

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is proposed?

The proposed Glacial Heritage Area project would be a coordinated series of parks, preserves, wildlife and natural areas, and other conservation lands that are linked together and to nearby cities and villages with different types of trails. This network of “strings and pearls” is intended to provide readily accessible opportunities for residents and visitors to get outdoors to hike, bike, watch wildlife, fish, paddle, hunt, camp, cross country ski, ride horses, and participate in other nature-based activities. Equally important, the project also seeks to protect and restore native grassland, savanna, woodland, and wetland habitats, and improve water quality in lakes, wetlands, and rivers. In addition, the project seeks to incorporate the area's significant cultural and historical elements. The proposed Glacial Heritage Area is the result of a cooperative planning effort by a diverse group of people representing local community interests, elected officials, conservation and recreation organizations, and the Department of Natural Resources.

Nationally, there is growing concern about the impact, particularly on families and children, of spending more time in front of televisions, video games, and computers, and less time outdoors. Throughout the state, communities are looking for ways to connect people with nature. As the “baby boom” generation continues to age, more and more residents have the time to enjoy nature-based recreation. Given the current distribution of public recreation lands in Wisconsin, the southern and eastern parts of the state are in critical need of increased opportunities for public access to natural resources. Because of its location and unique natural features, few, if any, areas in Wisconsin are as well suited as the proposed Glacial Heritage Area to offer the range and diversity of recreation activities that are envisioned in this proposal.

The Department and partners’ proposal is to create the Glacial Heritage Area to facilitate the protection and management of four types of landscape resources, while increasing economic development and prosperity of nearby cities and villages. The four types of lands proposed to be part of the network are:

- **Conservation parks.**

The primary purpose of the conservation parks is, collectively, to provide high quality opportunities for residents and visitors alike to engage in a range of outdoor activities, particularly trail-based activities including hiking, biking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. Most of the existing parks, as well as the proposed parks, have or are envisioned to have available, an assortment of improvements including picnic areas, drinking water, and toilets. Some might also include shelters, play equipment for children, or observation decks and blinds designed to provide enhanced wildlife-watching opportunities. If an adequate land base can be acquired, limited rustic camping would be possible at some parks.

The various conservation parks are intended to make available a range in outdoor experiences. Some parks would incorporate developed facilities while others would be managed to provide a rustic experience with limited improvements. Similarly, the parks are intended to provide mixes of different recreation activities based on each park’s attributes, size, and location. Deer and turkey hunting are proposed to be incorporated at times of the year and in portions of the new parks that supplement but do not conflict with the parks’ primary purposes and users.

A total of thirteen, small to modestly-sized parks and preserves currently exist in the GHA project area. The GHA plan proposes to expand five of these to provide a broader range of experiences and to establish seven new parks. Most of the conservation parks would eventually range in size from 200 to 700 acres.

- **Linking trails.**

Approximately 100 miles of linking trails are proposed to meander through the countryside and connect conservation and recreation destinations to the dozen cities and villages in the area. A

coordinated network of biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and hiking opportunities would be served by the trails. The linking trails are envisioned as relatively flat, either off-road or separated from vehicle traffic, and suitable for people with a range of abilities, including children and seniors. Most trails would be within narrow corridors (typically 30' to 100') with surfaces of packed gravel, asphalt, grass, or soil. Some would have different "treads" for different trail users (e.g., one for bicycles, and an adjacent one for horses).

A primary factor in locating these trails will be to ensure they have minimal impact on surrounding land use. They would be located based on landowner preferences, which might include along the edges of fields or woodlots, along the edges of road right-of-ways, on farm roads, or in other areas where existing land uses would not be significantly affected. Initial segments of the linking trails would be located on appropriate, lightly-traveled, country roads as needed.

- **River corridors.**

Two types of lands along rivers and creeks would be components of the GHA. First, is a series of small sites (5 to 10 acre), and potentially one or two larger sites, that would provide recreational access for boaters, paddlers, and shore anglers. These areas might include parking, launches, picnic areas, pit toilets, and other simple facilities. The larger sites would provide a limited number of simple, rustic campsites accessible only from the water.

The second type of river corridor protection would focus on natural resources. High quality open wetlands and floodplain forests along the Lower Bark River, Lower Koshkonong Creek, and Allen Creek are proposed to be protected. These landscape features harbor diverse native communities and populations of several rare plant and animal species. In addition, the protection and management of narrow bands of permanent riparian vegetation along rivers and streams to help improve water quality is proposed.

