

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

PURPOSE AND MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

The purpose of this master plan is to guide management of Department of Natural Resources (DNR; also referred to as “department”) properties within the Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape (NES EL). The department develops master plans to describe and direct how its properties will be used, managed, and developed. A master plan establishes the levels and types of public uses that are permitted on a property as well as the authorized resource management and facility development that will take place there. All DNR properties are required to have a master plan ([NR 1.60, Wisconsin Administrative Code](#)). Master plans are developed according to guidelines set forth in Wisconsin Administrative Code [Chapter NR 44](#), which is known as the ‘master plan rule’. Only management activities and techniques, recreational uses, and facilities identified or referenced in this master plan are authorized.

REGIONAL PLANNING APPROACH

The department has embarked on a regional approach to master planning, utilizing 16 regions known as Ecological Landscapes (Figure 1.1). These 16 regions are distinct areas of the state that each have different ecological attributes and management opportunities, and can be used to identify the best areas of the state to manage for various natural communities, key habitats, aquatic features, and native plants and animals. All 16 Landscapes are described in a DNR reference compendium, [The Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin](#) (WDNR 2015a), which provides a detailed assessment of ecological and socio-economic conditions for each Landscape, highlights management opportunities for significant or unique habitats and ecological features, and describes important considerations for planning and management.



Figure 1.1. Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin

This ecological information is combined with recreation information from the [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#) and the [Recreation Opportunities Analysis \(ROA\)](#). The SCORP periodically evaluates status, trends, demand, and needs for outdoor recreation throughout the state, and is the primary source of information on outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. The ROA is a recent assessment that identified recreational needs and shortages in different regions of the state as well as the potential role of department properties in helping meet those needs. The recreation regions were defined in the 2005-2010 SCORP (WDNR 2006), and are shown in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. SCORP Recreation Regions

Utilizing these comprehensive sources and tools for planning creates efficiencies by integrating and focusing the work and financial resources of multiple department programs. It also ensures that the public uses, facility development, and resource management described, established, and authorized in master plans is consistent with regional needs and demands, ecological capabilities, management opportunities, and department priorities.

A regional master plan for an Ecological Landscape includes all department properties within that Landscape. Some properties already have NR44-compliant master plans; those plans are incorporated into the regional plan by reference. Properties that fall within more than one Landscape typically (though not always) are assigned to the Landscape containing the majority of their acreage.

TRIBAL RESOURCES ON CEDED TERRITORY

A portion of the NES is included in the Ceded Territory of the state (Figure 1.3). Seven properties included in the NES plan lie within the Ceded Territory.

Native American tribes are independent, sovereign nations, as they were prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America. The Ojibwe Tribes ceded lands in the northern one-third of Wisconsin to the United States government in the Treaties of 1837 and 1842. In those Treaties, they reserved their rights to hunt, trap, fish, and gather within various publicly-owned lands. Treaty rights are currently being exercised and implemented by the Ojibwe Tribes within the Ceded Territory.



Figure 1.3. Ceded Territory

INTRODUCTION TO THE REGION AND PROPERTIES

The NES EL is located in northeastern Wisconsin, and includes portions of Florence, Marinette, Oconto, Menominee, and Shawano counties (Figure 1.4). It encompasses 1,542 square miles (987,176 acres), or 2.8 percent of Wisconsin’s land area. It is largely rural with extensive forest cover. Rivers are also prominent here, including several with a remote and wild character, as well as numerous high-quality coldwater streams. There are extensive public lands holdings, including state, county, and federal lands. The NES also includes the eastern portion of the Menominee Reservation.



Figure 1.4. Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape

The department properties within the NES include a State Forest, State Natural Areas, a State Park, a State Recreation Area, State Trails, Wild Rivers, Wildlife Areas and Fishery Areas, and numerous small parcels acquired through a variety of statewide acquisition authority programs. The Pine-Popple Wild Rivers property is being included in the NES regional plan despite the majority of its acreage falling within an adjoining Landscape (the North Central Forest). The Haley Creek Swamp State Natural Area, which is within and adjacent to the property boundary of the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers, is also being included.

The following properties within the NES EL already have NR 44-compliant plans:

- Governor Thompson State Park (approved in 2004, with a subsequent variance)
- Menominee River State Park and Recreation Area (approved in 2017)
- Peshtigo River State Forest (approved in 2007, with subsequent variances)

These plans are available on the [Completed Plans page](#) of the DNR website, and are incorporated into this regional plan by reference. These three plans will now be on the same update schedule as the NES plan.

