

# 2015 Work Plan

## Black River State Forest

As a requirement of forest certification state forests are required to annually provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on property activities. The Black River State Forest utilizes an online format including a synopsis of the property's major work plan goals. Annual work goals are directly tied to the property's master plan, which was accepted by the Natural Resources Board in January of 2010. The master plan can be accessed online at

[http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/documents/MP\\_BRSF\\_2010.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/documents/MP_BRSF_2010.pdf)

The work plan is divided into sections on land management, development projects, recreation operations, and real estate management. Other than recreation operations all actions taken by the property are directly authorized under the property's master plan. Recreation operations are partially tied to the master plan but also a function of budget and creating management efficiencies.

An important factor affecting the 2015 work plan is the high level of vacancies at the state forest and in other DNR support staff. At the time of this plan only two of the five permanent full time staff positions are filled. In addition key support staff including the state natural area crew, experienced a 100% turnover in 2014.

### **Forest Management:**

Forestry is one of the largest contributors to the state economy accounting for 22.6 billion dollars annually. The Black River State forest meets the highest standards for environmental quality in its forest practices being dually certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Twice each year the state forest sells tracts of timber to loggers through a competitive bidding process. Each bid opening averages 6-7 sales totaling 500-700 acres. In 2014 \$1,164,149 in timber was sold on the Black River State Forest. Timber sale revenues are deposited into the state forestry account.

State forest timber sales are a combination of thinnings and regeneration cuts. A thinning is an intermediate treatment where trees of poorer vigor and form are removed to favor higher quality future crop trees. A stand may be thinned once to several times before the final cut when it is regenerated. A regeneration cut removes the majority of the overstory trees at one time. These sites are assessed for regeneration needs at periodic cycles after the harvest is complete. If adequate natural regeneration is not present, then sites are planted or seeded to an acceptable level.

For 2015 the following forest management activities are planned:

1. Timber sales – Twenty five stands comprising 1173 acres will be reviewed for harvesting potential. These areas are shown in the proposed timber sale map provided with this document. If you wish to comment on any stand please include the compartment and stand number. A description of how to identify compartment and stand numbers is available after the map.
2. Forest Reconnaissance – On a 20 year cycle the state forest collects information on forest type, tree density, age, and site quality from every stand on the property. This information is used to schedule forest practices such as thinning and regeneration cuts. In 2015 the state forest will update stand information on at least 5% of the entire property.
3. Forest Regeneration – Two stands totaling 76 acres will be planted to Jack pine. Both sites are located within the Jack pine habitat management area. Three stands within the Morrison and Levis Creek Basins Forest Production Area totaling 104 acres will be seeded to Jack pine.

Two stands will receive site preparation work. The first is an 81 acre Jack pine stand that will be treated for buckthorn prior to its being planted in 2016 back to Jack pine. The second is a 44 acre Jack pine stand that will be pre-sale scarified to promote natural Jack pine regeneration.

4. Timber Stand Improvement – One 34 acre oak stand will need chemical release prior to its regeneration cut, and one 138 acre Jack pine plantation will need chemical release to reduce competition from scrub oak and hazel brush. Limited pruning may occur in white pine stands through the work crew provided by the minimum security corrections camp located within the state forest.
5. Highway borrow pit remediation – The state forest has plans to remediate an old 20 acre borrow pit that was likely created as part of the interstate 94 construction. This area has never recovered from having all of its topsoil and organic matter removed years ago. A long portion of right of way is being cleared in the state forest as part of a gas pipeline project. The chipped waste wood from a portion of this project will be hauled onto this site and allowed to decompose to hopefully improve the soil conditions and allow for the site to be eventually re-vegetated.

### **Invasive Species Management:**

Invasive species pose a serious threat to the integrity of forest ecosystems by displacing native species and negatively impacting forest regeneration. Invasives are estimated to cost 125-140 billion dollars a year to U.S. taxpayers. The state forest recently completed an invasive species plan that outlines management strategies. Techniques used to control invasives include a combination of herbicide use, hand weeding, and the use of biological

controls such as Larinus beetles to infest spotted knapweed populations. The state forest specific goals for 2015 include:

