



Interim Forest Management Plan

Property Identifiers

Property Name: **Merrick**

Property Designation or Type: **State Park**

DNR Property Code: **9330**

Forestry Property Code: **610**

Property Location - County: **Buffalo**

Property Acreage: **322 acres** (305 acres in WisFIRS)

Master Plan Date: **1986**

Property Manager: **James Thompson**

Property Assessment

The following should be considered during the property assessment:

A. **Ecological Landscape description and property context:**

Merrick State Park is located in the Western Coulee and Ridges ecological landscape. This ecological landscape is characterized by its highly eroded, un-glaciated topography with steep sided valleys and ridges, high gradient headwaters streams, and large rivers with extensive, complex floodplains and terraces. Many rare species have been documented here due to the diversity, scale, types, condition and context of the natural communities present. Oak forests are more abundant here than any other ecological landscape, and mesic maple-basswood forests are also widespread. All of these forest types can provide critical breeding and/or migratory habitat for significant populations of native plants and animals. Maintaining large blocks of these forest types, including areas with combinations of these types, is a major conservation opportunity. Fire-dependent oak ecosystems are well-represented in this ecological landscape, including Oak Openings, Oak Barrens, Oak Woodland, and dry to mesic oak forests.

Bedrock is mostly Paleozoic sandstones and dolomites of Cambrian and Ordovician age. Precambrian quartzite occurs in the Baraboo Hills, near the eastern edge of the ecological landscape. Thin beds of shale occur with other sedimentary rocks in some areas. Bedrock is exposed as cliffs and, more locally, as talus slopes. Soils are windblown loess of varying thickness, and alluvium in the floodplains. Organic soils, especially peats, are rare. Dendritic drainage patterns are well-developed in this mostly un-glaciated ecological landscape. Natural lakes are restricted to the floodplains of large rivers. Large, warm-water rivers are especially important here and include the Wisconsin, Chippewa, and Black. The Mississippi River forms the Ecological Landscape's western boundary. Numerous spring-fed (cold-water) headwaters streams occur here. Cool-water streams are also common.



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Most of the park is in the Mississippi River Valley Train-North (222Lc08) Landtype Association (LTA). The characteristic landform pattern in this LTA is nearly level river islands and floodplains. The characteristic landform pattern is nearly level river islands and floodplains. A very small portion of the park is in the Roundtree Ridges, Tunnel City Hills, and Valleys-North (222LC13) LTA. The characteristic landform pattern is hilly with wide summits surrounded by lower hills and very narrow valleys. Soils are well-drained silty and loamy soils with a silt loam or sandy loam surface over non-calcareous silty loess or over loamy or clayey residuum or colluvium; most over limestone or sandstone bedrock.

B. General property description – management, adjacent land uses, topography, soils, etc.:

An initial 265 acre gift to the State of Wisconsin by John A. Latch of Winona Minnesota led to the establishment of Merrick State Park in 1932. Mr. Latch asked that the park be named for George Byron Merrick an historian, author and well-known steamboat pilot from Prescott, Minnesota. Initial public use areas were developed and facilities built by the CCC and WPA during the 1930's. Additional development followed in the 1960's and 70's.

Merrick State Park lies in the floodplain of the Mississippi River on Fountain City Bay. The park is situated near the base of steep bluffs to the east. The eastern border is formed, in part, by STH 35 and Waumandee Creek. A railroad line passes through the Eight acres of pine plantation was established in about 1950. The pines were initially thinned in 1980. Following a severe blow down and "clean-up" that occurred in 1998, no further thinning has occurred. Hardwoods determined to be hazard trees in and around use areas have been addressed individually.

The extensive Mississippi River floodplain north and south of the park is largely undeveloped and consists of floodplain forest, shrub-carr, and a variety of open wetland types. There is extensive additional public land in the floodplain, both in state (Whitman Dam Wildlife Area) and in federal (Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge) ownership. Some of the floodplain is in agriculture.

