

WILLOW FLOWAGE SCENIC WATERS AREA

*VARIANCE
to the recreation portion of the
2016 MASTER PLAN*



Approved by the Department of Natural Resources
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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

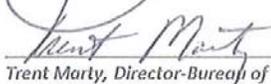


APPROVALS

APPROVED:  10-4-18
Doug Haag, Administrator-Division of Internal Services Date

SUPPORTING APPROVALS:

 8/22/2018
Ben Bergoy, Director-Bureau of Parks and Recreation Date

 8/27/18
Trent Marty, Director-Bureau of Forestry Field Operations Date

 8/22/2018
Diane Brusoe, Property Planning Section Chief Date

 8/15/2018
Tom Shockley, Program Region Supervisor Date

 8/15/2018
Adam Wallace, Property Manager Date

Variance Author: John Pohlman, Property Planner

Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area Master Plan Variance

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MASTER PLAN VARIANCE

Property Name: Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area

Date Master Plan was approved: April 2016

A. OVERVIEW

This variance authorizes two new parking areas in the Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area (WFSWA). These areas will supplement the 13 parking areas currently on the property and will provide parking at key locations and meet existing needs. The two parking areas are:

- Prairie Rapids Road parking lot – a parking lot at the far southern portion of the property, in the Town of Nokomis, to accommodate snowmobilers, ATV/UTV riders, boaters (primarily canoes and kayaks) on the Tomahawk River, and other visitors to the property. The parking lot will address safety concerns raised by users and local elected officials due to cars and trailers parking and unloading along a town road. The parking lot will have room for up to 15 vehicles with trailers and will be located in a wooded area just off the road.
- Willow Dam Road parking area – a small parking area along near the dam to accommodate visitors with disabilities. The parking area will be in a grassy strip along Willow Dam Road, a Town of Little Rice road, and will have space for two vehicles. A row of about 30 boulders have been placed along the bend in the road here. Approximately 20 of these will be moved back about 12 feet to create space for the accessible parking spaces. The department will continue to work with town officials and Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company to ensure the boulders are moved to a satisfactory alignment.

This variance does not change the land management classifications of the WFSWA. Except for the portions addressed in this variance, the components of the 2016 master plan related to recreation use and management remain unchanged. Similarly, this variance does not change habitat management objectives or strategies. The existing vegetation management techniques (e.g., timber harvest, prescribed fires and mowing) remain in effect.

B. VARIANCE TO THE WILLOW FLOWAGE SCENIC WATERS AREA MASTER PLAN

1. Changes to the 2016 master plan

Table 2.9 of the 2016 master plan lists the existing parking areas. This variance adds two parking areas to this table:

Parking Lot Name/Location	Number of Stalls	Surface
Prairie Rapids Road	15	Gravel
Willow Dam Road (accessible)	2	Gravel

(1) **Prairie Rapids Road** - a parking lot to accommodate up to 15 vehicles and trailers at the far southern portion of the property off Prairie Rapids Road to accommodate snowmobilers, ATV/UTV riders, boaters (primarily canoers and kayakers) on the Tomahawk River, and other visitors to the property, and

(2) **Willow Dam Road (accessible)** - a small parking area along Willow Dam Road to accommodate up to two vehicles (near the dam) with accessible parking spaces.

Maps G1 and G2 show the locations of the authorized projects. Gravel will be added to both parking areas as needed to create useable and sustainable surfaces. The department will be responsible for maintaining both parking areas. Work associated with both parking areas may be restricted during certain times of the year to minimize impacts to sensitive resources.

2. How the variance is consistent with the 2016 master plan and administrative codes

This variance does not make any changes to the land management classifications of the WFSWA. The portions of the property where the authorized parking areas are located currently have the following land management classifications:

- Forest Production Management Area (parking lot off Prairie Rapids Road). The master plan does not limit or restrict recreation uses or facilities in Forest Production Management Areas. The construction of the parking lot to accommodate up to 15 vehicles is consistent with this classification.
- Scenic Resources Management Area – Type 3 recreation use setting (accessible parking area along Willow Dam Road). The construction of the parking area along the road to accommodate up to two accessible parking spaces is consistent with this classification.

