

Summary of Public Participation & Comments

Northwest Barrens Properties Master Planning

January 25 - February 12, 2016

The Department of Natural Resources invited public comments on the Preliminary Vision and Goals, the Regional and Property Analysis and the Public Participation Plan for the Northwest Barrens properties master planning during this initial three-week public involvement period. An 'open house' style public meeting held February 4 at the Chicog Town Hall west of Minong, WI was attended by approximately 40 members of the public.

DNR staff received over 100 public comments: via online comment forms from the DNR master planning website; via email, letters, phone calls, direct contact with staff and via comment forms submitted at the open house. The public responded in significant favor overall to current management and public uses of the properties, with substantial interest in preserving and expanding ownership of the rare oak/pine barrens habitat, especially in the interest of maintaining and restoring a robust population of sharp-tailed grouse. Maintaining the wild, natural setting within the Totogatic Wild River Area was another theme among the interests expressed.

Participants and Public Comments represented:

- Bayfield Regional Conservancy
- Bird Dog Field Trial participants
- Boy Scout trip leaders
- Burnett County Resort Owners
- Chippewa Valley Grouse Dog Association
- Elected local officials
- Insect Research International Repository (antweb.org)
- Friends of Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area
- Friends of the Bird Sanctuary
- Hunters & Barrens enthusiasts beyond Wisconsin: Calif., Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, & S. Dakota
- Members of the public with no particular affiliation mentioned
- Nearby property owners, large company manager and small business owners
- North Country Trail Association
- Northwest Field Trial Association
- St. Croix River Association
- Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association
- West Wisconsin Land Trust
- WI Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

Future property planning information will be communicated to the public using email notification (GovDelivery) to share updates posted on the DNR master planning web page. At present there are more than 400 email recipients signed up for Northwest Barrens master planning notifications. Information is available at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/NWBarrens/>

Comments ranged from detailed and specific, to far-reaching and policy-related. Commenters overwhelmingly supported the Preliminary Vision & Goals and the Regional and Property Analysis documents. A couple of people objected to prescribed burning as a management tool. A summary of

public comments is provided below, with recurring themes identified in the categories that were listed on the comment forms and letters received by the department.

- Land management
 - Prescribed burns – would like more of this barrens habitat management tool; more woody plant management, try burning in staggered seasons, and more invasive species control.
 - Habitat diversity and management are spectacular. Many “thank you’s” to DNR staff and to volunteers for outstanding barrens stewardship and collaboration.
 - No rows of monotypic pine trees should occur on these state lands.
 - Oak/pine barrens are vanishing in Minnesota and Wisconsin and they need to be preserved.
 - Provide special protection to the bog on the south parcel of Namekagon Barrens WA.
 - Find ways to connect and expand the globally significant barrens in this region.
 - North Country Trail Association should be added to the list of “Community Partners.”

- Recreation & Access
 - Property parcels favored for: hunting sharp-tailed grouse, ruffed grouse (on the edges), and deer; for dog trialing and exercise, fishing, hiking, bird watching, wildlife watching, blueberry picking, xc skiing, snow-shoeing, landscape (grasslands) painting, and public programs and education.
 - Many commenters indicated they’ve been bird dog field trialing here and training for sharp-tailed grouse hunts since 1980’s.
 - Douglas County WA dog trial area needs better brush control; has recently grown too much for bird dog field trials.
 - Need to address the culvert with poor fish access on Clemens Creek (NBWA).
 - Manage for better trout habitat along 5-mile Creek (Totogatic tributary). (note: requires partnership with Lyme St. Croix Forest Company on adjacent land)
 - Enjoy the well-marked auto tour on Namekagon Barrens WA.
 - Ease of access is good on Namekagon Barrens WA for those with limited mobility.
 - Continue to protect the North Country National Scenic Trail (Douglas County WA).
 - Restrict to “foot only” as much as possible on the Totogatic, to enhance the wilderness experience and protect current resources.
 - Stop the illegal ATVs coming in to Totogatic property.
 - No bear dog hunting should be allowed on the Totogatic.
 - General interest in horse-back riding in the region.
 - Leave Totogatic wild and natural; no campsites, no walk-in river access for water craft; Too much erosion would otherwise occur; should avoid chances of ‘trashing’ the riverway.
 - Would like education stations and wildlife viewing areas designed to enhance public’s experiences. Wildlife Viewing is highly valued tourist attraction in the region.
 - Education programs are good, but minimal; would like more offered.
 - Comments indicate a need for more education programs. Also desire supporting amenities, including small educational visitor center on NBWA, picnic shelters on properties, and marked hiking trails.
 - Many comments and discussions emphasized the rare vast landscape of barrens with scattered wetlands that provides tremendous wildlife species diversity, and that management for this landscape provides abundant hunting, trapping and wildlife viewing opportunities – which are key to the ecotourism that supports the local communities.

- Wildlife Management
 - Rare species and natural areas - continue to monitor and protect.
 - Need increased habitat work to benefit sharp-tailed grouse.
 - Unprecedented sharp-tailed grouse management opportunities.

- **Boundary Modifications**
 - Substantial interest in preserving and expanding ownership of the rare oak/pine barrens habitat, especially in the interest of restoring and maintaining a genetically diverse and sustainable population of sharp-tailed grouse.
 - The north and south units of NBWA should be joined together.
 - Expand the properties project boundaries to obtain more lands for running bird dog field trials and dog training. This is an important economic and recreational benefit to the region. It will require controlled burning, timber removal and habitat management.
 - Several comments and letters emphatically supported the concept of a barrens partnership corridor from Namekagon Barrens north to Moquah Barrens, similar to the Crex-Namekagon Barrens partnership corridor - specifically preservation of the rare barrens ecological community for wildlife species conservation, increased habitat for hunting, tourism and job opportunities. (including request from a Minnesotan returning to these properties since 1978)
 - Expand the Totogatic Wild River boundary along the river corridor to protect it.

Comments received that directly affect property management and infrastructure will be addressed during the master planning process. Comments that are policy related are beyond the scope of this effort, and will be shared within the agency for consideration.

Thank you for your interest in these properties and their future management. We look forward to your continued involvement as you enjoy the natural resources benefits these properties provide.