



*Carolyn Rumery Betz*

# GET HOOKED!

## CASTING INTO THE FUTURE OF THE DRIFTLESS AREA.

**T**he Driftless Area — that wondrous southwest part of the state left unscathed by the latest glaciation that affected most of Wisconsin — conjures up images of steep hillsides and narrow valleys, rocky outcrops and hundreds of streams. Anglers flock to the Driftless Area to cast a fly in search of the big one. The region has the highest concentration of trout waters in the Midwest.

The Department of Natural Resources owns thousands of acres of land in the Driftless Area that provide access to anglers fishing for brook trout, brown trout and smallmouth bass. The properties are spread over 23 counties and most are in narrow strips along hundreds of streams. The Department of Natural Resources owns some of these properties outright and holds easements on others.

The agency is in the process of updating its management and acquisition goals for all of these properties in one overall master plan. The plan will describe the agency's land holdings and how they are currently managed. It will also present alternative options for future land acquisition to enhance recreational opportuni-



Angling opportunities are an important part of the economy in southwest Wisconsin.

MATTHEW MITRO



A DNR fish crew uses backpack shockers to survey fish populations in Timber Coulee, Vernon County.

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Long-term increases in air and water temperatures may lead to an increase in the prevalence of brown trout and a decrease in brook trout populations.

DNR FILE

ties. Access to waters is key to a positive fishing experience.

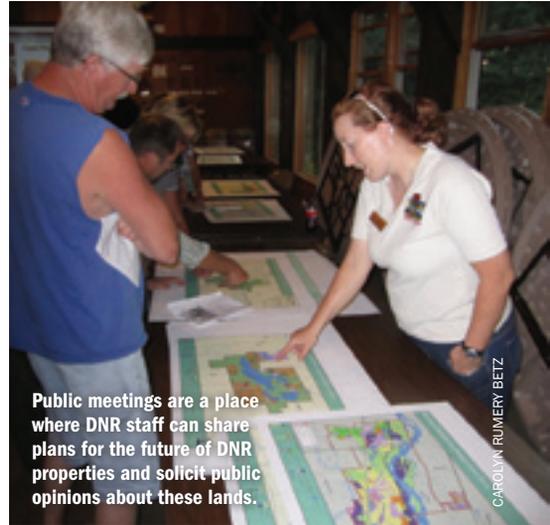
“This plan will be different from other master planning efforts because there are so many parcels involved,” says DNR biologist John Pohlman, one of the team leaders for the planning effort.

The plan will lay out the department’s future management of fishing lands as well as where efforts to provide additional public access to streams should be focused. The public is encouraged to weigh in on the various options.

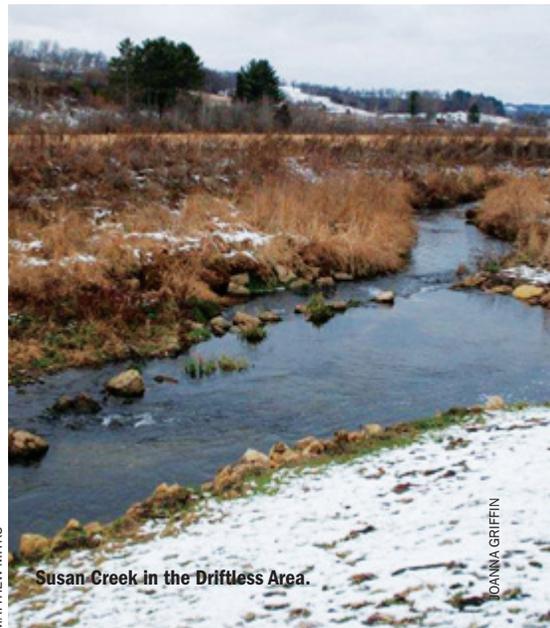
“As part of the planning process, we need to learn what people are concerned about,” Pohlman says. “For example, where is there demand for better public



A DNR fish crew uses backpack shockers to survey fish populations in Elk Creek in Richland and Vernon Counties.



Public meetings are a place where DNR staff can share plans for the future of DNR properties and solicit public opinions about these lands.



Susan Creek in the Driftless Area.

access to streams, or where should we focus in-stream habitat work? We'll incorporate those ideas into our draft plan."

The project is also unique because of its specific focus on fisheries. Long-term planning for fish management is challenging because the environment is constantly changing, from how land is used to long-term changes in the climate.