1. Practice best management practices to prevent the spread of invasive species <http://www.wisconsinforestry.org/initiatives/other/invasive-species-bmps/overview>
2. Control garlic mustard populations along the Black River through the use of a private contractor. This is an ongoing project to limit the spread along the river and contain it within the floodplain.
3. Control invasive species in timber sales before and after timber operations. This will be accomplished primarily through contracting with private vendors. An 81 acre Jack pine, referenced above in the forest management section will be treated for buckthorn prior to its 2016 planting.
4. Control invasive species in high quality native communities.
5. Monitor sites where invasives are most likely to be introduced. Priorities for this year will include Phragmites and road right of ways, as they serve as a primary vector for species such as wild parsnip and yellow toadflax.
6. Aggressively control any newly detected species considered a critical threat to forest health. Controlling any newly detected phragmites populations will be a high priority.
7. Work with interested groups to monitor the Black River for aquatic invasive species. While control may not be feasible at this point, the property would like to track the spread of species of concern. Also work with Jackson County Forestry and Parks and the Ho-Chunk Nation to contain the spread of invasives across boundaries and share detection and distribution information. This may involve joining the local Cooperative Weed Management Area organization if or when it is revitalized.
8. Monitoring for signs of disease or insect damage on invasive plants, especially buckthorn.

### **Barrens and Karner Blue Butterfly Management:**

Barrens are a globally imperiled ecosystem with Wisconsin, including the state forest, having some of the best potential areas for their restoration. The Black River State Forest currently receives funding for barrens management through a Turkey Stamp Grant. This funding will be used to maintain a semi-open barrens habitat through selective fecon mowing of high quality sites.

In 2014 the state forest received a hazard mitigation grant that has been used to reduce fuel loads and create a large firebreak in an area close to a new housing development area. These improvements will make prescribed fire a more realistic option in this area in the future.

The state forest is also a recovery property for the federally endangered Karner Blue Butterfly. The property has been given a goal of attaining a population of 3,000 butterflies on an annual basis every year for five years. Barrens management provides valuable habitat for the Karner Blue and a host of other endangered and special concern species. In 2015 the state forest will focus on meeting the following goals to improve barrens habitat and maintain a viable Karner Blue Butterfly population:

1. Attempt to conduct a prescribed burn in at least one high quality barrens location in the Sand Pillow barrens area. The crew that performs this work had a 100% turnover in 2014 so we are not certain at this time if this project will be feasible.
2. Use a fecon mower to open up the understory of quality barrens areas and to create better connectivity between barrens sites. This will be focused primarily south of Palm road, north of Sand Pillow road, and Dike 17. The work south of Palm road will serve a dual purpose of fire hazard mitigation.
3. Control spotted knapweed at key barrens restoration sites.

### **Wildlife Management:**

The state forest's wildlife management program is primarily focused on the Dike 17 habitat management area, flowage management, research, and population surveys. The following are the main objectives for 2015:

1. Surveys – Wildlife staff will conduct annual surveys for black bear, wolves, deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, eagles, osprey, waterfowl, furbearers, and amphibians.
2. Land management – All flowage dikes will be mowed to keep them clear of trees and brush. Additional control efforts will be conducted on black locust on the Dike 17 Wildlife Area through mechanical mowing and spot treatment with herbicides (Transline or Milestone). Access roads will be mowed and maintained leading into the fields at Battle Point, Wilson Flowage, Whitetail Flowage, Big and Little Bear Flowages, Tanner and Partridge Crop Flowage. All parking lots will be mowed and property signs will be replaced as needed. Fecon mowing and herbicide treatments may be used to remove brush on the Dike 17 Wildlife Area. Prescribed burn plans will be prepared for Dike 17 and burns may be conducted if appropriate weather conditions exist and resources are available. Wild rice will be planted on several flowages within the Dike 17 WA in an attempt to restore the

species. Logging trails and log landings will be reseeded post-harvest with a native seed blend that will benefit wildlife.

3. Research – Wolf research trapping will be conducted in an effort to radio collar and monitor the wolf packs surrounding Dike 17. All elk released as part of the reintroduction will be radio collared and monitored to evaluate project success.
4. Elk - In December of 2012 the Natural Resources Board approved amendments to the Black River Elk Management Plan. The plan calls for the introduction of up to 75 elk to the Black River Elk Range (BRER). The Department has identified a source of wild elk in the state of Kentucky and legislative changes have been passed in 2013 that will allow the importation of elk into Wisconsin. In anticipation of the elk arriving in March 2015, the Department is constructing a holding facility on the Black River State Forest that will be completed in late February. The elk will be held in the facility for up to 75 days and will likely be released in June 2015. The Department may also conduct habitat management projects focused on barrens and opening management that would benefit elk, including tree/brush removal, herbicide application, prescribed burning, and field plantings.

### **Development Projects:**

After a couple of busier years in terms of development projects 2015 will see considerably less development work with the exception of the ATV trails.