Two State Trails, the [Mountain Bay State Trail](#) and the [Nicolet State Trail](#) traverse the NES EL. The trails are operated and maintained by the counties through which they pass, under management agreements with DNR’s Bureau of Parks and Recreation. These partners are responsible for planning uses on the trails, and as such, the trails are not included in this plan.

The properties included for active planning in the NES EL regional plan are listed in Table 1.1, organized by property type. Larger properties are shown in Map A. The table and map do not include multiple small, scattered acquisition authority parcels – Scattered Forest Lands, State Owned Islands, Statewide Habitat Areas, and Statewide Public Access – which comprise approximately 163 acres. In total, this plan establishes or updates management (including real estate actions) for some 53,645 acres of state-owned and managed land. Consult the [Property Types and Designations Common Element](#) for descriptions of the various property types and statutory designations (see p. 10 for an overview of Common Elements).

Table 1.1. Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape Master Plan Properties.

Property Name	County	Deed Acres
Fishery and Wildlife Areas		
Amberg Wildlife Area	Marinette	1,190
Miscauno Wildlife Area	Marinette	635
North Branch Pemebonwon Fishery Area	Florence	5
Peshtigo Brook Wildlife Area	Oconto	2,200
Shawano Lake Fishery Area	Shawano	131
South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area	Oconto	625
Thunder River Rearing Station	Marinette	140
Town Corner Wildlife Area	Marinette	905
State Natural Areas		
Dunbar Barrens State Natural Area	Marinette	1,400
Haley Creek Swamp State Natural Area	Florence	473
Spread Eagle Barrens State Natural Area	Florence	8,418
Tower Site		
Bagley Tower Site	Oconto	40
Wild Rivers		
Pike Wild River	Marinette	4,771
Pine-Popple Wild Rivers	Florence	11,495
Stewardship Demonstration Forest		
Wausaukee Stewardship Demonstration Forest	Marinette	40
Properties with NR 44-Compliant Plans		
Governor Thompson State Park	Marinette	2,967
Menominee River State Park and Recreation Area	Marinette	4,766
Peshtigo River State Forest	Marinette	13,233
Administrative Properties		
Pembine Station	Marinette	3
Wausaukee Station	Marinette	3
Public Access Sites		
Big Eagle Creek Public Access	Marinette	40
Lake Noquebay Public Access	Marinette	3

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REGION AND PROPERTIES

The NES EL has the highest proportion of forest cover of any EL in the state, with over 75 percent of the Landscape in forest. These extensive forests are a defining feature of this Landscape, playing a significant role in maintaining high water quality, supporting viable populations of many native plants and animals, and presenting opportunities to manage for large habitat blocks and for varied structural conditions and successional stages. The NES supports several high-biodiversity-value forest communities, including dry, dry-mesic, mesic, and wet-mesic types. Many of these communities are found along the corridors of some of the Landscape’s major rivers, including the Menominee, Peshtigo, Oconto, Pine, and Pike rivers. These rivers also protect diverse aquatic and wetland habitats such as springs, bogs, fens, and sedge meadows.

Wetlands make up 20 percent of the NES EL, the sixth highest percentage of all ELs, with conifer swamps especially prominent. The NES is one of only three ELs in the state with management opportunity for the globally imperiled pine barrens community, and offers the best opportunity in the state to manage for bracken grasslands. Exposures of bedrock, including cliffs, glades, and talus slopes, are locally common and prominent in the NES and support rare plants and animals, including some bedrock specialists.

Recreationally, the extensive public land holdings, as well as private lands open to public recreation, give the NES an abundant land and water base for public recreation. These lands support a wide variety of recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, trapping, motorized and non-motorized trail activities, paddling, camping, wildlife watching and nature appreciation, and scenic viewing. The many high-quality, scenic rivers and streams make water-based pursuits a special attraction. The Menominee, Peshtigo, Pike, and Pine-Popple rivers are very popular for paddling and fishing, drawing thousands of visitors each year. The Roaring Rapids section of the Peshtigo River is considered the finest whitewater paddling opportunity in the Midwest. The numerous high-quality trout streams that flow into the major rivers offer excellent trout fishing. Many waterfalls and rapids exist in the northern portion of the NES, adding to the scenic appeal. Hunting, especially for deer and ruffed grouse, is another major draw. Hiking, bird watching, swimming, and bicycling also are popular activities.

