oak and a dense understory of upland and lowland brush.

A single red pine plantation occurs on the property and comprises 6% of the upland productive forest. This red pine is between 75 and 80 years of age and is a mixture of large and small saw timber sized trees with a dense understory of hazel brush and honeysuckle.

The final 21 acres (3%) of forest land is a mix of hemlock and swamp hardwoods. The hemlock is large saw timber in size and occurs on a hillside that demarks a transition between bottomland hardwoods and northern hardwood uplands.

Rib River Fishery Area

The current stand inventory information lists 61% of the property as productive forest land and 39% non-productive types. The non-productive areas include 82 acres of farm fields and 7 acres of lowland alder.

The productive forest lands consist of 71 acres of northern hardwoods, 31 acres of red maple, 22 acres of aspen and 13 acres of bottomland hardwoods.

Forty eight acres of the northern hardwoods is small saw timber and pole in size. An additional 50 acres was recently purchased of which, 23 acres was clearcut by the previous owner just before the state took ownership. This stand is sapling sized northern hardwoods and aspen sprouts.

One aspen stand makes up the entire aspen component and it is 56 years of age. To break up the age classes of the aspen component 9 acres of this stand was recently harvested.

Bottomland hardwoods make up the last 13 acres of the property; the trees in this stand are pole in size.

RARE SPECIES

NHI screening will be conducted prior to all future management activities. Currently, NHI does not list any rare species as occurring within the Big Rib River Fishery Area, although formal surveys have not taken place. A search of the NHI database indicates that one aquatic state species of concern occurs on Rib River Fishery Area.

HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS (HCVF) OR OTHER RESOURCES/ NATURAL COMMUNITY TYPES LIMITED IN THE LANDSCAPE

High Conservation Value Forests have not been identified on the property. The bottomland hardwood stand is unusual in that this timber type normally occurs much further south. Within this stand are several forested seeps. Also included in this stand is a ¼ mile stretch of bedrock benches and outcrops that the



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Big Rib River runs through. These bedrock benches have seeps and pools fed by the seeps that are very unusual.

BIOTIC INVENTORY STATUS:

A Rapid Ecological Assessment focusing on rare plants, selected rare animals, and high-quality natural communities has not been completed for the Fishery Areas.

DEFERRAL/CONSULTATION AREA DESIGNATIONS

There are no Deferral or Consultation sites present on either property.

CULTURAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES (INCLUDING TRIBAL SITES)

Lincoln, Marathon and Taylor County Archeological and other Cultural Resources maps do not identify any cultural or archeological sites within the property boundaries. Projects located within the Fishery Areas will follow manual code procedures to avoid impacts to cultural and archeological sites.

RECREATIONAL USES

Both the Big Rib River and Rib River Fishery Areas are extensively used by a wide variety of recreationalists. Fishermen, canoeists, kayakers, hunters, trappers, sightseers, skiers and berry pickers are common visitors to the properties.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Honeysuckle and buckthorn are present in various concentrations on the Big Rib River Fishery Area. No invasive species have been documented on the Rib River Fishery Area property.

SOILS

The Big Rib River is located in an area of outwash plains formed by glacial action. The majority of upland soils consist of poorly drained Magnor silt loams, having 0-2% slopes and moderately well drained Freean silt loams with 12-30% slopes. Both soil types have a sandy clay subsoil under a silt loam topsoil. Numerous other small deposits of outwash soils occur throughout the property associated with the Big Rib River or tributaries including silt, silt loams and gravel.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Forest management activities are restricted in the designated scenic areas. A 100-foot minimum timber harvest buffer will be observed between all waters, including creeks, springs, seeps, ponds, and lakes on both Fishery Areas. Buffers along smaller waters may be increased or decreased to address resource concerns on a case-by-case basis. All timber harvests will follow BMP's at a minimum to generally address invasive species, erosion, water quality, and fish and wildlife resource concerns. Added measures may be applied on a case-by-case basis to preclude inappropriate developments or uses which could originate an intrusion of sights, sounds or smells that would decrease recreational quality.

The aspen stands will be managed to regenerate aspen on a 50 year rotation while trying to create multiple age classes to the maximum extent given the limited access and merchantability. Where appropriate within the property, an objective for other areas of aspen may be to convert the aspen to northern hardwoods or bottomland hardwoods.



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The management of the northern hardwood stands will include individual tree selection harvesting designed to create an uneven aged stand and minimize aesthetic impacts. Some areas may be identified as examples of older northern hardwood stands with a rich ground layer. These areas may be opportunities to maintain older forest stands using old growth or extended rotation management.

Preserve the bottom land hardwood stands as a no cut zone to protect the seepages and bedrock benches and help to minimize the spread of invasive species.

Preserve the hemlock stand as a no cut zone to preserve this timber type and extend the riparian management zone.

Continue to manage the red pine on a 120 year rotation through periodic improvement thinning and provide conditions necessary for natural conversion to other native timber types at rotation.

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)

Timber management on the properties will be completed only after consulting with an integrated team, including staff from Facilities and Lands, Fisheries Management, Wildlife Management and Endangered Resources and after considering comments from the public and other interest groups. Stands will generally follow the prescriptions below.

Aspen – Aspen regeneration is achieved through coppice harvesting (even-aged management). The rotation age for aspen varies based on site conditions, but it is generally 50 to 60 years. On some sites an extended rotation of up to 80 years could be implemented. Large aspen stands should be divided and harvested years apart to increase age-class diversity. As appropriate, snags, high quality cavity, mast and conifer trees along with green tree retention areas will not be harvested.

Northern Hardwoods – Uneven-aged management with selection harvests that will improve stand quality by removing poor quality trees and releasing crop trees. Canopy gaps will be included to attempt to increase the regeneration of species such as white ash, birch, oak and basswood. Big tree silviculture and increasing some old growth characteristics can be implemented throughout this type.

Bottom Land Hardwood or Wetland Forests – As stated above in management objectives, these types are not currently scheduled for harvesting. .

Pine – Even-aged management with periodic thinnings and an extended rotation age. Conversion to other species mixed with pine in the pure plantation type stands.

Hemlock – As stated above in management objectives, these types are not currently scheduled for harvesting.



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Approvals:

Regional Ecologist Date

Forester (Big Rib River Fishery Area) Date

Forester (Rib River Fishery Area) Date

Property Manager Date

Area/Team Supervisor (Big Rib River Fishery Area) Date

Area/Team Supervisor (Rib River Fishery Area) Date



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