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WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Preston D. Cole
Dr. Fredrick Prehn
Gary Zimmer

101 South Webster Street PO Box 7921
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7921
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MASTER PLANNING TEAMS

SPONSOR TEAM

Steve Miller (retired)
  Director • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Laurie Osterndorf (retired)
  District Lands Program Manager • Southern District

Peter Biermeier (retired)
  Section Chief • Bureau of Parks and Recreation

Erin Crain
  Director • Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation

Paul Cunningham
  Staff Specialist • Bureau of Fisheries Management

Kate Fitzgerald
  Section Chief • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Eric Lobner
  Regional Program Manager
  Wildlife Management Southern District

John Nielsen (retired)
  Southern District Forestry Leader • Division of Forestry

Aaron Young
  Dodgeville Area Forestry Leader • Division of Forestry

CORE TEAM

Matt Seguin
  Parks and Recreation Specialist
  Facilities and Lands Southern District

Brian Hefty
  Southern District Property Management Supervisor
  Facilities and Lands Southern District

Nate Fayram
  Southwest Field Ecologist
  Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation

Bill Ishmael (retired)
  Area Supervisor • Wildlife Management Southern District

Nick Morehouse
  Forester • Division of Forestry

Tom Watkins
  Planning Consultant • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Ann Freiwald
  Planning Consultant • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

TECHNICAL SUB-TEAM

Travis Anderson
  Wildlife Biologist • Bureau of Wildlife Management

Daniel Goltz
  Wildlife Biologist • Bureau of Wildlife Management

Mike Dampf
  Wildlife Technician • Bureau of Wildlife Management

David Rowe
  Fisheries Region Team Supervisor • Fitchburg Field Unit

Dave Youngquist
  Conservation Warden • Bureau of Law Enforcement

Paul Zajackowski
  Regional Program Manager
  Parks and Recreation Southwest District

Jean Unmuth
  Water Resources Management Specialist
  Water Resources Southern District

CONSULTANTS

John M. Olson
  Engineer • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Mark J. Dudzik
  Departmental Historic Preservation Officer
  Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Anthonette Gilpatrick
  Accessibility Coordinator • Bureau of Facilities and Lands

Keith Warnke
  Program Specialist • Bureau of Law Enforcement

Mike Mossman (retired)
  Research Scientist • Bureau of Science Services

Brigit Brown
  Parks and Recreation Specialist
  Bureau of Parks and Recreation

GIS/MAP PRODUCTION

Ann Scott
  GIS Specialist/Cartographer, Facilities and Lands

Dana Dentice
  GIS Specialist/Cartographer, Facilities and Lands

Kaylin Helm
  GIS Specialist/Cartographer, Facilities and Lands

For your convenience this document is available at:
  dnr.wi.gov (keyword: Tower Hill State Park)

Cover photo by Ann Freiwald, DNR
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Tower Hill State Park is adjacent to the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway just south of Spring Green. This document represents an update to the previous master plan that was adopted in 1981. See Map A for regional context and location of the park.

**PARK OVERVIEW**

Tower Hill State Park is a 76.5 acre property nestled adjacent to the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway and is located in Iowa County on the south bank of the Wisconsin River, near Spring Green. The park is relatively close to the major population centers of southern Wisconsin, including Madison, Milwaukee, Janesville and Beloit. It is located in a popular regional tourist area with many attractions. Well known nearby neighbors include the famous American Players Theater, Taliesin (the summer home and studio of Frank Lloyd Wright), and the House on the Rock Resort and Golf Course. Visitors coming to enjoy these attractions often stop at Tower Hill for a picnic and a quick hike to take in the views and learn about the shot tower, and some use the campground as home base for an extended stay. See Map 1 for current infrastructure.

People have been coming to the park for generations and were enjoying the area long before it became a state park. While visitors come to Tower Hill to picnic, camp, hike and enjoy the outstanding natural beauty and scenic vistas afforded from the bluff top trails, another primary draw is the park’s unique historic resources. Highlights of the park’s interesting historic past include the shot tower and the old village of Helena, both dating from the 1830s, as well as the history of the site as the “Tower Hill Pleasure Company”.

**PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN**

The Tower Hill State Park Master Plan depicts how the property will be managed, used and developed, and the benefits it will provide to park visitors. It defines the recreational uses, natural resource management practices and additional aspects of the property’s future use and development.