- **Wildlife & Natural Areas.**

Eleven State Wildlife Areas and twelve State Natural Areas are present within the GHA Study Area and together encompass over 25,000 acres. Like many wildlife properties elsewhere in the state, several of the Wildlife Areas were originally established in the 1940s to 1960s as Public Hunting Grounds and were managed for different game animals. Over the ensuing decades, recognition of their value as habitat for many non-game species (including many rare plants and animals) has increased. Similarly, the recreation uses of many of these areas have expanded beyond hunting, trapping, and fishing and now include activities such as rustic hiking, snowshoeing, and wildlife watching. In recognition of their multi-purpose functions, these areas were re-named "State Wildlife Areas."

The GHA plan proposes to expand the eleven State Wildlife Areas to protect and restore additional native habitats, improve public use and access to the properties by having easily recognizable boundaries, enhance the efficiency of land management actions, increase public hunting and trapping opportunities, and provide additional opportunities for minimally developed nature-based recreation. In addition, the plan proposes to create four new State Natural Areas on existing DNR lands and to expand the Red Cedar Lake State Natural Area. Most of these proposed expansions to the Wildlife Areas would relocate existing project boundaries out to the nearest roadway.

In addition, the GHA plan proposes to establish one new property, the Crawfish Prairie Habitat Area, which would provide critically needed habitat for grassland birds and other related species. This area is designed to contain one large core area of grassland surrounded by a mix of cropland, pastures, and restored prairies.

Finally, the GHA plan proposes to establish Rural Landscape Protection Areas to buffer many of the Wildlife Areas. These landscapes are envisioned to be large undeveloped areas of protected farmlands interspersed with some small scattered conservation lands.

What lands would the GHA encompass?

Some of the lands envisioned as part of this network are already protected as state, county, and local parks, state wildlife areas, natural areas, and other properties owned by non-profit groups. These properties, such as the Glacial Drumlin Trail, Goose Lake Wildlife Area, and Dorothy Carnes Park, are some of the most popular and scenic sites in the area. Other parts of the proposed network, in particular the linking trails between the parks and the villages and cities, will require additional acquisitions by the DNR or other partner groups. The proposed long-term acquisition goals are outlined below.

	Acres in the GHA study area <i>currently owned or authorized for potential purchase</i> by the DNR, counties, municipalities, non- profit conservation groups, or other entity.	Acres <i>proposed to be acquired</i> by the DNR, counties, municipalities, non-profit conservation groups, or other similar entity as part of the proposed GHA.
Conservation Parks	3,500 acres (10%)	3,801 acres (15%)
Linking Trails	300 acres (1%)	1,344 acres (5%)
River Corridors	400 acres (1%)	2,075 acres (7%)
Wildlife & Natural Areas	31,500 acres (88 %)	20,800 acres (73%)
Total	35,700 acres (100%)	28,020 acres (100%)

Who would acquire and manage these lands and where would the funds come from?

The proposed GHA is a joint effort of many partner groups. Some of these groups have the ability to purchase and manage lands while others have expertise and capacity in other areas including education, outreach, construction and operation of various facilities and trails, and habitat restoration. The funding for DNR land acquisitions would come primarily from the state Stewardship program. The Stewardship program also provides matching funds to non-profit organizations and local governments to partner with those entities to purchase lands. County and local governments have acquired several key parcels in the area through donation and purchase in recent years, as have local conservation groups.

The development and management of facilities to support different types of outdoor recreation in the GHA network are also proposed to be a cooperative effort among many partners. In particular, for lands it acquires for the conservation parks and linking trails, the DNR proposes to engage county and local governments as well as conservation and recreation groups to develop and operate different recreation facilities such as biking, hiking, and horseback riding trails, picnic areas, observation platforms, and other features.

Lands for the proposed GHA project would only be acquired from landowners willing to sell or donate land or land rights.

What outdoor experiences will the GHA provide?

The Glacial Heritage Area is designed to provide readily accessible destinations for local residents and visitors to get outdoors and enjoy a wide range of nature-based recreational opportunities. Some components of the proposed network would be secluded, undeveloped, and remote settings with primitive trails and few, if any, facilities. Other locations would provide improved trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and cross country skiing as well as amenities such as picnic shelters, toilets, water, and play areas. Many of the individual conservation parks and some of the wildlife areas would offer a range of options within a single property.

For example, Dorothy Carnes Park currently has several moderately developed hiking trails, a three-season picnic shelter, an ADA-accessible wildlife observation deck overlooking Rose Lake, and vault toilets along with very scenic prairies, wetlands, and woodlands. If expanded as proposed, the park could also offer remote areas with no improvements or trails as well as areas with paved trails suitable for wheelchairs, bikes, rollerblades, or strollers.