In the bluff-lands to the east, many of the valley floors and ridge tops have been converted to agriculture. The slopes, by and large, are wooded. There are scattered residences and farmstead along the floodplain and in the hill country. Small urban areas, like Fountain City to the south, are present.

Eight acres of pine plantation was established in about 1950. The pines were initially thinned in 1980. Following a severe blow down and "clean-up" that occurred in 1998, no further thinning has occurred. Hardwoods determined to be hazard trees in and around use areas have been addressed individually.

Remnant sand prairie exists near the entrance road into the park. This priority natural community type has a state ranking of S2 (imperiled in Wisconsin).

C. Current forest types, size classes and successional stages:

- **Bottomland hardwoods** (33%) 100 acres; date of origin 1926; large sawlogs; dominated by silver maple, swamp white oak, and elm.
- **Red pine** (17%) 52 acres; dates of origin 1966-1980; softwood poles to softwood small sawlogs; plantations; dominated by red pine, Scots pine, and black oak.
- **Central hardwoods** (14%) 42 acres; dates of origin 1970 and 1985; hardwood small sawlogs and hardwood poles; dominated by black locust; green ash, elm, black oak, and Scots pine.
- **White pine** (2%) 7 acres; date of origin 1967; large sawlogs; plantation; dominated by white and red pine.



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- **Oak** (2%) 6 acres; date of origin 1925; large sawlogs; dominated by white oak, black oak, shagbark hickory, and black cherry.
- **Other types** (32%) 98 acres; include campgrounds, rows-of-way, upland grass, remnant sand prairie, and streams.

D. NHI: Endangered, threatened, Special Concern species, Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN):

Three rare plant species (one threatened, 2 special concern) were historically documented in the vicinity of Merrick State Park. Four rare animal species (one threatened, three special concern) have been documented in or in the vicinity of the park. Of these, three are Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

E. Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA), Important Bird Areas (IBA):

The park is within the Mississippi Bluffs and Floodplain COA and adjacent to the Upper Mississippi River IBA.

F. Significant cultural or archeological features

Archeological features are present at Merrick State Park.

G. Invasive species:

Buckthorn, black locust, Scots pine, garlic mustard, and reed canary grass have been noted.

H. Existing State Natural Areas (SNA) designations/natural community types limited in the landscape:

No SNAs have been designated. No limited natural community types are present.

I. Primary public uses:

Camping, hiking, fishing and boating access to Mississippi River at two boat landings. Merrick is visited by about 80,000 persons each year and realizes about 20,000 camper visitor days each year. Most visitors recreate at Merrick to access the adjacent Mississippi River to fish and or boat. Campers have direct access to the river, including boat mooring opportunities. The park is used year round including waterfowl hunting in the fall and ice fishing during the winter.

J. Biotic Inventory status: report issued 2012

K. Deferral/consultation area designations: None

IFMP components

Management Objectives:

From 1986 master plan, Section B.2.b Vegetative management:

1. Conifer plantations will be managed toward big tree silviculture.
2. Defective (i.e., hazard) trees will be removed to insure visitor safety.

Property Prescriptions

Conifer plantations – Thin every 10-15 years. Favor long-lived species such as red and white pine and discriminate against Scots pine. Leave dead and dying trees for wildlife habitat and coarse woody debris development if those trees are not a potentially hazardous.



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All stands – Control invasive plant species using accepted practices including mechanical, manual, chemical, and biological control methods such as prescribed fire. Manage hazard trees per department standards. Ash trees in use areas that may be affected by emerald ash borer may be managed prior to infestation.

Summary of Public Involvement and Comments Received

Maps (Optional)

- a. Property Maps

PREPARED BY:

James V Thompson 01/27/2015
Property Manager Date

APPROVED:

Ben Bergey 3/20/2015
Area Program Supervisor Date

REVIEWED BY:

Kevin Schilling 3/23/2015
Forester Date

Dean Edlin 3/23/2015
District Ecologist Date