WISCONSIN
JAN 14 2014
STATE PARKS

Master Plan Variance

Variance: Devils Lake State Park Forest Management

Property Name: Devils Lake State Park

Date the Current Master Plan was Approved: February 25, 1982
(Changes to plans approved after 1996 must follow the requirements of NR 44.04)

Proposed Change to the Master Plan (The specific master plan language changes and any change in land use classification, with revised maps as appropriate):

The following will be added to Section I.2.b of the master plan:

The specific forest management activities described for compartments 16 and 21 and shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3 may be carried out to implement the general forest management activities provided for within the master plan.

Compartment 16
Stand Description, Objective, Management Prescription

Stand 8 is approximately 117 acres (including 72 acres in the Public Use Natural Area, a.k.a "N" land use classification). This stand consists of large sawlog sized (15+inches diameter at breast height) trees which originated around 1935. The majority of the species are red oak, white oak, red maple, sugar maple and aspen. The understory is dominated by central and northern hardwood poletimber and saplings. Prescribed forest management activities consist of a marked thinning to reduce stocking in the stand to allow more sunlight to reach the understory and to promote regeneration of desirable native forest vegetation. Within the stand there are four mature aspen patches ranging in size from 0.33 acres to 2.3 acres, totaling approximately 5 acres. These aspen trees are mature to over-mature. The objective of this management action is to regenerate the aspen using coppice regeneration method.

Stand 9 is approximately 128 acres (119 acres in the Public Use Natural Area). This stand consists of large sawlog sized (15+inches diameter at breast height) trees which originated around 1940. The majority of the species are red oak, white oak, red maple, and shagbark hickory. The understory is dominated by central hardwood and oak poletimber and central hardwood seedlings and saplings. Prescribed forest management activities consist of a marked thinning to reduce stocking in the stand to allow more sunlight to reach the understory and to promote regeneration of desirable native forest vegetation.

Compartment 21
Stand Description, Objective, Management Prescription

Stand 1 is approximately 62 acres (51 acres in the Public Use Natural area. This stand consists of large sawlog sized (15+inches diameter at breast height) trees which originated around 1933. The majority of the species are red oak, red maple, white oak, and sugar maple. The understory is dominated by northern hardwood (primarily sugar maple) sapling and seedlings and other central hardwood seedlings and saplings. Prescribed forest management activities consist of a marked thinning (32 acres) to reduce stocking in the stand to allow more sunlight to reach the understory and to promote regeneration of desirable native forest vegetation. On approximately 19 acres, an overstory removal, with reserves, will retain desirable canopy trees while also releasing advanced regeneration (primarily sugar maple). The better quality trees in this area were removed in the past (under private ownership), leaving poor quality/low vigor trees in the stand.

Stand 2 is approximately 59 acres (16 acres in the Public Use Natural area ("N"). This stand consists of large sawlog sized (15+inches diameter at breast height) trees which originated around 1935. The

majority of the species are red oak, shagbark hickory, white oak, and black cherry. The understory is dominated by central hardwood seedlings and saplings. Prescribed forest management activities consist of a marked thinning to reduce stocking in the stand to allow more sunlight to reach the understory and to promote regeneration of desirable native forest vegetation.

Both Stands 1 and 2 had a total of 50 acres of invasive species control work done in 2012 through a Sustainable Forestry Fund grant. The removal of these species (non-native bush honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, common buckthorn, garlic mustard, and others) will help promote regeneration of native desirable tree species.