**THE TOWER HILL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN:**

- Provides a vision and framework for the use, development and management of the park well into the future with an emphasis on the next 15 years.
- Identifies land management areas and plans for their future management through descriptions of management objectives and specific management prescriptions.
- Makes recommendations for recreation, natural resource and cultural resource management and habitat conservation to meet current and future needs.
- Provides for continuing public involvement during plan implementation.

**NEED TO REVISE THE TOWER HILL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN**

The last master plan for Tower Hill State Park was approved in 1981. The department determined the need to revise the plan in light of changing ecological, economic and social conditions. The revised master plan will incorporate new information and current understanding of management needs in the context of the larger landscape in which the park is located, and as required by Wisconsin State Statute 28.04. This plan will receive a formal, rigorous review approximately every 15 years. When necessary, the master plan may also be updated by plan amendments and variances through a formal process that includes public involvement.

**OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The Tower Hill State Park Master Plan revision occurred in conjunction with the revision of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway (LWSR) Master Plan. Planning was conducted in a joint process. See the LWSR master plan for additional details on the management of surrounding lands.

The park planning process was guided by State Statute 28.04 and Wisconsin Administrative Code NR44. The previous property master plan and extensive ecological, economic and social assessments provided a foundation for the development of this plan.

Public involvement is an integral part of the master planning process. To create a shared vision for the future of Tower Hill State Park, the planning process relied on a solid foundation of public participation. In 2014 a Public Involvement Plan was adopted, outlining the process, procedures and tools used throughout the planning process to encourage public awareness, interaction and input. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) worked with local municipalities, nongovernmental organizations, citizens and businesses to create the Tower Hill State Park Draft Master Plan. Public meetings were held in 2014 and 2016. Public comment forms seeking input on a range of recreation and resource management considerations were made available online, and provided at public meetings.

**PROPERTY PURPOSE, DESIGNATION AND AUTHORITY**

State parks are managed in accordance with Wis. Stat. s. 23.09 to assure the preservation of their scenic value, their historical value and the natural wonders they contain. The Wisconsin State Park Mission is “To protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of our Wisconsin State Park System properties while providing high quality recreational and educational opportunities and programs.”
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ACREAGE GOAL
• Tower Hill State Park Acreage Goal: 76.5 acres
• State Owned Acreage (2014): 76.5 acres
• No changes are proposed.

OVERVIEW OF THE MASTER PLAN
RECREATION
Recreation management will be implemented in a way that provides safe and sustainable recreational access while protecting the ecological values and unique features of the park. Overall, the current recreational opportunities and facilities at the park will remain; however, a number of improvements are planned. They are detailed in the sections below. The changes are designed to meet the demands of today’s park visitor and improve the quality of the visitor’s experience.

LAND AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT
This plan revision will continue management efforts to maintain the high aesthetic character of the park’s landscape. See Map B for existing land cover information. The high quality floodplain forest and habitat area will be managed as part of the larger Tower Hill Bottoms Native Community Management Area. (See the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Master Plan, Area 14, for details.)

DNR ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT FACILITY
Buildings and grounds providing office and storage space for staff from multiple department programs (e.g. Parks, Wildlife Management, Forestry, Riverway and Law Enforcement) occupy a corner of the western boundary of the park. The main building provides limited public contact services as well as drinking water and public restrooms. See “Special Management Area”, Map F. The Tower Hill State Park master plan covers the public use areas within the park and does not direct the management, use and development of this administrative and management support area. That is covered by other DNR administrative policies or directives.

PARK MANAGEMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND USE
VISION STATEMENT
The park’s outstanding scenic, historical and cultural features are conserved and interpreted for present and future generations while providing compatible nature based outdoor recreational opportunities. Supportive connections with the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway and nearby communities are promoted for mutual benefit.

PROPERTY GOALS
• Preserve, protect and interpret the park’s historic features, telling the story about early Wisconsin settlement and the history of lead mining.
• Provide outdoor, nature based recreation opportunities and modern facilities that connect visitors to the park’s natural, scenic setting and the lower Wisconsin River.
• Preserve and sustain the park’s high quality ecological resources and values.
• The impressive vistas from the park provide exceptional opportunities for showcasing the scenic landscape of the lower Wisconsin River valley at a grand scale.

