PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS FOR PLAN INITIATION
The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources initiated a regional master planning process for the Southwest Savanna Ecological Landscape (SWS EL) with a public input process, which ran from May 21 to June 25, 2019. A statewide news release and a GovD release with 320 subscribers was sent out on May 21 and 22, respectively, announcing the start of the planning process. The public was invited to give input and share ideas for future recreation and resource management on DNR properties within the Southwest Savanna region. Two public meetings were held, June 5 at New Glarus Village Hall and June 6 at Mineral Point City Hall, and an online and paper Public Input Form were available for the public to complete. Background information on the region and properties was available on the DNR Property Planning website. A total of 258 online and two paper public input forms were completed, three comments were received via email, and 13 people attended the public meetings.

The input received does not represent a statistically valid survey sample and should not be interpreted as such. Rather, the results of this process should be read as the views of those interested in giving their input.

SUMMARY OF INPUT RECEIVED
Major themes identified in the comments are presented below, organized by topic.

General Resource Management
Commenters expressed the need for more public lands in the region and the need to ensure recreation activity is balanced with sustainable management of ecological communities. Specifically, the comments stated the importance of grassland management, including managing invasive species and native species planting. Concern for the quality of Yellowstone Lake and the need for increased conservation efforts for coldwater fisheries were also discussed.

Respondents indicated interest in all natural resources topics listed within the Public Input Form: invasive species management, natural communities conservation, game species habitat conservation, fish habitat conservation, and rare species conservation. Property specific comments are discussed below.

General Public Use
Hiking, mountain biking, camping, canoeing and kayaking, and enjoying scenery were some of the most popular activities chosen through the online public input form. Respondents stated that there was an adequate amount of opportunity to participate in camping, enjoying scenery, hiking, road biking, and fishing. Mountain biking was noted as an activity with an inadequate amount of opportunity to participate by commenters. Respondents expressed their desire for increased trails throughout the region for mountain biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Comments varied on whether certain DNR properties should solely allow silent sports or allow motorized vehicles. Property specific comments are discussed below.
Property-specific

State Parks

Belmont Mound State Park
Public Input Form respondents shared that they use Belmont Mound State Park throughout the year. Hiking and enjoying scenery were some of the most popular activities chosen. Comments expressed support for increased signage, mountain biking trails, maintenance of existing trails, and repairing or rebuilding the observation tower.

New Glarus Woods State Park
New Glarus Woods State Park elicited the most property-specific comments. Public Input Form respondents shared that they use the park throughout the year. Hiking, camping, and enjoying scenery were some of the most popular activities chosen. Comments expressed support for building single-track mountain biking trails -- stating that the topography is ideal. Support for additional facilities included cross-country ski trails, campsites, showers, and flush toilets. Respondents also expressed the need for increased invasive species management.

Yellowstone Lake State Park
Yellowstone Lake State Park elicited the second most number of property-specific comments. Public Input Form respondents shared that they use the park throughout the year. Hiking, enjoying scenery, and swimming were among the most popular activities chosen. Respondents expressed support for additional facilities/opportunities including mountain biking, hiking, and cross-country ski trails; primitive campsites; and canoe/kayak access points. Further ideas included clearer trail signage, a fenced-in and maintained dog park with instructions on allowed activities, and a new boat rental shop. Comments varied on whether motorized recreation should be allowed on the lake.

Public comments discussed concern for the lake’s water quality, including runoff and harmful algae blooms, and the need for additional resources to address water quality. Respondents also expressed the need for increased invasive species management throughout the park.

State Wildlife Area

Yellowstone Wildlife Area
Yellowstone Wildlife Area elicited a wide range of comments. Public Input Form respondents shared that they use the park throughout the year. Enjoying scenery, hiking, and target shooting were some of the most popular activities respondents indicated they participate in -- although hunting, horseback riding, and dog training and trialing were discussed in comments. Respondents expressed support for a variety of additional facilities/opportunities including mountain biking, hiking, cross-country ski, snowshoe and horseback riding trails; and an expansion to the shooting range. Dog training and trialing on horseback were also discussed by respondents. This included their desire to designate and build a dog training and trialing area within a portion of Yellowstone Wildlife Area.