As determined by recent survey data, the four most popular outdoor recreation activities in the region (Jefferson County and the five surrounding counties) currently are hiking, wildlife watching, fishing, and biking, although those may change as the population grows and ages and as new activities emerge. For example, the region's population is expected to climb significantly over the next couple of decades (300,000 new residents from 2000 to 2030 – 75% of whom will live in cities and villages). This growth may be offset by the fact that as people age their overall participation in outdoor recreation tends to decline, particularly in activities that are more physically demanding. As a result, while some activities are expected to decline in popularity, others (most notably hiking and wildlife watching) are expected to experience significant increases.

How will the project balance with existing land uses, especially farming?

The GHA project is designed to complement existing land uses and integrate with growth plans for the area. Similarly, the partners helping develop the GHA project understand the importance and value of farming and advocate for ensuring a strong, vibrant agriculture community for the area. Not only does farming form a critical component of the local culture and economy, but the farm-dominated landscape provides the ideal setting within which to establish the network of parks and trails. The GHA project seeks to ensure that the proposed recreation facilities and conservation lands have minimal impact to agricultural operations and are compatible with the various federal, state, county, and local efforts to maintain the area's farmland. Of note, the GHA project proposes to establish Rural Landscape Protection Areas with the intent of working with the agricultural community to maintain large, undeveloped, farm-dominated areas that can buffer conservation lands.

Why should the GHA be implemented?

Survey data consistently show that one of the biggest barriers to participation in outdoor activities is a lack of time and access to nearby natural resources. As the amount of free time for many people declines, the public increasingly seeks out places to hike, bike, watch wildlife, camp, hunt, fish, ride horses, study nature, and participate in environmental education that are *close to home*, near enough to one's residence to be able to go there after work or on a day trip. For many residents of southern and eastern Wisconsin, this obstacle has long been amplified by the lack of nearby public conservation lands. Situated midway between the Madison and Milwaukee/Waukesha metropolitan areas (and therefore within an hour's drive of over half the state's population), the GHA project strives to make it much easier for people in southern Wisconsin to engage in outdoor activities.

In addition, there is growing concern in the state and nationally about the diminishing bond and affinity that people have to the outdoors and how this may be affecting the physical and mental well-being of our population, particularly children. Just a few generations ago, most Wisconsinites either lived on farms or had a relative or close friend who did. Getting outdoors to do farm chores, explore woodlots, catch frogs, fish nearby creeks, run a trap line, or build a tree house was commonplace.

Today, almost 70% of Wisconsin's population lives in cities or suburbs and kids spend an average of 5 hours a day playing video games, surfing the Internet, watching television, or listening to personal music players such as iPods. Children are now exposed to a barrage of fast-paced, hyper-stimulating images and sounds and, for a variety of reasons, there is little time in many children's days for reflection and unstructured outdoor play. Data on the consequences of this shift continue to accumulate: childhood obesity is on the rise

and with it the prevalence of diabetes and other health concerns, a growing number of children have difficulty concentrating on different tasks, and the diagnosis of ADHD and other attention disorders is increasing.

As spending time outdoors becomes less central to more people's day-to-day lives, our population also risks losing an understanding of, and appreciation for, the complexity, wealth, and fragility of the natural world. If today's children don't directly and frequently experience the outdoors, they (and their children) will likely lack an awareness of issues that affect wildlife and people, including: habitat and species management issues, the benefits of public conservation lands, and the enjoyment of catching one's first fish, identifying warblers by sound, or gracing a Thanksgiving table with a wild turkey. The GHA seeks to help make it easier for a broad cross-section of the population to stay connected to the outdoors through different types of outdoor recreational opportunities.

Finally, the proposed GHA project would help meet the increased need to protect and restore habitats for species of greatest conservation need that occur within the region. The project area plays an important role in the life histories of many rare and declining plants and animals.

Why here?

Simply put, location and natural resources. The proposed Glacial Heritage Area originates from the recently completed Wisconsin Land Legacy Report. The Legacy Report is the outcome of a three-year study led by the DNR to identify the places most important to protect to meet conservation and recreation needs over the next fifty years. The study ultimately identified 229 "Legacy Places" that are described in the report. One of the highest priorities the DNR heard from the public throughout the development of the Land Legacy Report was to protect places *near where people live* — not because they were necessarily the highest quality habitats, but rather to provide readily accessible opportunities for residents to connect with the outdoors.

In evaluating the Legacy Places across the state for opportunities to provide some of the most popular nature-based outdoor recreation activities (wildlife watching, hiking, bicycling, fishing, camping, etc.) in close proximity to population centers, the DNR looked at several factors. Included in this analysis were population distribution and relative accessibility, land use patterns, potential to provide a variety of recreation activities, average parcel sizes and acreage costs, existing local, state, and federal properties that could form the foundation of a network, and local land use plans and visions. From this emerged the concept of creating a network of connected properties, rather than a single location, centered in northwestern Jefferson County that could collectively provide multiple opportunities for a range of low-impact outdoor activities.

