

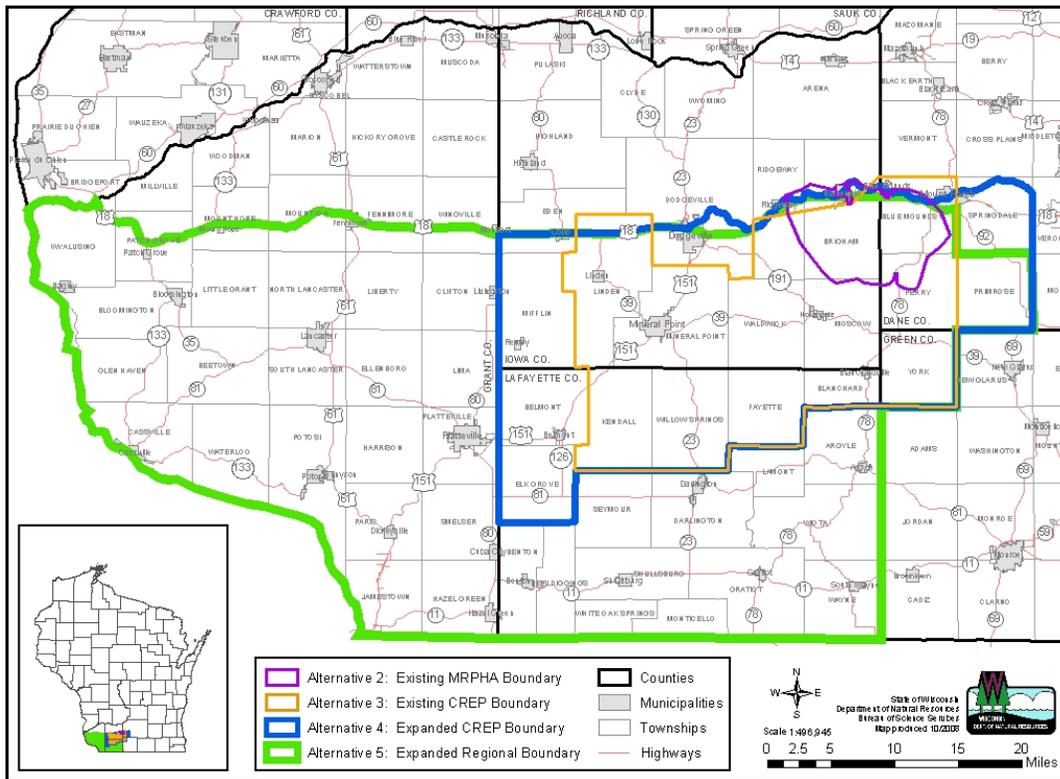
APPENDIX A: PROJECT BOUNDARY ALTERNATIVES

The primary factors considered in evaluating alternative boundaries were:

- Does the boundary encompass appropriate areas and habitat for meeting the natural resources project objectives?
- Is the scale of the area appropriate for the project objectives?
- Is the boundary easily identifiable?
- How well does the boundary incorporate results of past planning efforts (*Wildlife Action Plan*, *Land Legacy Report*, *Grassland Bird Handbook*)?
- Are other agencies and conservation organizations active within the area being considered? Which boundary do our conservation partners support as being the best fit for this project?
- Does the boundary reflect public input, particularly comments received at our project open house meetings in July 2005?

Below we describe the four alternative boundaries which the Department considered (see Figure A-1 below), including Alternative 4, the recommended project boundary taken to the public in July 2008. The final boundary is Alternative 4, but with the northern boundary line expanded from Dodgeville through Springdale Township to coincide with the Military Ridge State Trail (rather than Highway 18/151). See final boundary as shown in Figure 1 on p. 9 of main document.

Figure A-1: *Alternative boundaries considered for the Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Project. Alternative 4, shown as the darkest heavy blue line, was the recommended project boundary in the July 2008 Draft. The first alternative considered was ‘No Action.’*



Alternative 1: No Action

Alternative 1 would mean that the DNR would not pursue a new large-scale project in southwestern Wisconsin. DNR acquisition authority currently exists for the Streambank Conservation program, the State Natural Areas program (acquisition of <500 acres only) and other unique sites on a very limited basis. Other conservation partners (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts, NRCS, USFWS, County Land Conservation Departments, Pheasants Forever, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, the Blue Mounds Area Project) are currently active in southwestern Wisconsin, and their activities are expected to continue. Some existing conservation programs that involve the largest grassland acreages, however, do not usually provide permanent land protection (e.g., CRP).