RECREATION FACILITIES AND MANAGEMENT
Recreation management areas are managed with the primary objective of providing and maintaining land and water areas and facilities with a particular focus on outdoor recreation and
education. Management activities to achieve habitat, native community, or scenic management objectives may also occur in these areas. See Map C for planned and existing infrastructure and Map D for the road infrastructure.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Provide high quality opportunities for outdoor day-use recreation, such as picnicking and family gatherings.
- Provide trail opportunities for hiking, interpretation and nature enjoyment.
- Provide opportunities for high quality family and group camping.

RECREATION PRESCRIPTIONS

**Designated Trails**

*Management Prescriptions*

- Maintain approximately two miles of lightly to moderately developed designated trails\(^2\) for hiking/snowshoeing, nature-study, interpretation and education.
- Reroute or redevelop trails or trail segments as necessary to maintain the trail system in a sustainable condition.

The trail system layout is depicted in Figure 1 on the following page. Table 1 describes each trail segment’s current condition and management recommendation. See Figure 2 for planned improvements to the entire park.

**Day Use Area**

*Management Prescriptions*

- Provide a rustic day use area to accommodate up to 100 people. The facilities should include mowed grounds with picnic tables, grills, a shelter building, water access, toilets and parking as described below.

**Shelter building**

Tower Hill has one reservable shelter (capacity 60). It is enclosed and has picnic tables and electricity. Although the shelter (originally called a pavilion) was built in the early 1900s, it is in good condition, and it will receive some exterior improvements to make it ADA accessible.

**Toilets**

Tower Hill State Park currently has two sets of two pit toilets, one near the shelter building and the other near the campground. After years of service, both sets of pit toilets are beyond repair and do not meet current department standards. They will be removed and replaced with single new vault toilet building to serve both areas.

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2 “Designated trails” are trails that are maintained and signed for specific uses, and are shown on the official park maps. “Lightly and moderately developed trails are defined in NR 44.07(3).
Parking
The existing 60 vehicle parking lot serving the day use area is oversized and it will be reconfigured to provide for 45 parking stalls, plus two ADA stalls.

Water Access
The park’s minimally developed carry-in boat landing on Mill Creek lies about 800 feet upstream of the main-stem of the Wisconsin River. When water levels are low it can be muddy and difficult to use. Due to wetlands in the area, improvements to access are not possible. The landing will remain in service in its current condition. Peck’s Landing, across the river, serves as the primary public river access in the area.

Camping
Tower Hill State Park currently has 11 family campsites (non-electric). The campground layout is crowded and does not meet current department design standards. It will be redeveloped as a rustic campground [NR44.07(7)(e)4b], including the addition of a group campsite.

Management and Development Prescriptions
• Redevelop and reconfigure the existing family campground to improve the function of the campground and the camping experience. Provide up to eight campsite, suitable space being the limiting factor for the number of potential sites.

• At a nearby, separate location, develop a new group campsite that will accommodate up to 30 campers. Provide a central gathering area with a fire ring.

Interpretive and Historic Features
Tower Hill State Park’s interpretive and historic features are its main draw. The primary features include the shot tower, and the remnants and ruins remaining from the Village of Helena and the “Tower Hill Pleasure Co.”.

Management Prescriptions
• Develop and maintain an education/interpretation plan and program for the park. Revise the plan and program as required to meet changing needs and opportunities. Potential themes include:
  ○ The shot tower, who designed and built it, when, how and why,
  ○ The role of lead mining in southwestern Wisconsin in the early and mid 1800s,
  ○ The Village of Helena, the historical marker, the cemetery, the village’s demise,
  ○ The “Tower Hill Pleasure Co.”, remnants still remaining on the landscape including the cabin foundations, the gazebo, the “oven” and the pavilion,
  ○ The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway, its proximity to Tower Hill, and the recreation and education opportunities it offers.
• Preserve and maintain the shot tower and the associated structure.

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• Provide and maintain the interpretive displays directed by the interpretation/education plan.

Public Access
The public entrance and traffic pattern in the park will be reconfigured to improve the traffic flow pattern.

Management and Development Prescriptions
• Move the park entrance approximately 500 feet to the east of the existing entrance on CTH C. Provide a one-way road entrance and continue to exit the park at the current location.
• Construct a new park identification sign near the new entrance. Its design character should be appropriate to the area. (As the barn foundation located just north of the existing contact station will be removed, use the stones from this old foundation for the sign base.)
• Install a self-serve park sticker kiosk, a gate (for seasonal park closure), and a new 10’ by 10’ public contact station.

