

## **Wisconsin DNR Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest and Willow Flowage Proposed Master Plan Amendments – 2013**

The Department of Natural Resources is seeking public comment on two proposed master plan amendments, one on the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest (NHAL) in Vilas and Oneida County and one on the Willow Flowage, in Oneida County.

In May of 2013, an effort was initiated to reach out to public and partners through a planning process to engage and seek initial comments on 1. land management and recreation opportunities on parcels acquired since the approval of the 2005 NHAL master plan and 2. camping opportunities on the Rainbow Flowage unit acquired at the completion of the 2005 NHAL master plan and 3. motorized access on the Willow Flowage.

Considering public feedback, assessment documents and considering ecological, economic and social impacts, the Department has developed a specific proposal for review and comment that reflects and balances the range of interests.

### Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest Proposed Amendment Highlights

The NHAL amendment proposes future use and management for five parcel blocks acquired since the approval of the 2005 NHAL Master Plan and codifies current management of two existing State Natural Areas located within the 2005 Master Plan boundary area. All seven parcels are located within Vilas County and total 4,100 acres.

The proposed amendment places the blocks into existing land management classifications and associated management objectives identified in the 2005 Master Plan. Four blocks, totaling 2,660 acres, will be managed under a forest production classification in the Winegar Moraines Area and one block will be managed under a Native Community classification in the Hemlock Hardwood Area. The two existing State Natural Areas will be managed as they are today, and are only included in this amendment as they fall within the 2005 adjusted NHAL project boundary. One of the 7 blocks, the Ontonagon block, was identified as having characteristics that meet the needs of a statewide deer research project linked with the Kroll report with a goal to, "...increase our understanding of forest management and white-tailed deer health." This block proposes using a good portion of the area for deer research purposes in combination with forest management.

The amendment proposes the addition of camping opportunities on the Rainbow Flowage unit, including water accessed group sites, canoe sites, and a traditional group camp. The Rainbow Flowage unit was acquired during the approval process of the 2005 Master Plan but recreation interests were not fully known at that time and in the past few years, users have expressed interest in water camping opportunities.

### Willow Flowage Proposed Amendment Highlights

The proposed amendment to the Willow Flowage Master Plan addresses increased public interest for additional motorized access, primarily for hunting purposes. The master plan, approved in 2000, provides limited access to the Willow for motorized access. The proposed changes would allow public motorized access on three road segments, totaling 7.4 miles. The three road segments are existing roads, developed and maintained to a moderately developed standard, currently supporting vehicle use for forest management purposes. Two of the road segments, Iron Gate Road and West Side Fire lane would be open seasonally from approximately September to December and the Cedar Falls Fire lane road segment would be open year round with the exception of when the road is groomed and used as a snowmobile trail. The Department will open the Department owned portion of Cedar Falls Fire lane recognizing that public access is contingent on approval from adjacent private landowners, either from the north or from the south. The remaining interior roads will remain unchanged, and generally not maintained, but used for a variety of purposes, including hunting and hiking trails. ATV and UTV's trails are an important use in the area and the Willow currently provides trails as part of the interconnected trail system. ATV use is proposed on the Iron Gate road, during the same time period as vehicle access. This segment will create an additional connector link using County Forest and town roads already in place just south of Iron Gate Road. ATV use is proposed on West Side and Cedar Falls Fire lanes, however, the use would be dependent on the private landowner at the north and south end of the Departments road also allowing ATV use, as well as town roads retaining ATV route status.