Pursuing Alternative 1 would mean that there would be no significant expansion of DNR's land- protection efforts for rare upland resources in southwestern Wisconsin. Accordingly, additional DNR staff time and funds for the project would not be needed. There would be a greater risk of continued declines in the broad suite of native plant and animal species associated with grassland ecosystems, such as area-sensitive grassland birds, and fewer water quality improvements would be expected. In addition, substantially fewer DNR funds would be available to contribute toward ongoing protection activities of other conservation partners working in the area. Those funds that are available would require match from partners, a known limiting factor to acquisition efforts by smaller organizations and land trusts.

Very few public comments received to date call for no action.

Alternative 2: Existing Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Boundary

Alternative 2 would mean that the DNR would pursue a new project in southwestern Wisconsin, using the existing Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA) boundary. The MRPHA boundary encompasses 48,970 acres in southeastern Iowa and southwestern Dane counties, and is a more manageable size than Alternatives 3-5. Positive aspects of Alternative 2 include a boundary that coincides with that of an established project with many active cooperators and a full-time (grant funded) project coordinator. Pursuing Alternative 2 would focus DNR efforts and funds in an area with a high concentration of important grassland resources (e.g., prairie remnants and associated rare species). There are conservation programs and practices in place throughout the MRPHA boundary, and some conservation groups are only active within this boundary (i.e., The Nature Conservancy). In-depth resource evaluation efforts of partners working within this area have already led to designation of core and buffer areas, largely precluding the need for additional efforts to develop specific focus criteria for DNR activities.

There are questions about whether the area within the MRPHA boundary can provide sufficient opportunities for protection of large contiguous grasslands within an open landscape matrix, which are required by some area-sensitive species such as northern harriers and upland sandpipers. There are also higher development pressures and higher land costs in this area versus some other areas within boundary Alternatives 3-5 which are farther away from urban centers. The smaller area and existing land use pressures within this boundary versus Alternatives 3-5 provide less flexibility and more limited opportunities for conservation. This boundary also excludes several key grassland areas present in Alternatives 3-5. This boundary encompasses some important cold-water stream systems, including Gordon Creek (designated an Exceptional Resource Water by the DNR), but excludes important warm-water streams that support high biodiversity and rare species.

Additional DNR staff and funds would be needed to augment and assist existing partner conservation efforts within this boundary. This boundary includes part of the Blue Mounds to Blanchardville area identified in the DNR Land Legacy report. This and other 'Legacy Areas' are considered to be the most important areas for meeting Wisconsin's conservation and recreation needs over the next 50 years.

The majority of public comments received to date encourage the Department to pursue a boundary larger than Alternative 2.



Alternative 3: Existing Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Boundary

Alternative 3 would mean that the DNR would pursue a new project in southwestern Wisconsin, with the boundary being the existing Southern Grassland Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) boundary. This is an established, state and federally approved boundary which encompasses all or most of 13 townships and approximately 330,240 acres in southern Iowa, southwestern Dane, northwestern Green and northern Lafayette counties. The CREP boundary is a more manageable size than Alternatives 4 or 5. Existing federal conservation programs (e.g., USDA's CREP, CRP) are focused within this boundary, as well as conservation efforts of other groups. This larger boundary would encompass more grassland-dependent species, provide opportunities for conservation of large (5,000 to 10,000 acre) blocks of grassland that would support more area-sensitive grassland birds, and provide more flexibility and opportunities for conservation than Alternative 2. This larger boundary (along with Alternatives 4 and 5) includes a broader range of recreational opportunities, which likely serve a larger segment of the public and could be enhanced through project activities. Because land in parts of the CREP boundary is farther away from urban centers, development pressure and land costs are, on average, lower.

The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board authorized this feasibility study with the understanding that Department staff would investigate this draft working boundary and alternatives. This boundary was the proposed working boundary that we presented for comment at public open house meetings in July 2005. With a larger boundary such as this one, strategies for focusing DNR efforts within the boundary would be critical to success. Even this boundary does not encompass the full range of resource opportunities in the area, and misses some key grassland landscapes (e.g., southern Dodgeville, eastern Mifflin, Belmont, Elk Grove, and Primrose Townships). Staffing for conservation efforts within this boundary is uncertain. This boundary includes most of three 'Legacy Areas' identified in the DNR Land Legacy report: the Blue Mounds to Blanchardville area, Yellowstone Lake, and much of Pecatonica River and Grasslands.