The properties to be planned within the NES are major contributors to the ecological and recreational significance of the Landscape. Collectively, the properties present opportunities to protect, manage, and restore all the major ecological features of the NES: extensive forests, high-biodiversity-value forest communities; barrens and bracken grasslands; river/stream corridors and other aquatic and wetland habitats; and bedrock features. The Pine-Popple and Pike Wild Rivers, three of only five state-designated Wild Rivers in Wisconsin, feature densely forested corridors with diverse forest communities and significant tracts of older forest, including hemlock-hardwoods, drier pine-oak-aspen, lowland hardwoods, and conifer swamps. Spread Eagle Barrens and Dunbar Barrens offer opportunity to manage for globally imperiled pine barrens and Spread Eagle is the best place in the state for bracken grasslands. The Wildlife and Fishery Areas contain extensive forests of aspen, oak, and pine, and wetland complexes of conifer and hardwood swamps, shrub wetlands, and sedge meadow. Three of the Wildlife Areas contain an embedded State Natural Area.

Similarly, the properties contain regionally significant recreational resources. All the major properties offer extensive tracts for hunting and trapping. The Pine-Popple and Pike rivers feature outstanding paddling and fishing, as well as scenic enjoyment of their many rapids, waterfalls, and bedrock outcrops. Various coldwater streams on the properties are excellent for trout fishing. The properties also offer opportunity for hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, and gathering of wild edibles. Several properties may have potential to meet recreational shortages and high-ranked recreation needs as identified in the ROA.

OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

The NES EL master plan describes how the properties in this region will be managed, used, and developed. The proposed management actions in the plan reflect the significant ecological opportunities and recreational resources of the NES and support the department's regional habitat management and recreational priorities and goals. The plan focuses on maintenance and enhancement of upland and lowland forested habitats, rare natural communities, and high-quality surface water and aquatic resources through a variety of active and passive management techniques. Recreation management

emphasizes the traditional outdoor activities of hunting and fishing as well other nature-based pursuits such as paddling, hiking, camping, and enjoyment of outstanding wild and scenic resources along three state-designated wild rivers. The plan also recognizes the importance of working with external partners, including other government entities, private landowners, and non-profit conservation groups to achieve common goals.

The NES plan includes management and/or real estate updates for three properties with existing NR 44-compliant plans.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Resource management in the NES EL plan emphasizes protection and maintenance of both upland and lowland deciduous and coniferous forest types and globally imperiled pine barrens and rare bracken grassland natural communities through a combination of standard habitat management practices and native community management. The plan calls for wild/scenic resources management along the corridors of the three state-designated wild rivers. A new State Natural Area is being proposed on the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers property. Fisheries management focuses on maintenance and enhancement of existing high-quality coldwater fisheries.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT

Hunting, fishing, trapping, paddling, and scenic enjoyment, pursued mainly in remote and rustic settings, are the primary recreational uses of the NES EL properties. The plan supports these activities primarily through habitat management, fish stocking, and maintenance of existing facilities. The plan recommends modest recreational enhancements, including additional boat access, parking areas, signage improvements, relocation of some existing facilities, and a new walking trail for scenic enjoyment of the Pine River.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are critical to the department's work. DNR collaborates with various government entities, private landowners, and other organizations to manage and restore habitat, monitor wildlife populations, control invasive species, and maintain recreational facilities. These partners include Florence County, Marinette County, Oconto County, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Turtles for Tomorrow, U.S. Forest Service, and We Energies. The NES EL plan acknowledges the importance of these partnerships and calls for continuing collaboration to achieve resource management and public use objectives.

REAL ESTATE RECOMMENDATIONS

Real estate recommendations in the NES EL plan include project boundary adjustments, property re-designations, acquisition goal adjustments, designation of administrative owners, and establishment of official property names, including for Scattered Statewide Acquisition Authority parcels. These are all considered routine "clean-up" actions related to accurate mapping of boundaries, clarification of administrative responsibility, improving management efficiency, and improving customer service by establishing official names for currently unnamed properties. The majority of proposed boundary expansions are to encompass land already owned by the department.