

Blue Mound State Park Master Plan Initial Public Input Period 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. The department initiated the plan revision process with an initial public involvement period that ran from February 26 to March 26, 2019.

Public Involvement Process

The intent of the initial public involvement period was to aid DNR in identifying pertinent issues, topics and questions that should be addressed in the planning process. Individuals and stakeholder organizations were informed of the public involvement period through:

- A website that contained background information as well as details on the public involvement process.
- An informational item on the NRB's February 27, 2019 meeting agenda. The online agenda also contained a link to the BMSP master plan website.
- A link on the Blue Mound State Park homepage to the master plan's website.
- A press release regarding the planning process and public involvement opportunities issued statewide as part of the *DNR Weekly News* packet on February 26, 2019. The press release was forwarded to the 1,742 people on the GovD distribution list used in past planning efforts as well as representatives of 34 organizations DNR identified as potentially having an interest in this planning process. The department's Twitter account also posted the press release.
- Posters advertising the public involvement opportunity were placed at Blue Mound State Park and several local libraries.

To give the public a summary of the background data gathered, DNR created and posted a scoping document for the BMSP master plan. The public was able to submit input through an online public input

form posted to the plan’s website, email, phone, U.S. mail or a public meeting held March 12, 2019 in Mount Horeb.

Public Meeting Summary

DNR hosted a public meeting to identify pertinent issues and topics to address during the planning process. The meeting, attended by approximately 320 people, began with a short presentation followed by a series of small group discussions. Participants were asked to sit with a randomly assigned group for the first question and were then welcome to switch tables between rounds. The questions posed to the group for discussion were:

1. What do you value about Blue Mound State Park?
2. What would improve your experience at Blue Mound State Park?
3. What are the most important questions to address during the master planning process?

Participants were asked to discuss their response with their table and write their thoughts on the sticky notes or poster paper available. All attendees were also given the opportunity to fill out and submit a hard-copy public input form at the meeting, or by sending it to the department at a later time.



Meeting attendees discussed pertinent issues and questions that should be addressed during the master planning process at the March 12, 2019 public meeting in Mount Horeb.

Input Received

DNR received over 1,800 comments during the public involvement period. The majority of these were received through the online public input form.

Number of Comments Received Regarding the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan per Input Format, February 26 – March 26, 2019

Input Format	Number of Comments Received
Online Input Form	1,532
Hard Copy Input Forms at Public Meeting	237
Email/Phone Calls	50
Hard Copy Input Forms and Letters through U.S. Mail	5
Total	1,824

An additional 595 individual comments were recorded during the small group discussion portion of the public meeting.

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 pertinent topics and questions to address during the planning process. Specific management alternatives were not included in this initial process as none were yet proposed. 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. It is not a complete listing of all comments, nor does it directly respond to every comment received. Rather, this section aims to discuss the themes present in the perspectives shared with the department.

Shared Values

The structured public input options DNR offered (public meeting, online and hard-copy public input forms) asked questions meant to help the department understand why people choose to visit Blue Mound State Park. While the majority of the input received focused on respondents' preferred recreational offerings at the park, each person was asked why they chose to participate in their preferred activities at Blue Mound State Park. Through the answers to these questions, and the small group discussions at the public meeting, several themes emerged across respondents as shared reasons for valuing Blue Mound State Park.

Appreciation of Scenic and Natural Beauty

The most common sentiment expressed, across all activity preferences, was an appreciation of the scenic beauty of BMSP. The park's topography makes the park a landmark and offers scenic vistas of the surrounding areas. The variety of habitats and land cover offer park users varying scenery as they traverse the park.

Location

The park's location in western Dane County, at the edge of Wisconsin's Driftless Area, makes it both scenic and conveniently located for many park users. Many commenters expressed appreciation for having a scenic area to visit and recreate within a short drive of the Madison metro-area. Of those who provided input to the online public input form, the most frequently given ZIP codes were in Dane and Iowa counties, with the Milwaukee metro-area also well represented.

Access to Safe Recreation

The desire to have recreational facilities that are both safe and readily accessible was a common theme. Some commenters suggested safety concerns with current conditions or past proposals and suggested solutions to these safety concerns. Others



Commenters frequently mentioned the scenic beauty of BMSP as a reason for visiting the park.

discussed BMSP as providing access for them to participate in their preferred recreational activities through facilities onsite and as a connection to other recreation on adjacent public and private lands. This was especially true for those interested in snowmobiling and mountain biking.

Outdoor Recreation

Most of the comments focused on outdoor recreation offerings at the park. Along with input regarding specific outdoor recreational activities, the department also received comments that addressed outdoor recreation more generally. These comments included requests to expand the park's project boundary to facilitate expanded recreational access, additional interpretive opportunities and various operational considerations.

Motorized Recreation

Motorized recreation at BMSP, primarily snowmobiling, was a frequent comment topic. Snowmobiling currently occurs through the park in the Mounds Park and Ryan road right-of-way owned by the Town of Brigham. Comments regarding motorized recreation in the park largely centered on removing snowmobiling from the right-of-way to a designated trail.

Those in favor of a snowmobile trail outside of the right-of-way expressed safety concerns related to the right-of-way snowmobilers currently utilize. Uneven terrain in the right-of-way is a primary factor in these safety concerns. Right-of-way riding was also generally discussed as an undesirable experience that subtracted from the enjoyment of the park surroundings. Other proponents discussed a trail outside of the right-of-way as a potential gateway to other recreation in the park, such as snowshoeing. Environmental impact of any snowmobiling outside of the right-of-way was discussed by those in favor as either being minimal, or in positive terms by citing deer and other wildlife's ability to use the trail to navigate snow covered forests.