These Actions will be Taken to Inform Park Users and Minimize Visual and Biological Impacts:

1. Provide signs, handouts, public meetings and posting to the Park web site to explain the what, where and why of these management activities.
2. Conduct harvesting in late summer through late winter when park usage is low and impacts to biological resources are minimal.
3. Slash will be removed and stumps will be cut low in visually sensitive areas, such as along designated trails. In other areas slash will be flattened or laid flat to promote decomposition. Follow State Parks guidelines for slash and stump management.
4. Timber selection and harvests shall be consistent with the "Guidance for Managing Forest Lands" for the Wisconsin State Park System.
5. To maintain a 50 foot buffer along the Ice Age Trail (IAT), purple vertical paint lines were marked on trees along both sides of the trail. Within this buffer zone, no trees will be harvested during the timber sale.
6. Avoid bedrock glades, ephemeral ponds, and other sensitive biological features for log yards, skid trails, and other associated harvest activities. (The two ephemeral ponds located in and near Compartment 21-1will be identified with flagging ribbon. Harvesting activity in this area will follow Wisconsin's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Field Manual. Reference to the specifics can be viewed in Chapter 8-Wetlands, pages 100-102 (General Wetland BMP's and Wetland Filter Strip BMP's).
7. Special Concern, Threatened, or Endangered Plants and Animals:
   Steps will be taken to protect the Special Concern, Threatened, or Endangered plants and animals for which potential habitat exists in the harvest area. A State threatened plant has been documented in the harvest area in the past, in 1885, but not recently. The habitat this plant is typically found in is calcareous fens and moist prairies, which may be located outside of the harvest area (open fields). These fields will have specific limited areas utilized as log landings. If the plant is found, protection is addressed by avoidance. Additional protection is provided by requiring dry or frozen ground conditions.

Archeological, Historical, Cultural Resources:
No Archeological, Historical or Cultural Concerns.