In addition, the area already supports a diverse set of high quality grasslands, wetlands and forests interspersed in a glaciated landscape dominated by productive agricultural operations. Together, this mix of conservation lands and farmlands provides a unique opportunity to protect a landscape that harbors a wide variety of habitats, provides a wide range of outdoor, nature-based recreation activities, and sustains viable farming operations.

Further, Jefferson County has consistently implemented effective, proactive policies and plans to maintain farmland and important natural resources. Although development is occurring rapidly in the county, it is mostly concentrated in urban service areas. By reducing development pressure on rural lands, it is easier for farmers to maintain their lands in production, adjust farming practices and strategies, and expand operations as needed. As a consequence, the rural lands in Jefferson County support a strong, viable farming community and retain their scenic, pastoral setting.

Finally, the cities and villages in the area, the Jefferson County Tourism Council and the Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium are collaboratively assisting local businesses to provide amenities and services for visitors and residents who seek out outdoor recreational activities. The proposed GHA project is consistent with these efforts and matches local leaders' visions for their economic and land use future.

What will be the economic costs and benefits?

Implementing the proposed Glacial Heritage Area would result in a significant economic benefit to the region and state from a significant financial investment. Lands within the proposed new and expanded conservation parks, linking trails, river corridors, and wildlife areas will vary in their appraised values due to a variety of factors. Based on existing values for the types of lands that would be part of the proposed GHA, the DNR estimates that **acquiring the proposed lands would cost perhaps \$125 million (in current dollars). In addition, restoring habitats and constructing the proposed facilities (e.g., trails, parking lots, picnic areas, paddle access sites, etc.) is estimated to be \$12 to \$50 million. As stated earlier, these costs would most likely be spread out over several decades** depending on availability of land, the availability of federal, state, county, local, and non-profit funds, among other factors.

If implemented, the GHA would help diversify the local economy and provide financial benefits on several fronts. One of the most obvious ways would be direct spending by residents and visitors. Research has shown that most people spend between \$10 to \$40 per person per day on travel-related items regardless of whether they are biking, hunting, bird watching, hiking, paddling or participating in other nature-based activities. People who make overnight trips typically spend double this amount (or more). The \$10 to \$40/person/day figure includes trip-related expenses (such as food purchases in restaurants and grocery stores, gasoline, bait, entry fees, and many other supplies). In addition, a considerable amount is spent on associated equipment purchases (e.g., tents, bikes, binoculars, fishing rods, guns, saddles, and canoes) as well as at stores and shops on items not directly related to outdoor recreation (e.g., antiques, clothing, gifts, etc.).

A recent study lead by University of Wisconsin faculty concluded that if just a portion of the proposed park and trail components in the GHA project were implemented, an estimated \$32 million each year in total value-added income and that over 1,000 jobs might be created as a result. By another measure, ***if just 2% to 4% of the surrounding region's future "participation days" in hiking, wildlife watching, fishing, biking, hunting, horseback riding, canoeing, and cross-country skiing occur in the GHA project, then an estimated \$50 to \$100 million in direct travel-related spending would occur annually in the area.***

Another source of economic benefit that the proposed GHA project could have would be to attract small to mid-sized businesses. A key factor that companies evaluate when evaluating where to locate or relocate is the quality-of-life amenities available for their employees, particularly facilities that provide opportunities for nature-based outdoor activities. As the composition of the job market in the region shifts over time, the Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium and local leaders are looking to attract new businesses. They view the proposed GHA as a strong positive element in that effort.

Who would be involved in implementing the GHA?

From its inception, the proposed GHA has been a collaborative venture that incorporated the visions and perspectives of many different partners. Throughout the design and planning phases, a variety of local and state interests and groups have been closely involved in shaping the proposed project. Going forward, it is expected that these groups (and others) will leverage their unique expertise and strengths to help implement the GHA.

For example, the DNR has management expertise, funding, and staffing to manage large wildlife areas. As the administrative home of Stewardship funds, the DNR can allocate acquisition funds for conservation parks, linking trails, and river corridors. Counties are well positioned to operate conservation-oriented parks that mix some simple facilities and different types of trails with native habitats such as prairies, savannas, and marshes. Non-profit groups, such as Madison Audubon Society, Pheasants Forever, and local land trusts have the range of knowledge and skills necessary to restore habitats, leverage federal and state funds to protect lands, and work with a variety of landowner needs. As a result, many partners will be working collaboratively and creatively to implement the GHA project.