Those opposed to snowmobiling in BMSP discussed safety, noise, fumes and other potentially negative environmental impacts among their concerns. Those discussing safety expressed concern about crossings between nonmotorized and motorized use trails. Fumes and noise from snowmobiles were often noted as harmful to the experience of participating in silent, nonmotorized recreation. Commenters that discussed environmental impacts of snowmobiling suggested the loss of trees required to create a trail outside of the right-of-way and erosion would be detrimental to the park's ecology. Others discussed potential climate change impacts in southwest Wisconsin and suggested the efforts to create a snowmobile trail may be detrimental to climate change mitigation efforts or may not be worthwhile.

Land use for recreation was a frequently discussed topic by those commenting on motorized recreation at BMSP. Those in favor of snowmobiling often stated that, as a state-owned park, BMSP should be open to all, regardless of how they want to recreate. They also mentioned Wisconsin snowmobile clubs' record of successfully working with private landowners to establish responsibly maintained trail systems and suggested they would do the same at BMSP. Those opposed to snowmobiling in BMSP often cited the thousands of miles of snowmobile trails throughout the state as evidence that more snowmobile trails were not needed to provide that recreational opportunity.

Camping

Both the Family Campground and Bike-Hike Campground are popular with those who submitted input. Campers appreciate the quiet, natural atmosphere of both campgrounds. The Bike-Hike Campground's



accessibility from the Military Ridge State Trail and the ability to bike to it from Madison were frequently cited as assets. Improvements suggested for the camping facilities were varied but included:

- Providing additional electric receptacles at the Family Campground
- Providing additional bike-to or hike-to campsites
- Addition of a self-registration station to the Bike-Hike Campground.

Many other suggested improvements were operational in nature and outside the scope of the master plan. These comments were shared with the Bureau of Parks and Recreation Management.

Cross-Country Skiing

Those who commented on cross-country skiing appreciated the length, varied terrain and peaceful nature of the cross-country ski trail system. The ability to ski in either skate or classical styles at the park was frequently mentioned as a positive of the trails. The Friends Shelter warming house and that BMSP often has quality skiing snow later into the spring season than other locations in southern Wisconsin were also mentioned as assets for skiing at the park.

Increasing skate skiing opportunities, adding more trails and discouraging hiking on groomed ski trails were suggested improvements for the cross-country ski trails. Others suggested DNR should establish areas where skiing with leashed dogs or skijoring is permitted. Additional connections to Brigham County Park and expanding the park's boundaries to facilitate additional ski trails were also mentioned.

Hiking

BMSP draws hikers because of the beauty, solitude and varied terrain the park offers according to those who submitted input. The opportunity to see wildlife and landscape vistas from the park's trails and towers was also frequently cited as a reason people choose to hike at BMSP. In addition to traditional hiking activities, trail running and using the terrain as training for other hikes in more mountainous terrain are also popular activities at BMSP. Commenters suggested keeping trails as natural as possible, exploring opportunities for connecting to existing and potential future trails and improving trail maintenance and routing to avoid erosion and water-logged trails as potential improvements to the hiking experience.



Over 300 hundred people attended the initial public meeting March 12, 2019 in Mount Horeb.

Mountain Biking

Those commenting on mountain biking at BMSP discussed their appreciation of the length, quality and location of the trail system. The technicality of the trail system was a frequent topic. Opinions varied regarding whether the trails were too focused on experienced riders. Other suggested improvements to the mountain biking system included:

- Creating more sustainable trails with better drainage to limit the amount of days trails are closed following the spring melt or precipitation events.
- Developing connections to Brigham County Park for a more extensive mountain biking experience.
- Encouraging snowshoeing and discouraging hiking on soft winter biking trails to keep trails intact.

Snowmobiling

Connecting to adjacent trail systems on the current right-of-way trail and enjoying the natural setting of BMSP were the main reasons individuals gave for snowmobiling through the park. Suggested improvements to the snowmobiling experience at BMSP included:

- Developing a designated snowmobile trail outside of the right-of-way.
- Ensuring the safety of the riding experience.

Snowshoeing

Enjoyment of the snowy landscape, packing down the fat bike trails and the opportunity to explore areas of the park not always accessible during the summer were all reasons commenters gave for snowshoeing at BMSP. Increasing the number of trails designated for snowshoeing, encouraging individuals to wear snowshoes when hiking on winter bike trails, and creating an area where off-leash dogs can accompany snowshoers were suggested improvements to the trail system.

Swimming

Commenters discussed the swimming facilities at BMSP as a great way to cool off during the summer, especially after a day of hiking or biking. Commenters appreciated the kid-friendly nature of the pool area, especially the splashpad. Installing a pool similar to the former lap pool and high dive was frequently mentioned as a potential improvement to the swimming experience.

Natural Resources Management

Comments related to natural resources management at BMSP were heavily focused on invasive species control, erosion and water management and maintaining the natural aesthetic of the property.

Other topics mentioned in natural resources-related comments include:

- Protecting and providing habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- Prioritizing restoration of prairie and Oak Savanna areas.
- Managing timber for an unbroken forest and overall healthy ecosystem.
- Expanding the park's boundaries to provide additional resource protection and management.
- Maintaining the natural aesthetic of the park, especially in higher use areas.
- Consideration of climate change mitigation and adaptation in developing management objectives and prescriptions.

Throughout the many comments received as part of this process it was clear that the natural environment of Blue Mound State Park is a large part of why people enjoy recreating at the park.

Overall Conclusions and Next Steps

The number of public comments received and attendees at the public meeting was higher than many initial input periods for DNR master plans, demonstrating the significant 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 now begin to develop the draft master plan while considering public input and background information summarized in this document and the Blue Mound State Park Master Plan Scoping Document. Additional formal public input processes will take place at key milestones during the planning process.