Figure 1. Devil's Lake State Park Variance Location

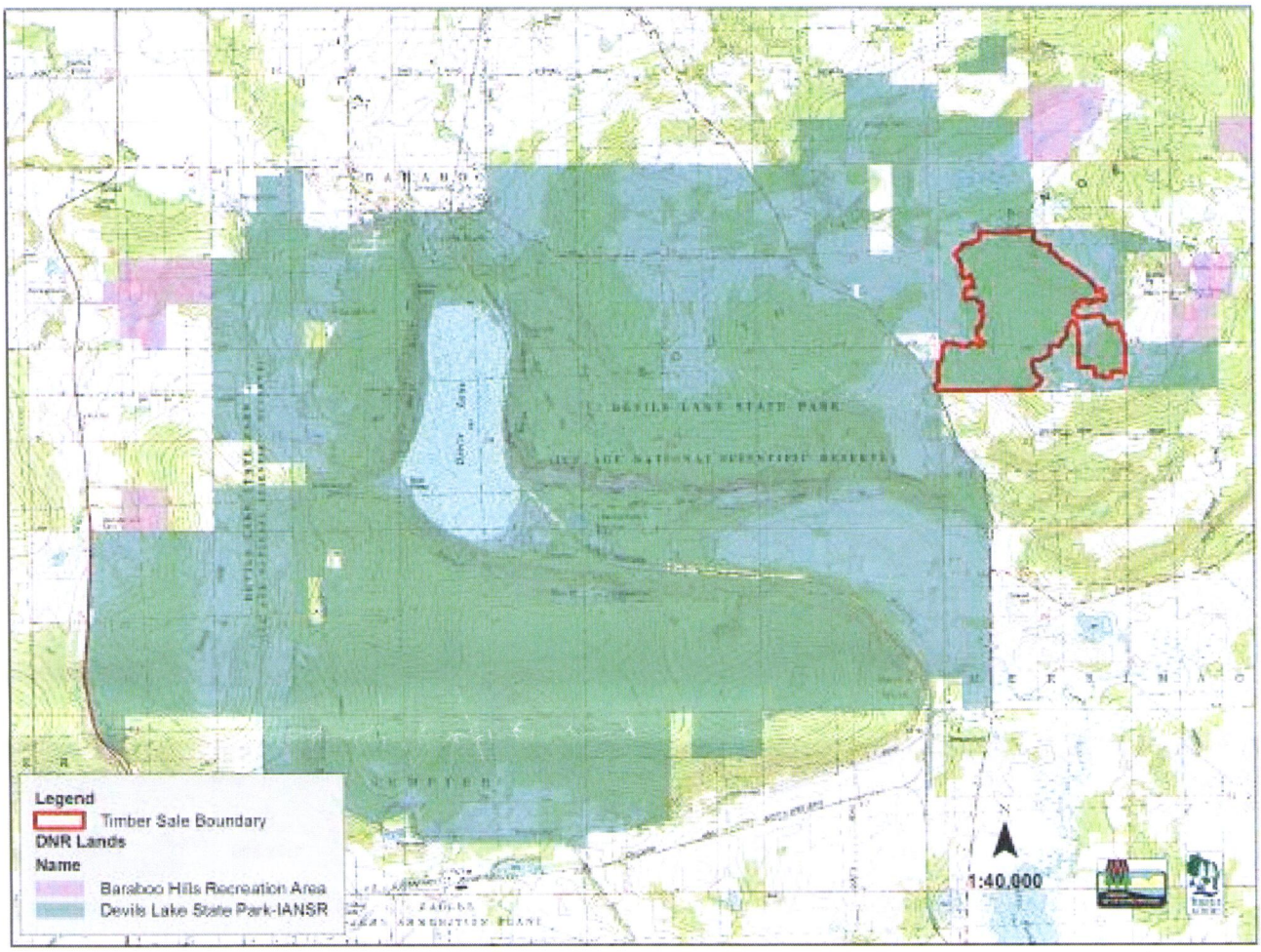


Figure 2. Devil's Lake State Park