No changes are authorized to the management objectives and prescriptions for parking areas identified in the 2016 master plan (page 25). The department will continue to follow all applicable protocols and best management practices in developing and maintaining the two authorized parking areas.

This variance does not authorize additional ATV/UTV trails, routes or facilities on department-owned lands within the WFSWA that are beyond those activities or facilities approved in the 2016 master plan.

The variance is consistent with the 2016 master plan as follows:

- a) No changes to the WFSWA property vision or goals are made.
- b) No changes to the management area objectives or prescriptions are made.
- c) The master plan and this variance establish management, development and public use for the property.

- d) Management of existing recreational uses of the WFSWA (e.g., fishing, boating, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, ATV/UTV riding, hunting) remains unchanged.
- e) The additional parking areas are consistent with the management area objectives for the Scenic Resources Management Areas and the Forest Production Areas described in the 2016 master plan.
- f) The additional parking areas will not affect the department's ability to maintain and enhance the aesthetic qualities of the WFSWA and to protect water quality, sustain the fishery, maintain undeveloped shoreline, and manage for aquatic and terrestrial habitats.
- g) The additional parking areas will not affect the department's ability to maintain and enhance the diverse range of native flora and fauna and a diversity of forest cover types and age classes of the WFSWA.
- h) The additional parking areas will help provide access to the WFSWA for persons of varying abilities.
- i) The additional parking areas will not affect the department's ability to maintain wildlife habitats, a diversity of forest types and renewable forest products.
- j) The additional parking areas will not substantively affect the management and use of adjacent areas.

C. CONSISTENCY IN OPERATIONS

This variance does not make any changes to the structure or process in the department's interactions with partner groups and local governments. The department may continue to engage in collaborative projects with various partners and to enter into agreements as necessary to seek mutually beneficial outcomes.

The department will continue to use and require best management practices (BMP) for erosion, noise and dust control for all construction activities, including proper erosion/siltation control during construction of the authorized recreation facilities. All facilities will continue to be constructed according to department facilities design standards and subject to necessary permits.

Lands around the flowage that are within the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) project boundary are subject to a series of plans describing habitat and recreation management. These plans are implemented by Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company (WVIC), the holder of the FERC license to operate the dam and associated facilities.

The proposed establishment of handicap accessible parking along Willow Dam Road is within the FERC project boundary (Map E). The department will continue working with WVIC to ensure that this project will not adversely affect WVIC's management plans or their responsibilities in managing the flowage. Further, the department will continue to work with WVIC to ensure that management actions the department undertakes are consistent with WVIC's management plans and their needs and responsibilities associated with maintaining structures associated with the flowage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area is located in Oneida County in northern Wisconsin and encompasses over 32,000 acres (Map A and Map B). With limited development and access, the WFSWA is a large island-studded reservoir with a wild flavor. The property includes 73 miles of shoreline (95 percent of which is undeveloped), 106 islands, and 7 boat landings. Surrounded by swamps, bogs and other watery lowlands, the Willow Flowage is isolated from roads and development. This remoteness, along with its natural shoreline, draws visitors from around the state and region for a wilderness experience described as "almost Canada." Designated as an Outstanding Resource Water in 1997, the Willow Flowage supports a diversity of aquatic plants, fish, and wildlife. Abundant walleye and panfish populations, along with northern pike, muskellunge, and large and smallmouth bass, make fishing the primary draw. White-tailed deer, bear, ruffed grouse, ducks, eagles and loons are commonly seen.