Hunting and Trapping
In 2012 the Natural Resources Board enacted a hunting and trapping framework for state parks and trails. Details on the allowed seasons and locations for hunting can be found online at: http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/pr/PR_2235.pdf

LAND AND VEGETATIVE MANAGEMENT

GENERAL STATE PARK VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES
Sustaining healthy forests is a vital role of Wisconsin State Parks System (WSPS) properties, and the key to sustaining healthy forests is pro-active management. To ensure that management practices are consistent with the goals and objectives of the WSPS, several management priorities have been established but may vary depending on site characteristics. The forest management priorities are:

• Aesthetics: Protect scenic views and allow forest cover to provide settings for solitude and privacy.
• Recreation: Sustain large tree canopy cover and shade in picnic areas, campgrounds, along nature trails and high use areas.
• Habitat: Provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and plants, including endangered and threatened species.

FIGURE 1 TRAIL PLAN FOR TOWER HILL STATE PARK
• Forest Health: Allow for regeneration of the forest through quality forest management and seek opportunities that enhance or maintain the overall health and vigor of the forest ecosystem.
• Pest management: Manage invasive plant and animal species, pests, diseases and nuisance wildlife through prevention, control and eradication activities.
• Education and research: Provide opportunities for interpretation, education and scientific research.
• Water quality: Sustain and enhance local watersheds and water resources including erosion control along waterways, trails and other property features.

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS FOR ALL AREAS**

- When conducting forest management activities follow the management guidelines in the guidance document, Managing Forests on Wisconsin State Park Lands, http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/documents/forestmanagement.pdf. In particular, establish buffers between harvest areas and designated use areas, roads and trails whenever possible, and apply visual quality best management practices to minimize conflict with recreational users.
- Reduce or eliminate non-native invasive species. NR40 regulated and other early detection species should immediately be reported and eliminated.

**LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS**

The master plan assigns land management classifications to areas within the property to represent the primary management or use focus of the area. The classifications are defined in WI Administrative Code (NR 44.06). The Tower Hill State Park property has the following land management classifications, and they are shown on Map F.

**Recreation Management Area (52 acres);** the primary management focus is to provide and maintain land and water areas and facilities for outdoor public recreation or education. This management area is further divided into two Recreational Use Settings;

**Type 4 Setting Area:** This 10 acre portion of the park is the most intensively developed, encompassing the picnic/day use area, the boat landing and campground. Intensive recreational use activities and related facilities are the primary focus of this portion of the park.

**Type 3 Setting Area:** This 42 acre back area of the park, located to the east of the developed picnicking/day use area, encompasses the forested bluff, back area trails and the shot tower.

Compared to the more developed part of the park, the focus here is on providing opportunities for recreational uses and experiences in a less developed setting and opportunities for more solitude.

**Native Community Management Area (15.5 acres);** the primary management focus is to conserve and perpetuate native plant and animal communities and native biological diversity. This area contains a high quality bottomland forest.

**Special Management Area (9 acres);** this classification applies to special-purpose areas. At Tower Hill, the Special Management Area Classification applies to the area that is primarily used for administrative and management facilities. Limited public use facilities or services may be provided there as well.

**Tower Hill Recreation Management Area**

**Management by Vegetation Type**

**White Pine**

**Management Objective**

- Develop, maintain and enhance old growth pine attributes for ecological and aesthetic benefits.

**Management Prescriptions**

- Primarily passively manage white pine. Limited management may be used where it is determined to be important for the long-term maintenance or enhancement of old growth attributes in these stands.
- Remove hazard trees along trails and near intensive use facilities per standards.

**Central Hardwoods**

**Management Objective**

- Maintain oak for aesthetic benefits.

**Management Prescription**

- Retain large oaks until the end of their biological lifespan.
- When harvesting, leave about one-third of all woody material (tops, trunks) on-site as coarse woody debris.
- Remove hazard trees along trails and near intensive use facilities per standards.

**Lowland Brush**

**Management Objective**

- In conjunction with the adjacent SNA, allow natural processes to determine the nature of this lowland brush site.

