

Blue Mound State Park Master Plan Management Alternatives Public Input Summary



In June 2018, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB) approved the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) recommendation to develop a plan revision to the Blue Mound State Park (BMSP) master plan. Initial public involvement occurred in Spring 2019. In Fall 2019, the public had the opportunity to comment on management alternatives for the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan. The management alternatives input period was an additional public involvement step the department offered to gain information for the planning team as it forms the draft master plan.

This document summarizes the input received during the management alternatives public input period. The Management Alternatives Document and other planning documents for this process can be found on the [Blue Mound State Park Master Plan website](http://dnr.wi.gov) (dnr.wi.gov; keyword: Property Planning).

Public Involvement Process

The intent of the management alternatives public involvement period was to aid DNR in evaluating alternatives, or options, for recreation and grassland and forest management. The DNR planning team created management alternatives for the following topics:

- Project boundary
- Camping
- Cross-country skiing
- Mountain biking
- Snowmobiling
- Other recreation topics
- Forest and grassland management

The BMSP master plan website contained background information, the Management Alternatives Document and details on the public involvement process. Additionally, the public was informed of the opportunity to comment on management alternatives through:

- A press release regarding the management alternatives public involvement opportunity issued statewide as part of the *DNR Weekly News* packet on November 5, 2019. The press release was forwarded to the 1,899 people on the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan and the Statewide Master Planning GovD distribution lists. The press release was also forwarded to organizations DNR identified as potentially having an interest in this planning process, local and county governments and legislative and Wisconsin Conservation Congress contacts.
- A display describing the management alternatives and the input process was set up in the Friends Shelter at BMSP.

The public had the opportunity to comment on and review the management alternatives through:

- An online public input form. The online public input form contained an option to utilize an interactive map to view the alternatives as the comment form was completed.
- A hard-copy input form that was available at the park or could be downloaded from the website and sent to DNR via U.S. Mail.
- Email or phone calls to the project's lead planner.
- A public meeting held on November 19 at Mount Horeb High School.

Public Meeting Summary

DNR hosted a public meeting to present the management alternatives and discuss them with the public. The meeting was held at Mount Horeb High School and was attended by approximately 130 people. The meeting began with a presentation on the alternatives and was followed by an open house.



Approximately 130 people attended the public meeting held November 19, 2019 at Mount Horeb High School.

During the open house portion of the meeting, attendees had the opportunity to view educational displays and maps, discuss the alternatives with department staff and submit input. Posters with the alternative topics and names were set up throughout the room. Meeting attendees were given red, blue and green sticky notes. During the presentation and open house attendees were asked to write their thoughts on the management alternatives by recording what they liked on green notes, what they did not like on red notes and questions they had on blue notes. They were then asked to place them on the corresponding alternative topic poster. All attendees were also given the opportunity to fill out a hard-copy public input form to submit at the meeting or by U.S. mail at a later date.

Input Received

DNR received approximately 1,073 comment submissions during the public involvement period. The majority of these were received through the online public input form. Approximately 400 individual sticky note comments were also received from the public meeting activity. The comments from the sticky notes are incorporated into this summary document with the rest of the comments received.

Number of Public Input Submissions Regarding the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan Management Alternatives per Input Format

Input Format	Number Received
Online Input Form	900
Hard Copy Input Forms at Public Meeting	40
Email/Phone Calls	82
Hard Copy Input Forms and Letters through U.S. Mail	51
Total	1,073

Note on the Public Input Process and Input Received

This public input process was conducted to gain an understanding of the public's perspective on the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan Management Alternatives. While seven management alternative topics were available for comment, respondents were not required to respond to every topic, and most did not. 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 offering their input.

Public Input Summary

This section summarizes the input the department received and aims to discuss the themes present in the perspectives shared with the department. It is not a complete listing of all comments, nor does it directly respond to every comment received.

Shared Values

As in the initial public comment period, the input received on the management alternatives reflects shared values in comments across the topics. These shared values include appreciation for the scenic and natural setting of BMSP and a desire for safe recreational facilities.

Input Received on Management Alternative Topics

Project Boundary

Comments in favor of Alternative 1: Project Boundary Expansion frequently cited appreciation for public land access, especially in southern Wisconsin and near the Madison metro-area. Comments in favor of Alternative 1 also discussed the potential for increased recreational opportunity and increased resource protection in positive terms. Additional opportunity to buffer the existing park from development was also stated as a reason for supporting Alternative 1. Commenters expressed appreciation for Alternative 1's potential to expand the connection between BMSP and Brigham County Park.



Those comments in favor of Alternative 2: Status Quo discussed the current park as adequate or thought the resources needed to expand the park may be better allocated elsewhere.

Camping

Those commenters that selected Camping Alternative 1: Expanded Camping as their preferred option frequently cited the increased opportunity offered by the alternative as a reason for their selection. Maintaining adequate spacing between sites, ensuring adequate support facilities and adding electrical receptacles were mentioned as considerations for campground expansion. Some commenters that selected Alternative 1 suggested they supported only expanding certain types of camping. Several commenters requested additional camping types, such as dispersed camp sites, be included in Alternative 1.

Commenters that preferred Alternative 2: Status Quo often stated that the park was too small to accommodate additional camping opportunities. Others preferred the smaller campground experience and expressed concern that additional campsites would lead to overcrowding.