There are 33 rustic campsites scattered along the shoreline and islands; all campsites are occupied on a first come-first served basis with no registration, no reservations, and no fees. Campsite amenities include a fire ring (with cooking grill), picnic table, and outdoor toilet. A small number of department-managed roads exist, most of which are closed to public vehicles (Maps C1 and C2). The property is largely wooded with some extensive wetlands (Map D).

In addition to the material presented in Chapter 1 of the 2016 master plan¹, the following background information provides context for this variance.

A. ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE THE MASTER PLAN WAS APPROVED IN 2016

Since the plan approval in April 2016, several authorized changes to the Willow Flowage's recreation program have been implemented. Two additional group campsites designed to accommodate up to 15 people have been established along the shoreline. Over eight miles of Iron Gate Road have been opened to motorized vehicle access including ATV/UTV and snowmobile and over seven miles of additional hunter walking trails were established along Iron Gate Road and Cedar Falls Firelane.

Sportsman's boat landing was renovated to improve both the landing and the parking area. Bicycle and equestrian usage are now allowed in all areas of the property unless they are signed as closed. Changes to the forestry program, such as allowing year-round timber harvest and tree planting, have simplified timber management in Native Community Management Areas.

B. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE MASTER PLAN VARIANCE

Demands for, and trends in, outdoor recreation are continually changing. The department was asked to add the proposed parking areas to help facilitate better and safer access for visitors and agrees that developing these modest-sized parking areas will be beneficial. Although 13 designated parking lots exist on the property, the authorized parking areas will provide key parking and access where it is needed.

The authorized parking area off Prairie Rapids Road will provide needed parking for snowmobilers and ATV/UTV riders using the trail that passes through the southern edge of the property. This parking area will also provide overflow parking for people using the popular launch site on the Tomahawk River located on private lands south of Prairie Rapids Road. A small primitive parking lot, which provides a take-out spot for canoers and kayakers before

¹ The master plan can be found at dnr.wi.gov keyword "Willow Flowage" and then go to the documents tab.

the river enters a large rapids section, exists about 0.5 mile to the north of the authorized lot. The authorized parking area will be downstream of the rapids.

The parking area along Willow Dam Road will provide easier access to the shore and boat launch area for visitors with disabilities than the existing parking area north of the dam (which has handicap accessible parking spaces).

C. FEDERAL INTERESTS AND LIMITATIONS

The department has acquired over 32,000 acres within the boundary of the WFSWA. Just over 6,700 acres have federal interest due to federal aid money being used in part for acquisition (Map E). Federal interest requires that the department obtain federal approval prior to granting any permanent real estate interests or building permanent structures that impact public outdoor recreation opportunities. The Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company (WVIC) also holds restrictive covenants prohibiting or restricting buildings on all of the shoreline surrounding WFSWA that is owned by the State of Wisconsin.

The WVIC gifted 6,144 flooded bottomland acres of the Willow Flowage to the State of Wisconsin in 2004. These lands are within the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) project boundary and are subject to a series of plans developed and administered by WVIC including Fish and Wildlife Management, Land Resource Management, Historic Resource Management, Recreation, and Operations plans. WVIC retains flowage rights and has responsibilities related to the dikes, dams, and other structures necessary to operate and maintain the flowage.

WVIC also donated to the department 36 upland acres near the dam that contain two high-use recreation sites. The donation included the requirement that the State assumed the responsibility to develop and maintain the recreational facilities required by WVIC's FERC license. One part of the recreational development required by FERC that has not yet been put in place is a drinking water hand-pump. The department and WVIC are currently working collaboratively on a plan to provide drinking water for visitors at the recreation site near the dam.

LIST OF MAPS

Map A:	Regional locator
Map B:	DNR and other lands
Map C1-2 A:	Existing recreation infrastructure
Map C1-2 B:	Existing road infrastructure
Map D:	Existing land cover
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Map F:	Land management classifications (2016)
Map G1:	Authorized parking area along Willow Dam Road
Map G2:	Authorized parking area off Prairie Rapids Road