1. ATV Trails Wetland Crossing Upgrades – In the Spring of 2015 the state forest will complete the ATV trail wetland crossings on the Pray connector. Once the Pray connector is finished we will focus on upgrading the Wildcat loop wetland crossings. Improving this section of trail is expected to take two seasons of work and be complete by the Fall of 2016. These upgrades will protect the long term integrity of the trail system and minimize weather related closures. These projects may result in some short term trail closures, however we will limit these to weekdays only with all trails being accessible from Friday noon through Sunday.
2. Weber Road Improvement Projects – In 2015 the state forest will complete the Weber Flowage road project including shaping and adding gravel material. This road is important both from a logging and a recreational, primarily hunting standpoint.
3. Castle Mound Toilet Shower Building – This project is in the design stage and will be bid out in 2015 with an expected completion date of Spring 2016. This project will replace an undersized, poorly sited toilet shower building that is in need of various repairs.

### **Property and Recreational Operations:**

2015 will see some minor changes to the property's operations.

1. Improvements to outdoor Group Camp – The new outdoor group camp was very successful in its first two seasons being reserved almost every weekend through October. Some minor improvements were completed in 2014. In 2015 we will add a small gravel parking area to this facility. We will also submit a capital development project request to construct a shelter. This will meet the number one request we receive from our visitors. The shelter will be open on all four sides and feature log construction.
2. Trail signing improvements – In 2014 a signage improvement project was initiated for the Overmeyer Hills trail system, this included the replacement of all of the “you are here” signs. The state forest is planning on continuing this work in 2015 focusing on replacing and/or repainting directional signage, focusing first on the Smrekar portion of the trails.

### **Real Estate Management:**

1. Land Acquisition –The Black River State forest acquired one new 96 acre parcel in 2014. Three additional parcels totaling 148 acres are being appraised for potential purchase for 2015.

The state forest will continue to purchase real estate from willing sellers at the fair market price. However, any potential purchase must meet a series of stringent criteria to assure that limited acquisition dollars are spent on the best parcels for conservation.

2. Pipeline Easement – An easement has been signed by the Department of Natural Resources with We Energies to allow a natural gas pipeline to run through the state forest, utilizing primarily right of way corridors. The route of the pipeline is shown in appendix A. The pipeline will impact approximately 34 acres. As part of this project some habitat work that may potentially improve conditions for barrens species will occur. Clearing for this project will occur in the winter of 2015 with construction of the pipeline occurring during the summer months. This project should have zero to minimal impact on the recreating public.
3. Power line corridor – The state forest is still under consideration as a route for a new power line corridor. This corridor would run along Interstate 94 and impact a small portion of the state forest adjacent to the interstate corridor. It is not known at the time of this plan if this route will be chosen or a different one that will not utilize the state forest.

## **Partnership Work:**

The state forest works with numerous partners every year to meet mutual goals. Several of these have already been discussed in other more appropriate sections of the work plan. The following are additional partnership events the state forest will participate in during 2015.

1. Cultural Resource Protection – Each year the state forest provides a map of planned timber sales to the Cultural Resources staff of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Preservation staff are provided the opportunity to comment on any sale that could adversely impact important cultural resources.
2. Friends Group – The Black River Forest Trail Foundation is the officially recognized Friends group to the state forest. Each year they plan and provide a candlelight ski event on the first Saturday night in February. This event draws 250-300 users when conditions are favorable. The Friends group recently lost their 501C3 status and are in the process of discussing their future as an organization.
3. Fort McCoy – The state forest is working with the Military to renew the agreement that allows for Fort McCoy to make limited use of the state forest for specific training exercises. The current agreement expires in June of 2015
4. Jackson County Correctional Center – In 2014 the correctional center within the state forest ended its challenge academy program for younger offenders and changed their designation to a minimum security facility. This change resulted in fewer crews being available to the state forest. Instead of receiving a crew to conduct state forest operations four days a week the property now receives five crew days every three week period. This is a 60% reduction in the amount of services provided to the state forest.
5. Nature Conservancy & Barrens Restoration – Adequate staffing is often a limiting factor in planning for prescribed burning. The state forest has formed a relationship with the Conservancy to address this issue. The Nature Conservancy has available staffing to provide assistance with prescribed burns on high quality barrens areas.
6. Snowmobile grooming and maintenance – The state forest conveyed all snowmobile trail responsibilities to Jackson County starting the winter of 2011. This arrangement has freed up state forest staff to work on other priorities. This relationship will continue in 2015.

**Appendix A** Natural Gas Pipeline Easement



**Comments:**

Comments on the 2015 Black River State Forest Work Plan should be directed to:

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**Comments must be received by March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015**