Cross-Country Skiing

Respondents that preferred Cross-Country Skiing Alternative 1: Controlled Mounds Park Road Crossing often cited the increased convenience of only removing their skis once, and the increased safety of crossing Mounds Park road at one controlled intersection, as their reason for preferring the alternative. Those that preferred Alternative 2: Status Quo frequently discussed their appreciation for the trails in their current alignment. Other comments in favor of Alternative 2 discussed concerns with snow quality and two-way skiing on the potential Alternative 1 trail, as well as safety concerns with crossing Mounds Park Road at the controlled intersection.

Comments on cross-country skiing at BMSP in general expressed appreciation for the trails and frequently mentioned BMSP as one of the top skiing destinations in Southern Wisconsin. Several commenters also requested cross-country ski trails be included in future park expansion areas.

Mountain Biking

The mountain biking alternatives received the second-most comments of any topic. Increased mountain biking opportunity through better water management and a trail system that fits a full spectrum of skill levels were common reasons for supporting Alternative 1: Trail Network Redesign. Commenters expressed dissatisfaction with the number of days the current trail system is closed due to water management (soil displacement or poor drainage) issues. Commenters on Alternative 1 also often mentioned the potential to connect to Brigham County Park and to limit environmental impacts, such as erosion, as positive attributes of the alternative. Commenters also requested that the total mileage of mountain bike trails not be reduced at the park.

Those that selected Alternative 2: Status Quo as their preferred alternative often cited environmental concerns, such as erosion, with mountain biking trails and appreciation for the current trail system as reasons for selecting the alternative.

Snowmobiling

The snowmobiling alternatives drew more comments than any other topic. Those that selected Alternative 1 as their preferred alternative noted that it removed snowmobiles from the unpaved portions of the roadway while keeping them near the existing road corridor. Some commenters that preferred

Alternative 1 also noted that this alternative was close to the status quo while offering an improved snowmobiling experience.

Those supporting Alternative 2: Service Road Trail often noted that the trail in this alternative does not intersect with cross-country ski trails. Comments in support of Alternative 2 frequently discussed the existing infrastructure the trail would be sited on and the limited cost and construction needed to open this trail to snowmobile use. Many commenters that preferred Alternative 2 noted their view that this trail is a safe alternative. Others commented that Alternative 2 is near the location of the snowmobile trail that operated until the 1990s and that it would be a scenic trail.

Those that chose Alternative 3: West and North Slope Trail as their preferred alternative often discussed this alternative as a solution that may work for both snowmobilers and those who prefer to not have snowmobiling present in BMSP. Other comments supporting Alternative 3 noted its limited impact on other park activities and as a solution to the snowmobile sound and trail crossing concerns noted by some commenters.

Commenters that selected Alternative 4: Status Quo as their preferred alternative frequently noted that the status quo currently makes the desired connection between the Military Ridge State Trail and the county trail system north of the park. These commenters often noted that because this connection exists, they did not feel additional snowmobile facilities were necessary or they expressed concern with additional snowmobile activity in the park. Others commented in support of Alternative 4 because they felt resources may be better allocated to other projects. Environmental concerns with additional snowmobile facility development were also often cited by those that preferred Alternative 4.

Many comments were related to snowmobile access to Blue Mound State Park in general and not related to a specific alternative. Comments in support of snowmobile access to Blue Mound State Park often cited economic benefits to communities, enjoyment of snowmobiling as a recreational activity and support for snowmobile access to public lands in general. Comments against snowmobiling in BMSP frequently expressed concerns about exposure to snowmobile sounds and fumes, safety concerns and their view that BMSP is a park that should be dedicated to nonmotorized activities. Others discussed environmental concerns, including invasive species spread and habitat loss.

Other recreation Topics

Comments on other recreation topics included slow speed four-wheel drive trails, hunting, trapping, snowshoeing, fat-tire (winter) biking, and appreciation for the observation towers. Several commenters commented positively on the potential Driftless Trail connection.

Natural Resources Management

Natural resources management was discussed in the alternatives document in three zones.

Forest Zone

Comments in support of Forest Zone Alternative 1: Large Hardwoods Management frequently focused on BMSP's forest setting and a desire to see little timber management. Several commenters discussed other efforts to manage for oaks in the region and suggested that BMSP should be a setting where Central Hardwoods succeeds the oak forest. The limited potential impact to recreational activities under this alternative was discussed in some comments.



Comments in support of Forest Zone Alternative 2: Large Hardwoods Management with Oak Component often cited oak forests as the historic or iconic cover type in the BMSP region and supported efforts to regenerate oaks. Other comments supporting Alternative 2 focused on the wildlife and habitat benefits oak forests provide.

Oak Woodland and Prairie Transition Zone

Comments on the oak woodland and prairie zone were limited. Those that favored the management described for this zone cited ecological benefits and discussed historic cover. Those with concerns about the management discussed maintaining the wooded nature of BMSP and potential disruptions to recreational activity.

Day Use and Camping Zone

Few comments on the Day Use and Camping Zone were received. Those comments received were generally supportive of the management described.

Overall Conclusions and Next Steps

The number of public comments received and attendees at the public meeting demonstrated continuing public interest in this planning process. DNR is committed to an open, transparent planning process that follows the process described in ch. NR 44, Wis. Adm. Code. The planning team will continue to develop the draft master plan while considering public input, staff expertise and background information summarized in this and other documents posted to the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan website. Additional formal public input processes will take place at key milestones during the planning process.