Forestry Stands and Proposed Timber Sale

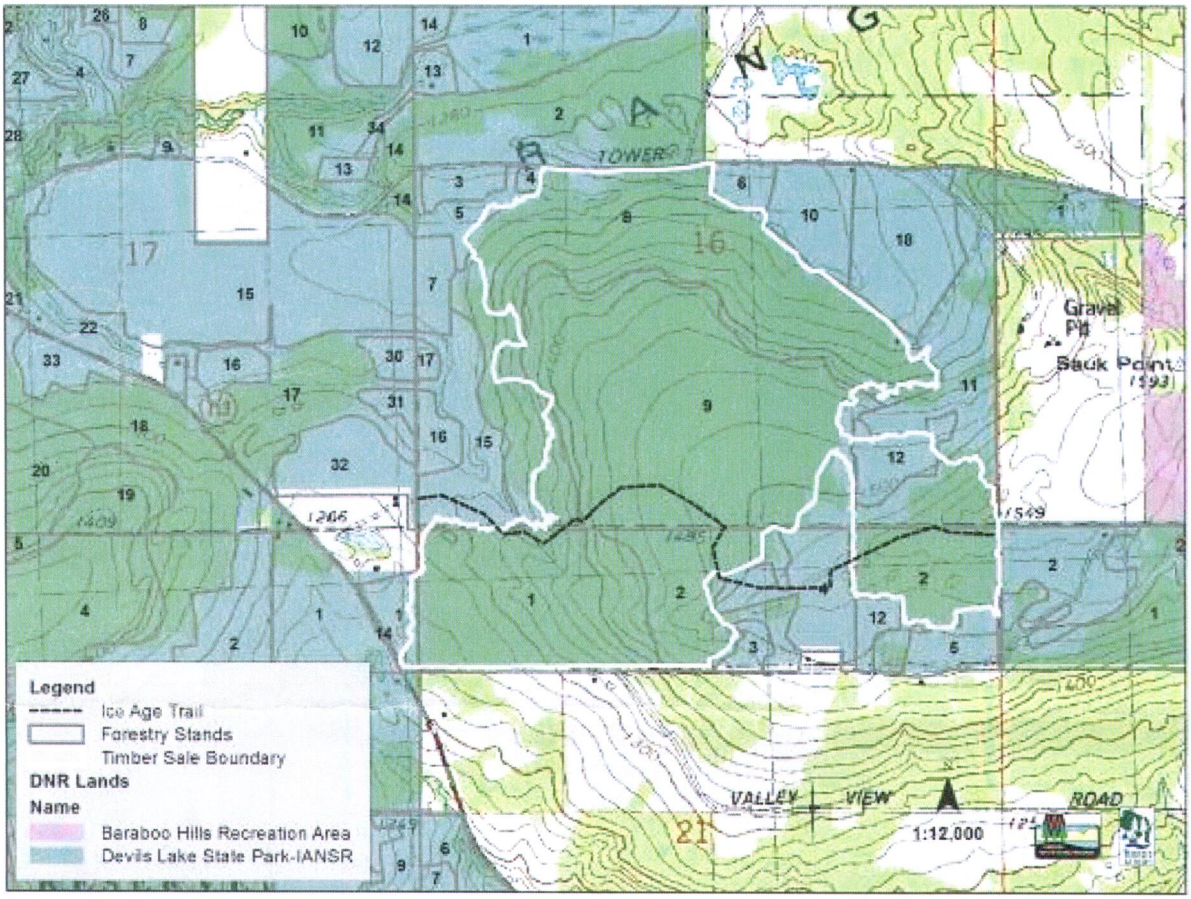
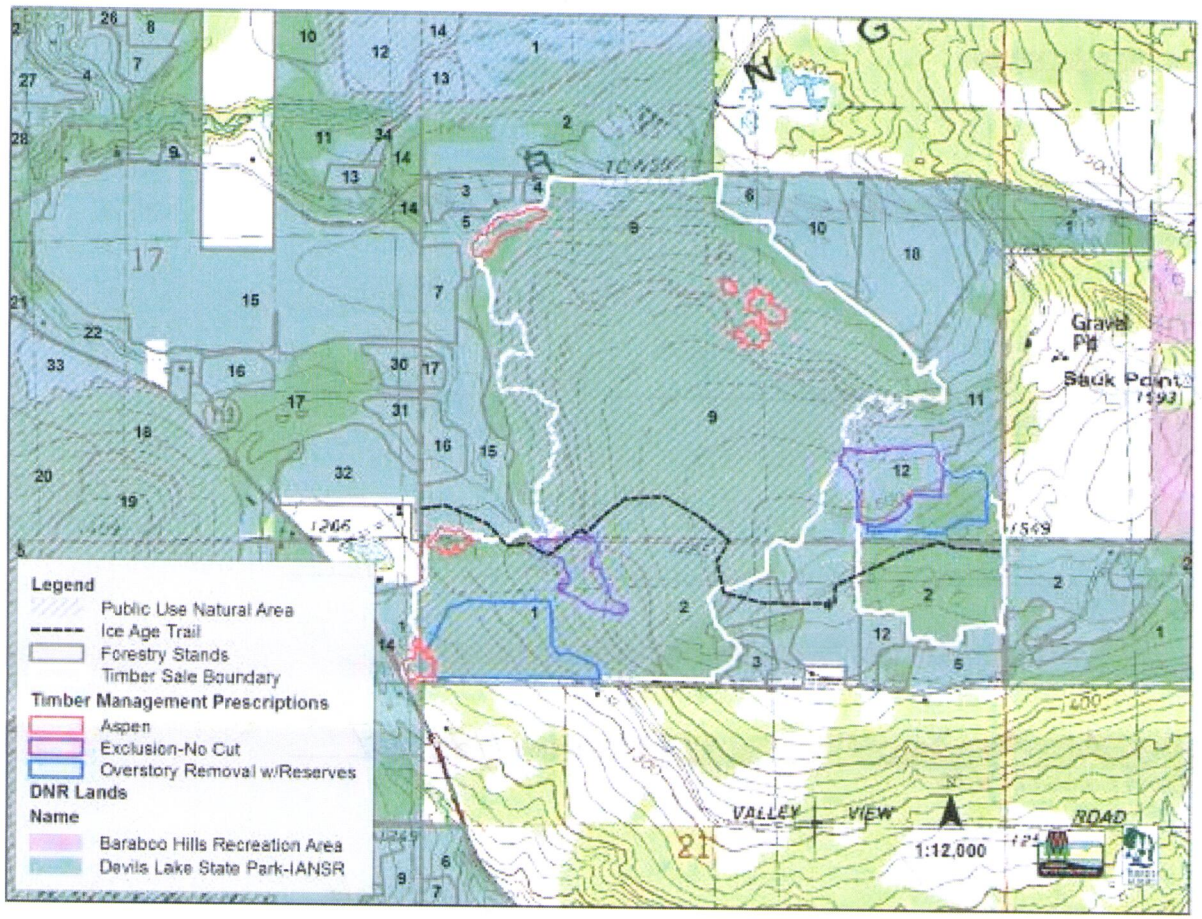