Urbanization may decrease the quality of the fisheries when water runs off parking lots, driveways and rooftops instead of sinking into the ground and replenishing the groundwater supply. Runoff water from impervious surfaces may be warmer than what coldwater fish can tolerate. Soil erosion can deposit sediment on the stream bed and degrade habitat.

Wisconsin's changing climate will

also be taken into consideration when developing the fisheries-focused plan. Warmer air temperatures will increase water temperatures, according to DNR

research biologists Matthew Mitro and John Lyons, and long-term drought may reduce cool, groundwater flow into coldwater streams.

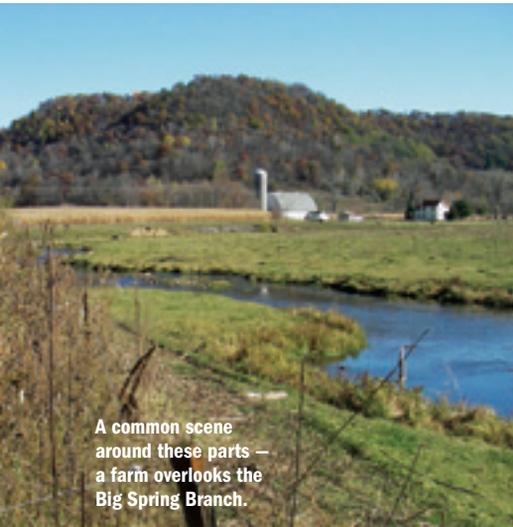
## WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

**Because the properties are so diverse and expansive, the Department of Natural Resources is asking for input from citizens, property owners, anglers and recreational groups to assure that multiple viewpoints are heard during the planning process and are incorporated into the final plan.**

**In 2013, the agency will host open house meetings in various communities within the 23-county region. Participants will see how the land areas are currently being managed and will be asked to share their views about the future.**

**The dates and locations of these public meetings will be posted on the DNR website, [dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/DriftlessStreams/](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/DriftlessStreams/)**

**The website also has a link to sign up to receive occasional newsletters and updates on the planning process. If you don't have access to the Internet, you can call (608) 266-2698, or write to the DNR Driftless Area Master Plan, P.O. Box 7921, LF/6, Madison, WI 53707-7921.**



A common scene around these parts — a farm overlooks the Big Spring Branch.

MATTHEW MITRO

Brook trout will be the most vulnerable to these changes because they can endure only a narrow temperature range to thrive and reproduce. In some cases, streams dominated by brook trout may shift to become brown trout streams or even smallmouth bass waters by the mid-21st century. Different fish species require different management practices.

The master plan will present some of the strategies that can be used to adapt to changing environmental conditions. These include land management practices on DNR properties such as planting tall grasses or trees to provide shade to cool surface waters.

Depending on public input and ideas, the Department of Natural Resources may propose acquiring more land to improve fish habitat, enhance ecological objectives and improve recreational uses. The agency only purchases land or easements from willing sellers and would offer a fair market value for the parcel or easement. The Department of Natural Resources pays the property taxes on land they acquire.

“We’re looking forward to working with residents, the angling community, and partners like Trout Unlimited and local rod and gun clubs to help us plan for the future,” says DNR fish specialist Paul Cunningham, who co-leads the project. “We all need to team up to keep one of the most unique areas of Wisconsin a place where we’ll continue to love to fish.”



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## DRIFTLESS AREA STREAMS



MAPS CREATED BY DNR

## FISHING LANDS ADD GREAT ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The glaciers didn’t just miss the southwestern portion of Wisconsin; they also bypassed northwestern Illinois, northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota.

Recreational trout fishing in the four-state Driftless Area is a billion-dollar industry. A study commissioned by Trout Unlimited in 2008 showed that these four states and their federal and private partners invested about \$45 million to restoring more than 450 miles of streams in the area. The region brings in an additional \$24.50 for each dollar spent on stream restoration when anglers eat, sleep and fish in the area.

In 2011, tourism brought in \$28.8 million to Vernon County alone and provided 469 jobs, according to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

“Ecotourism is an important part of our economy,” says Susan Noble, executive director of the Vernon Economic Development Association. “Folks travel to our region from across the United States to access the trout streams in our Coon Creek and Timber Coulee watersheds. We even have a business in downtown Viroqua that focuses exclusively on fly-fishing supplies and guiding services.”



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