Property Overview

The South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area project was created in 1992 along multiple stream segments in Bayfield County, to preserve a large, self-sustaining potadromous (freshwater migration) fishery, primarily Brown Trout, Coho Salmon, and Steelhead (Rainbow Trout). The area also preserves the habitats necessary for self-sustaining Brook Trout populations. The area consists of 7,630 acres of contiguous and non-contiguous parcels along six major tributaries to Lake Superior. These unique stream and coastal habitats benefit the flora and fauna associated with the Lake Superior tributaries through this property’s possession of some of the deepest sand aquifers in Wisconsin, which provide consistent cold, high-quality groundwater. The streambank parcels also provide public access and education opportunities.

The project area spans six distinct stream drainages, including segments of Fish Creek, Sioux River, Pikes Creek, Cranberry River, Flag River, Iron River, and their associated coastal wetlands. It also includes the former Orienta dam site on Iron River. More than 50% of the self-sustaining potadromous fishery on the Wisconsin shore of Lake Superior is included within the boundaries of this project.

Maps for each of the units can also be found using the links below:

- Fish Creek Unit
- Sioux River & Fourmile Creek Units
- Pikes Creek Unit
- Cranberry River Unit
- Flag River Unit

Facilities and Recreation Management

The parcels of the South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area are open to hunting, trapping hiking, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, and fishing across the entire property. Snowmobiling is allowed on the designated trail. Parking lots exist on many of the parcels, which provide visitor access to the lands and streams. Walking/hiking trails, mainly single track, also exist on several parcels.

Natural Resources Management

The South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area parcels are managed to enhance stream and coastal habitats and provide public recreation and education opportunities. Targeted forest management is compatible with this objective, but is not the primary purpose of the property. In general, the forests on the property are managed to moderate stream flow from rain and snow melt, thereby protecting streams from damage due to peak flow conditions. The goal is to maintain forests of long-lived coniferous species (white pine, red pine, white spruce, and northern white cedar) because they provide a key role in stream flow management due to their long rotation lengths,
interception of snow, and shading of the forest floor during spring thaw, which reduces peak flow by slowing snow melt. Forest practices are therefore chosen to 1) maintain the present cover of long-lived conifers, 2) promote natural forest succession toward long-lived conifer species where appropriate, and 3) force conversion to long-lived conifer forests via under-planting where appropriate. The intention behind any forced conversion is to establish late-successional, species-rich forest communities that are resilient and self-sustaining in the event of natural disturbance. The stream channels within the parcels are also managed toward enhanced cold-water fish production.

In maintaining and further protecting the valuable resources of the Fish and Wildlife Area, the department seek to work with adjacent land owners in instituting wholistic watershed management.

**Special Attributes:**

The Flag River Unit and Cranberry River Unit are both within the Coastal Headlands and Estuaries Conservation Opportunity Area (COA), as described in the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan. Priority actions for this COA include increasing the representation of conifer-dominated boreal forest, especially in older age classes. The Fish Creek Unit is part of the Fish Creek COA, wherein priority actions include preserving and maintaining large expanses of wetland communities, both forested and non-forested.

Wetland community types on these properties are known to contain uncommon species of both plants and wildlife. Exposed bedrock and cliff features on some of these properties are known to contain populations of rare plants. The existing conifer-dominated Boreal Forest is an uncommon community type that, where present on these properties, should be considered for special management.

**Important Bird Area:** These property parcels are recognized for providing high quality habitat that supports breeding birds and is used as a migratory bird stopover site.

Five "Primary Sites" have been identified on the property. To help inform this property master planning process, a biotic inventory is underway, with results ready by mid-2018. Primary sites generally encompass the best examples of 1) rare and representative natural communities and 2) documented rare species populations with opportunities for restoration or connections. These sites warrant high protection and/or restoration consideration during development of a master plan. Primary Sites can be considered High Conservation Value Forests for the purpose of Forest Certification.

- South Shore Fishery Area (Flag River Unit) adjacent to the Port Wing Boreal Forest SNA
- Upper Pikes Creek Boreal Forest (Pike River Unit)
- Upper Sioux River Big Rock Pines (Sioux River Unit)
- Sioux River Bayview Beach (Sioux River Unit)
- Fish Creek Estuary (Fish Creek Unit)

**Fisheries** are monitored by the Fisheries Management Bureau as part of its rotational, trend, and special monitoring projects. Young-of-year production and recruitment to ages one and two for lake-run Brown Trout, Coho Salmon, and Steelhead are the primary focus of these surveys. The surveys are also used to document all age classes of Brook Trout.

The region possesses some of the deepest sand aquifers in Wisconsin that provide consistent cold, high-quality
groundwater. This is the fundamental environment that supports the region’s coldwater fisheries resources.