Figure 3. Devil's Lake State Park Proposed Timber Sale Management Prescriptions and Public Use Natural Area



Variance/Amendment Initiator or Author: Steve Schmelzer

Job Title: Park Superintendent-Devil's Lake State Park

Supporting Approvals

Date: 1/6/14
Property Manager

Date: 1-10-14
Park District Manager

Date: 1/14/14
State Park Ecologist

Date: 1/29/14
Program Bureau Director

Date: 2/21/14
Lands Division Administrator

Supporting Information

Purpose and need for the plan change (include background and history as appropriate):
The 1982 Master Plan for Devils Lake State Park restricts forest management to lands classified as Extensive Recreation Area, where aesthetics perpetuation or conversion of forest stand management can be carried out and educational programs can be implemented. Vegetative management to control insects and diseases and to provide for public safety may be allowed. In lands classified as Public Use Natural Areas timber harvesting is generally prohibited, but salvage following extensive natural disaster may be permitted. This proposed plan variance identifies specific actions to be taken prior to the revision of the master plan.

Since 1982, no significant forest management activities have occurred in the park.

- The oak and northern and central hardwood stands are maturing and are overstocked with areas of young regeneration in the understory. It would be beneficial to create more diversity in age classes to promote a healthy forested community.

  The aspen stands are starting to deteriorate from age. It is beneficial to keep this forest cover type within the park for habitat diversity. The best way to regenerate aspen is to use the coppice regeneration method, which may not be successful if cutting is delay

How the proposed plan change is supported by or is inconsistent with the property vision, goals, and objectives or other plan provisions:

Section I.2.b of the current Devils Lake State Park Master Plan states:

Vegetation
One of the stated objectives for Devil's Lake is to "wherever possible, return the flora and fauna of the park to presettlement conditions." It is not an objective for Devil's Lake State Park to maximize timber production. Consistent with the Wild Resources Policy, timber harvest and harvest and habitat manipulation will not be carried out in areas designated as "natural" areas, or scientific areas.

The predominant vegetative cover in most of the park is oak which is a subclimax type. Without management, those portions of this type are on better sites such as coves or northern or eastern exposures, will eventually succeed to more shade tolerant species such as sugar maple, basswood, red maple, red oak, slippery elm, white ash, hickory, etc.
Aspen stands occurring in the Extensive Recreation Areas will be managed to continue aspen regeneration. This will provide winter and spring food sources for many species of wildlife and scenic diversity within the park.

Anticipated primary benefits of the proposed plan change:
The primary benefit is the long term management plan that is being developed for forest management to maintain and promote desirable trees (i.e., oak, maple, and aspen) and keeping the desired visual aesthetics.

Additional anticipated benefits:
Another benefit may be the educational possibilities, demonstrating to park visitors how good forest management practices can promote a healthy and aesthetically pleasing forest.

Unavoidable adverse impacts:
There may be some short term land scarring from harvesting. Negative aesthetic impacts will be minimized and mitigated by closely following aesthetic management guidelines.

Summary of any alternatives considered:
No action will allow the forest to age with the unavoidable consequences of slowed growth and tree losses with little new regeneration of desirable species occurring. This may allow the more invasive species to increase in population and spread. This may also increase the susceptibility of the stand to insect and disease concerns.

