SUMMARY of the draft master plan and environmental impact statement for:

SAUK PRAIRIE RECREATION AREA

The draft Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA) master plan and environmental impact statement (EIS) describes the proposed recreation activities and facilities as well as the habitat restoration and management at SPRA. Also included is an analysis of potential impacts. The draft document can be found at the DNR web site: dnr.wi.gov and search for “Sauk Prairie Recreation Area.”

The draft master plan lays out the Department of Natural Resources’ proposal for the management and use of Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA). SPRA comprises about half of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP), which was formally decommissioned in 1997. SPRA came to state ownership through the Federal Lands to Parks program. The Department’s ownership is not a contiguous block, but an irregular arrangement in two holdings. The Department will continue working with the other landowners of the former BAAP on a variety of common issues related to land management and public recreation.

**Landowners of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant**

Wisconsin DNR..............................3,385 acres
Dairy Forage Research Center ..........2,105 acres
Ho-Chunk Nation..........................1,553 acres
Bluffview Sanitary District.............163 acres
Wisconsin DOT ................................80 acres
Town of Sumpter ............................4 acres

A blend of recreation activities that take advantage of the property’s attributes and features are proposed, including a variety of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling and snow shoeing. The Department’s goal is to provide high quality half-day or day-long experiences for a range of abilities. Being immediately adjacent to Devil’s Lake State Park, which receives over two million visitors a year, SPRA is well positioned to provide many activities that complement the camping, swimming, fishing, hiking, picnicking and other opportunities provided there.

Hunting and bird watching, as well as fishing along Lake Wisconsin at the old pump house, are expected to be very popular at SPRA. In addition, a 72-acre Class 2 dog training ground is proposed in the far southern portion of the property. Several day use areas – with shelters, picnic tables, grills, vault toilets, and educational kiosks – are also proposed.

Building on the popularity of the model rocket launch site at Bong State Recreation Area in Kenosha County, the Department is proposing a small, 2-acre site at SPRA for clubs to launch sport rockets up to 10 days a year.

During the planning process the Department received many responses to the potential inclusion of ATVs (and motorized recreation in general) and a shooting range at SPRA; a large majority of the reaction was in opposition. After considerable deliberations, the Department proposes to repurpose many of the biking and equestrian trails and roads at SPRA for use by dual-sport motorcycles up to six days each year. The trails would be closed to other users during these days. No ATV riding area is proposed at SPRA.

Although no shooting range is proposed in this master plan, the Department recognizes the need for more opportunities for the public to shoot at ranges in southern Wisconsin. Separate from the SPRA plan, the Department will initiate a process to locate a public shooting range in Sauk County, similar to the process recently used to identify the Mud Lake Wildlife Area in Columbia County. This evaluation will incorporate public lands in the vicinity and will include multiple opportunities for the public to provide comments and input.

**Featured recreation opportunities (proposed)**

- Visitor Center with display space.
- Hiking trails (10 miles).
- Biking trails:
  - Recreational, family-friendly (15 miles).
  - Mountain bike (5 miles in coordination with Devil’s Lake State Park).
  - Great Sauk Trail (5 access points to SPRA).
- Equestrian trails (12 miles).
- All hunting seasons from mid-October to Feb. 15. Pheasant stocking.
- Trapping from Nov. 15 to Feb. 15.
- Public access roads (15 miles).
- Bird & wildlife watching, nature photography.
- Day use area at the former reservoir site with an overlook deck, picnic shelter and amphitheater.
- Horse trailer parking, corral, and loading area with picnic shelter and vault toilet.
- Day use area at Weigand’s Bay with accessible fishing platform, carry-in boat access and picnic tables.
- Special event staging area with picnic shelter, vault toilets, grills, and a large grassy field.
- Rocketry site (up to 10 days/year).
- Lake Wisconsin overlook with shelter, picnic tables, grills and trailhead.
- Re-purposing biking and equestrian trails and roads for use by dual-sport motorcycles (up to six days/year).
- Horse-drawn carts and buggies on the equestrian trails (up to two weekends/year).
- Snowmobile trail, either along the east side of the SPRAs or on the Great Sauk Trail.
- A 72-acre Class 2 dog training area.
- Off-leash dog use in the Magazine Area.

**Habitat management (pages 30-45)**

From a habitat perspective, Sauk Prairie Recreation Area can play a pivotal role in the regional conservation of grasslands and savannas and their constituent species. Of particular note here are two unique opportunities: (a) managing lands as part of an ecological continuum of habitats from the southern dry-mesic forest (in Devil’s Lake State Park) to oak woodland to oak...
Partnerships

Given current budget constraints, the Department will need to continue to develop partnerships with conservation and recreation organizations, local businesses and clubs, government agencies, and other groups to help construct and operate the numerous proposed recreation facilities. And the interpretive opportunities will require a close working relationship with the Badger History Group, the Ho-Chunk Nation, the local farm community, and others.