Comments at our original series of public informational meetings favored a boundary larger than Alternative 3.

Recommended Boundary: Alternative 4: Expanded CREP Boundary

Alternative 4 would mean that the DNR would pursue a new project in southwestern Wisconsin, with the boundary being similar to, but somewhat larger than the existing Southern Grassland Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) boundary. This boundary would encompass **459,926 acres** in southern Iowa, southwestern Dane, northwestern Green and northern Lafayette counties. The northern boundary of Alternative 4 is defined by US Highway 18/151, an easily identifiable landmark that follows the Military Ridge. The Alternative 4 boundary is a more manageable size than Alternative 5. It incorporates most of the large areas of idle grasslands and pasture in southwestern Wisconsin. Compared to Alternative 3, this larger boundary would encompass additional townships with key grassland resources (e.g., large grassland and savanna areas in Mifflin township and important prairie remnants and open grassland landscapes in Primrose township), important areas of aquatic biodiversity, and communities with a strong interest in conservation. It would provide even more flexibility and opportunities for conservation work with willing landowners, and more opportunities for conservation of the large (5,000 to 10,000 acre) blocks of grassland necessary for some area-sensitive grassland species. Similar to Alternative 3, land in parts of this boundary is farther away from urban centers, so development pressure and land costs are, on average, lower. The alternative 4 boundary would include important warm-water streams such as Pats Creek, which supports Ozark minnow (state threatened) populations.

However, even this larger boundary does not encompass the full range of resource opportunities in the region, missing some very large open landscapes to the west and the option to build upon existing projects of partner groups (e.g., The Prairie Enthusiasts). Staffing for conservation efforts within this boundary is uncertain, and strategies for focusing DNR efforts within this larger boundary would be critical to project success. All four counties with land within this boundary have already been contacted about the project. This boundary includes the same three 'Legacy Places' as Alternative 3, plus part of the Fever (Galena) River 'Legacy Area' as well as Belmont and Ipswich Prairie State Natural Areas. State Natural Areas represent our highest quality, most intact examples of natural communities remaining in Wisconsin.



This boundary includes most grassland resources that the public requested be included within the project boundary at the July 2005 Open Houses.

Alternative 5: Expanded Regional Boundary

Alternative 5 would mean that the DNR would pursue a new project in southwestern Wisconsin, with the boundary including nearly all of the state's Southwest Savanna region. The boundary would encompass approximately 1,254,380 acres in southern Iowa, southwestern Dane, northwestern Green, all of Lafayette County and all of Grant County. The Alternative 5 boundary is easy to understand, running largely along US Highway 18/151 to the north, and the state line to the west and south. This boundary best accommodates our uncertainty regarding the exact locations and quality of key natural resources in the region.

Compared to Alternatives 3 and 4, this larger boundary includes all of Grant and Lafayette Counties, and additional townships in other counties with key grassland resources and aquatic biodiversity. By reaching to the state line, this alternative would open up the potential for multi-state partnerships to conserve grassland resources. This boundary also offers the greatest flexibility and opportunities for conservation work with willing landowners, particularly for the restoration of 5,000 to 10,000 acre blocks considered necessary to protect the full range of grassland biodiversity. It includes large areas with low development pressure and lower land costs, although some areas along the new four-lane U.S. Highway 151 in Grant County do have higher land costs. The Alternative 5 boundary would include many more important warm-water streams with high biodiversity and rare fish species (including the state threatened Ozark minnow), and an additional 20 streams that support trout populations in Grant County. This boundary includes six 'Legacy Places' identified in the DNR Land Legacy report for the SW Savanna Ecological Landscape (it adds in all of the Grant/Rattlesnake Rivers, and Platte River areas in Grant County), and includes additional State Natural Areas.

Alternative 5 would involve work with an entire additional county and many additional townships that have not yet been contacted about the project. Staffing and funding for conservation efforts within such a larger area would be very difficult, but could be managed with strict adherence to habitat suitability or other focusing models.

This boundary includes very close to all of the grassland areas requested by any member of the public at the July 2005 open houses.