Compatibility with statutes, codes, and department policies:
Forestry management is supported by the Bureau of Parks and other department policies. The limiting factor at this time is the Master Plan for Devils Lake State Park. The proposed management will not set a new precedent, as similar forest management activities have and are occurring on other state parks. The prescribed forest management practices are designed to perpetuate existing cover types and will not preclude other management options that may be considered for these areas in the upcoming Master Planning process.

Federal aid limitations: Devils Lake State Park received Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON) dollars in the 1960s. The proposed action is fully compatible.

Summary of Public Review and Comments:
The draft variance was posted to the Devil's Lake State Park home page at: http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/devilslake/ from December 20, 2013 – January 6, 2014. A presentation was given to the Devil's Lake State Park Friends Group and letters were sent to adjacent landowners. No written comments were received about the variance.

Attachment A

Wisconsin State Park System
Guidance for Managing Forest Lands

Background

Wisconsin's forested lands are some of our state's most valuable resources, prized by visitors and citizens alike. People come to these special places for moments of quiet reflection or simply to be in the great outdoors. They pursue recreational opportunities ranging from biking and hiking to camping, wildlife watching, and cross country skiing.

Scenic beauty — or "visual quality" — is one of the primary reasons people choose to spend their recreation and vacation time in or near forested areas and within Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) properties. They are also attracted by the serenity and solitude of the outdoors.
Forested landscapes inspire spiritual and emotional connections resulting in deeply personal experiences for many people.

Protecting and enhancing this sensory experience is a priority for those entrusted with managing WSPS properties. In addition, management must work to sustain healthy communities that provide economic, social, and ecological benefits, now and for future generations. This careful oversight of our natural resources is a cornerstone of the WSPS mission.

This document provides guidance related to the management of WSPS forested lands, including desired outcomes that will preserve the value of these resources for millions of WSPS visitors, into the future.

Opportunities for Management

Forested lands on WSPS properties include a wide variety of natural community types, as well as altered landscapes. These various types of forests allow for different types of management activities that should be determined through careful planning (including property master plans and resource management plans) and consultation with foresters, wildlife managers, and other resource experts. All management actions must be consistent with the ecological capability of the landscape, optimize forest health and maintain or enhance the recreational, aesthetic, and other social aspects of the property.

Forest management activities may be undertaken to accomplish a variety of objectives on a property. Forests altered by human activities like fire suppression, development, or removal of hazard trees may be managed to restore the lands to a natural condition. Landscapes disturbed by natural phenomena such as tornadoes, fires, pests, or disease may be managed by allowing recovery to occur naturally. In cases where visitor safety or park developments are threatened, more active management efforts may be necessary. And, forests affected by exotic species or nuisance wildlife may be restored through more intensive management activities.

Just as forested lands reflect a diversity of habitats, so, too, forest management encompasses many different approaches. In some cases, management activities are virtually undetectable to property visitors. In others, timber sales are obvious, at least in the short-term. Over time, as these landscapes regenerate, the scenic beauty is restored and the benefits of management become much more apparent. In all cases, management must be conducted with both the forest resource and the visitors in mind.

Visual Quality Management
Property visitors place an extremely high value on the aesthetics and scenic beauty of forested lands. Thus, visual quality is one important aspect of integrated forest management. Visual quality management can:

- Enhance the aesthetic value of forested lands for recreational users, contributing to a healthy tourism economy.
- Encourage public acceptance of forest management and timber harvesting, thereby building support for Wisconsin's forest industries.
- Minimize visual and audible impacts of forest management activities including perceived size of harvest areas, presence of logging slash, timber harvest landing operations, road building, site preparation, and herbicide treatment.
- Promote more natural-appearing forest stands.
- Provide opportunities to educate property visitors about forest management practices, benefits of sustainable forestry, and other related concepts.