Similarly, given the size of the property and the scope of the task of restoring and managing habitats, it will be to the DNR’s benefit to develop diverse partnerships to achieve the needed habitat management at the SPRA. Portions of the property may be well-suited to integrate and study the ability of different grazing systems (in concert with mowing and prescribed fire and potentially other techniques) to effectively reduce shrubs, weedy trees, and various invasive plants.

The SPRA holds great potential to be a unique and popular destination that merges recreation, conservation, and education about the profound history of the site. The Department looks forward to working with a wide variety of partners to move the envisioned recreation area to reality.

Are portions of the property still contaminated? What hazards remain?

The site’s use as an industrial facility that manufactured propellants resulted in contamination of some areas with chemicals and byproducts used in propellant manufacture as well as asbestos, lead paint, PCBs and oil. Contaminants were found in buildings and storage areas and spread through the sewer system and ditches. Groundwater beneath the site is contaminated in three discrete plumes.

The U.S. Army and its contractors undertook extensive remediation efforts to address these contamination issues. As a result, all lands within SPRA now meet environmental thresholds for use as a recreation area. The Army remains responsible for addressing any contamination resulting from its use of the BAAP property that may be found later.
Concept Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area
opening to grassland, and (b) managing large blocks of grassland and oak opening habitats. Although there are other large blocks of grassland habitat in southern and central Wisconsin, this is likely the largest and most viable opportunity to restore and manage a large-scale forest to grassland transition.

The plan proposes that much of SPRA on the glacial moraine (generally east of the future Great Sauk Trail) be restored to oak opening, which was the dominant habitat present before settlement. In addition, a large part of the Rocket Area and part of the Magazine Area will be managed as open grassland. The Hillside Prairie, a high quality remnant that has long been the focus of local conservation efforts, is a priority to maintain and the master plan calls for the remnant to be expanded and connected with a larger grassland to the east.

### Habitat management (proposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Acres</th>
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<td>Grasslands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Openings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oak Woodland</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Invasive species, particularly shrubs, have taken over large portions of SPRA and are the most pressing management challenge. The plan calls for a variety of techniques to address these plants, including grazing.

### Cultural and Historic Resources

Few places in Wisconsin or the Midwest are as rich with cultural, historical, geologic, and ecological stories as SPRA, and the Department seeks to capitalize on this unique opportunity. Seven areas that represent and highlight the unique features and history of the property are proposed to be the focus of interpretive efforts.

The Department proposes—in collaboration with the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Badger History Group, and others—to educate visitors through a variety of approaches about the site’s geologic past, the life and culture of Native Americans, the Euro-American settlement and farm era, and the construction, operation, deconstruction of the BAAP.

### Potential Outcomes

If the proposed master plan is implemented, a number of positive benefits are expected. These include the restoration of native grasslands and savannas and associated increases in populations of rare or declining species.

The property will also help meet local and regional recreation demands. With tens of thousands of visitors expected each year, the property is also expected to generate a sizable economic impact in local communities.

Potential adverse impacts include the cost to restore and manage habitats as well as to build and maintain parking lots, trails, shelters, an overlook and other facilities. Other outcomes could include increased traffic, noise, dust, energy consumption resulting from visitors, smoke from prescribed fires, and other issues.

### Alternatives

Department staff evaluated many alternatives and options to meet the property vision and goals. Alternatives included different ways for the public to access the property, providing various recreation experiences, options to address the reservoirs and the population of neotenic salamanders, establishing a motorized recreation area, setting aside a place for dog trialing, establishing a bison herd, and other possibilities. These alternatives were not included in the draft master plan due to potential cost, conflicts, limitations, safety and other reasons.

### What happens next?

Although SPRA opened to the public in April 2015, the property will be in a transition phase for many years to come. Other than trails on some of the former roads, currently there are no amenities for visitors. The Department proposes to place initial focus on continuing to clean up rubble and debris, filling the worst of the potholes, placing boundary signs, and conducting other tasks to ensure that visitors have a safe experience.

The Department is aware of the interest in redeveloping two locations currently closed to the public: the reservoir site and the old pump house at Weigand’s Bay. The reservoirs are a safety hazard and need to be razed and filled in. The old pump house is also a safety concern in its current condition. In addition, many other relics of the complex’s past need to be removed, including miles of deteriorating roads throughout the property, numerous pipes, stakes and metal rods, and various abandoned utility structures and building foundations.

As with the recreation facilities, there is far more habitat restoration and management work to be done than the Department has the capacity to address over the next 15 years. Large areas of the property are dominated by invasive shrubs while other areas have been stripped of their topsoil. Some portions have been leveled, while others have been ditched. Non-native weeds are the primary vegetation in many places.

Unfortunately, the Department does not have the funding to address these pressing needs. As a consequence, the Department will work with the Ho-Chunk Nation, Dairy Forage Research Center, Sauk County, local governments, and many conservation, recreation, and education groups with an interest in helping SPRA reach its potential. Of particular promise is the interest expressed by the Wisconsin Army National Guard to address some of the clean-up and development work at SPRA as part of their training exercises.