**Management Prescription**

- Passively manage the site.
Bottomland Hardwood SNA - Native Community Management Area
This 15 acre area is part of the 476 acre Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Tower Hill Bottoms State Natural Area. The whole state natural area is managed as a unit. The following are the management objectives and prescriptions for the whole natural area.

Management Objective
- Maintain as a Reserved Old Growth Bottomland Hardwood Forest and as an ecological reference area.

Management Prescription
- Use passive management to allow natural processes to determine the structure of the native forest. Actions to control invasive species and low intensity prescribed fire are allowed.
- Retain snags and coarse woody debris to promote old growth characteristics.
- Plant appropriate native trees to fill in gaps where reed canary grass dominates, or is threatening to dominate.
- Actively control non-native invasives or aggressive natives/naturalized vegetation such as box elder, garlic mustard and reed canary grass.
- Salvage of trees after a major wind event is not compatible with the management objectives.
- Provide opportunities for research and education on the highest quality native floodplain forests.

GENERAL PARK MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PROVISIONS
The following section describes general policies and provisions that are applied to all lands of the Tower Hill State Park under state ownership.

Invasive Species Control
Invasive non-native species have become recognized in recent years as a major threat to the integrity of the state parks. These species have the ability to invade natural systems and proliferate, often dominating a community to the detriment and sometimes the exclusion of native species. Invasive species can alter natural ecological processes by reducing the interactions of many species to the interaction of only a few species.

Tower Hill State Park has an invasive plant management plan which outlines various factors in managing for invasive species such as early detection, inventory, mapping, control, monitoring and research and education. The plan is used to guide the management of invasive plants on the state park property. In addition, Best Management Practices (BMPs) for invasive species will be incorporated into management practices on the property.

If detected, invasive species may be controlled using appropriate and effective methods, including but not limited to the use of pesticides, cutting, or removal by hand. Control methods may be restricted in certain sensitive management areas. Before initiating control measures, the management prescriptions for the area being treated will be referenced.

Chemical Use
In accordance with MC 4230.1, approved pesticides may be used for various purposes on the park, such as to control invasive plants, to control plant competition in forest regeneration areas, or for insect control except as restricted in the management prescriptions in this master plan. All pesticide label requirements and department procedures will be followed.

Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species
All management prescriptions in the master plan will consider the needs of these species and the potential impacts to the species and their habitat. Management actions being planned on the state park are checked against an up-to-date database of rare species to assure that no department actions result in the direct taking of any known endangered or threatened resource. Property managers routinely work with department biologists and ecologists to protect rare species where they are known to occur.

Fire Suppression
As stated in Wisconsin Statutes 26.11, “The department is vested with power, authority and jurisdiction in all matters relating to the prevention, detection and suppression of forest fires outside the limits of incorporated villages and cities in the state except as provided in sub (2), and to do all things necessary in the exercise of such power, authority and jurisdiction.” Forest fire suppression actions within the state park will consider the property management goals and the threats of the fire to life and property. Appropriate techniques will be used in each event to provide effective fire suppression while minimizing resource damage.

Forest Certification
In 2004, Wisconsin State Forests gained dual Forest Certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Independent, third-party
Certification means management of Wisconsin's forests meets strict standards for ecological, social and economic sustainability. In 2009, the state park lands were certified under FSC and SFI. The state park program will continue to participate in forest certification. The status of certification corrective actions will be shared annually.

**Authorized Response to Catastrophic Events**

Wildfires, timber diseases and insect infestations shall be controlled to the degree appropriate to protect the values of each management area. Necessary emergency actions may be taken to protect public health and safety. Appropriate management responses to catastrophic events are determined on a case-by-case basis, and action will be taken as appropriate. At a minimum, salvage of trees damaged by wind, fire, ice, disease, or insects may occur if consistent with the objectives and prescriptions of the management area.

**Research**

Tower Hill State Park has been host to deer browse research in the past. The research conducted by department managers, scientists and educational partners can be beneficial for the park, the department and the general public. Scientific research that is compatible with the ecological and aesthetic attributes of the site is generally supported. The State Park Superintendent has the authority to approve or deny requests for research projects in Tower Hill State Park.

**DNR Administrative and support facility - Special use management area**

This management area is not covered by this master plan. The specific management, use and development of this area is governed by other DNR administrative policies or directives.
APPENDIX MAPS
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