Within any property, different forested landscapes have varying levels of visual sensitivity that are determined by factors including:

- Perceived degree of sensitivity to landscape aesthetics of users of that travel route,
- Volume and type of use the travel route or recreation area receives, and
- Speed of travel within the route or area.
- Terrain/topography

Based on these factors, the WSPS identifies three levels of visual sensitivity to be applied to forested lands. The definitions of these various levels of sensitivity will assist the property manager and forester in development of prescriptions specific to each site being managed.
Language insuring proper completion and compliance with aesthetics practices should be included in timber sale and silvicultural activities contracts.

☐ **Most Sensitive**
Applies to travel routes and use areas where **significant public use occurs** and where **visual quality is of high concern** to typical users.
Examples of such areas may include picnic areas, campgrounds, nature study areas, local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, designated trails and surrounding viewshed and other areas that provide a high level of scenic quality.

☐ **Moderately Sensitive**
Applies to travel routes or recreation areas, not identified as "most sensitive," **where visual quality is of moderate concern** to typical users. These types of areas provide **moderate to high scenic quality but less significant public use.**
Examples of these areas may include public highways and local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, and areas receiving a moderate amount of public use outside designated use areas.

- **Less Sensitive**
  Applies to travel routes, recreation areas or all other lands, not identified as "most sensitive" or "moderately sensitive," **where visual quality is of less concern to typical users**.
  Examples of these areas may include remote local roads and low-volume local forest roads, areas removed from designated use areas with limited access, and remote areas receiving minimal public use.

By attempting to manage visual quality of forested lands based on these categories and following the Forest Management Guidelines, Timber Sale Handbook and Aesthetic chapter of the Silviculture Handbook, property managers can minimize visitor disruption and maintain or enhance scenic resources.

Overall Management Priorities
Sustaining healthy forests is a vital role of WSPS properties, and the key to sustaining healthy forests is pro-active management. To ensure that management practices are consistent with the goals and objectives of the WSPS, several management priorities have been established but may vary depending on site characteristics:

- Aesthetics: Protect scenic views and allow forest cover to provide settings for solitude and privacy.
- Recreation: Sustain large canopy cover and shade in picnic areas, campgrounds, along nature trails and high use areas.
- Habitat: Provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and plants, including endangered and threatened species.
- Forest Health: Allow for regeneration of the forest through quality forest management and seek opportunities that enhance or maintain the overall health and vigor of the forest ecosystem.
- Pest management: Manage invasive plant and animal species, pests, diseases, and nuisance wildlife through prevention, control, and eradication activities.
- Education and research: Provide opportunities for interpretation, education, and scientific research.
- Water quality: Sustain and enhance local watersheds and water resources including erosion control along waterways, trails, and other property features.

The Wisconsin State Park System has created these priorities for forest management experts to utilize when preparing forest management plans for WSPS properties. These priorities take into consideration both visitor demands and the need for sustaining high quality, healthy forests. Of course, site capabilities help define sustainable forestry practices. Each particular growing space has its own set of environmental conditions affecting tree growth. To achieve long-term health and vitality of forests, factors like soil type, aspect, and climate that influence moisture and nutrient supplies must be considered. The art and science of sustainable forestry blends program priorities with site capabilities to adapt high quality forest management systems.

Desired Outcomes
By considering these overall priorities and managing for visual quality, property managers and resource professionals can prepare property and/or site specific forest management prescriptions that will create desirable outcomes for the WSPS. These desired outcomes include:

- Maintenance and/or enhancement of visually acceptable and functional forest cover for areas within easy view of WSPS users, particularly in picnic areas and campgrounds, along waterways and trails, and next to park roads and scenic outlooks.

- Use of appropriate forest management techniques to prevent or minimize damage from pests, disease, and nuisance wildlife.

- Planning of approved timber harvests to maintain visual quality in high and moderate use areas; require buffers between harvest areas and designated use areas, roads, and trails; and require immediate attention to negligent harvest practices. Consider contract language that includes specifications for waste, stump heights, forest fire prevention, slash management, sale area use and cleanup, and best management practices.

- Restoration of natural forest communities where practical.

- Development of areas for education and interpretation on topics such as forest protection and management.