Respondents expressed a desire for stronger rule enforcement and increased maintenance at the existing shooting range. Commenters also expressed concern that hunting and horseback riding interfere or are at conflict with one another.

A need for increased invasive species management throughout the property was highlighted by commenters.
State Recreation Area
Browntown-Cadiz State Recreation Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property to enjoy scenery in the summer.

State Natural Areas
All
Overarching public comments for State Natural Areas (SNAs) included the desire to expand the size of existing SNAs, provide signage, complete prescribed burns where appropriate and increase invasive species management.

Hardscrabble Prairie State Natural Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property to enjoy scenery (primarily viewing the butterflies) in the summer and fall.

Ipswich Prairie State Natural Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property to enjoy scenery in the summer and fall.

Olson Oak Woods State Natural Area
Public input Form respondents visit the property in the spring to hike, enjoy scenery, and participate in educational activities. Respondent ideas included continuing prescribed fire to maintain species diversity and creating a natural surface hiking and biking trail to connect Olson Oak Woods to other State Natural Areas.

Pecatonica River Woods State Natural Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property to enjoy scenery in the spring, summer, and fall. Respondent ideas included investigating the value of the water and land upstream of this State Natural Area and creating a natural surface hiking and biking trail to connect Pecatonica River Woods to other State Natural Areas.

Sugar River Wetlands State Natural Area
Public Input Form respondents shared that they use the property throughout the year. Enjoying scenery, hiking, hunting, and collecting wild edibles were some of the most popular activities chosen. Respondent ideas included continued prescribed fire use to maintain species diversity, increasing invasive species management, completing streambank improvements and creating a natural surface hiking and biking trail to connect Sugar River Wetlands to other State Natural Areas. The need for clearer signage, or an easement, at the south parking lot was also stated.

York Prairie State Natural Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property to enjoy scenery, hunt, and hike in the spring, summer, and fall. Respondent ideas included increasing invasive species management, consider acquiring contiguous or nearby remnants, and creating a natural surface hiking and biking trail to connect York Prairie to other State Natural Areas.
Streambank Fee Protection Area

Yellowstone and Canon Creek Streambank Fee Protection Area
Public Input Form respondents use the property throughout the year for fishing. Ideas for improvement included pursuing easements along Canon Creek and Steiner Branch, re-connecting headwater tributaries with the main stem of Canon Creek, and increasing educational materials about the value of Yellowstone River.

Trails
Badger State Trail
Public Input Form respondents shared that they use Badger State Trail throughout the year. Comments included appreciation for the connectivity the trail provides between communities and to other trails, and the Stewart Tunnel. Ideas for improvement included increasing and providing consistent trail maintenance, increasing drainage, planting native species along the trail, and paving additional areas of the trail. Comments varied on whether the trail should allow motorized traffic.

Military Ridge State Trail
Public Input Form respondents shared that they use Military Ridge State Trail throughout the year. Comments included appreciation for the connectivity the trail provides between state parks and trails, and the ability to use the trail year-round. Ideas for improvement largely centered around the need for increased and consistent trail maintenance, especially after the last several years of severe weather events that have caused damage to the trail and bridges. Native species plantings along the trail was also suggested. Comments varied on whether the trail should have more portions paved and whether the trail should allow motorized traffic.

Mound View State Trail
This trail is not included in the Southwest Savanna Ecological Landscape Master Plan. Comments received regarding this trail will be shared with DNR staff and may be used when a master plan is developed for the trail.

Sugar River State Trail
Public Input Form respondents shared that they use Sugar River State Trail throughout the year. Comments included appreciation for the scenic beauty and camping opportunities along the trail in New Glarus Woods State Park. Ideas for improvement included increasing and providing consistent trail maintenance, paving, and building more accessible camping. Comments varied on whether the trail should allow motorized traffic.

Other Properties
Public input on properties not included in the Southwest Savanna Ecological Landscape Master Plan will be shared with DNR staff and may be used in future planning efforts.

Next Steps
The planning team will evaluate the input received and incorporate it into its consideration of recreation and resource management on Southwest Savanna properties. Additional factors that may be considered by the planning team include the properties’ statutory designations (i.e., Wildlife Area, State Natural Area, etc.); their physical/biological capabilities; the best role of the properties in their local, regional, and statewide context; and the professional expertise of DNR staff. The planning team will develop a draft master plan, which will be released for public review and comment.