

# Summary of public input to the Draft Feasibility Study, Master Plan, and Environmental Impact Statement, for the proposed Glacial Heritage Area

## A. BACKGROUND.

### 1. Public input process.

The planning document was available for public review and input from June 1 to July 15, 2009. In addition to the standard press release and publication of public notice in the Wisconsin State Journal and eight local papers, there were numerous articles in local newspapers describing the proposed project and the opportunity for public input. The Department hosted two public open house meetings and a public hearing to gather input on June 29, 30 and July 1, respectively. During the six-week comment period, the Department also posted an on-line survey on the DNR's website; a paper copy of the survey (which contained the same questions) was also available at the open houses and public hearing.

The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement is to provide the public the opportunity to fully understand the scope of the project and the impacts or ramifications created by the project. A comment period is provided to give the public the opportunity to further inquire, submit pertinent information regarding the proposal, as well as provide comments, questions or concerns. The comment period is also used to help decision makers gauge the level of controversy over the proposal and address public concerns.

### 2. Overview of public input.

The Department received the following input during the six-week comment period:

- 7 formal comments and two statements submitted at the EIS hearing
- 651 responses to the on-line survey
- 43 paper copies of the survey
- 2 phone calls with input on the proposed project
- 9 e-mail comments
- 9 letters or resolutions from groups or organizations active in the Study Area

The public input received is summarized in the rest of this document and organized by topic. After summarizing the nature of the issue and input, a response is provided to each issue describing if and how the Department proposes to modify the project or plan. The public can review the comments received upon request.

The input received was "self selected" - that is, it was a function of people's and organization's interest in the project and not a randomized sample of people living in the project area, region, or state. Thus, the **input from the survey can be used to assess the range of public perspectives and can indicate a general level of support, but it cannot be used to statistically judge the perspectives of residents in the project area, region, or state.**



### 3. Overview of survey respondents.

The survey (both the on-line and paper copies asked the same questions) asked for some background information about what activities people liked to participate in, what types of licenses or stickers they typically purchased, their age, gender, and zip code of primary residence. These questions can provide context for their responses to other questions.

#### (a) Participation in recreation activities.

Nearly all respondents indicated participation in one or more outdoor activities. The level of participation compared to statewide averages are as follows:

Activities where survey respondents participated **considerably more** than the statewide average. (*% respondents compared to % statewide average*)

- Cross-country skiing (40% to 11%)
- Hiking (74% to 35%)
- Horseback riding (17% to 10%)
- Paddling (43% to ~25%)
- Recreational biking (64% to 49%)
- Trapping (4% to 0.2%)

Activities where survey respondents participated **about the same** as the statewide average. (*% respondents compared to % statewide average*)

- Bird Watching (40% to 40%)
- Camping (50% to ~40%)
- Fishing (34% to 41%)
- Hunting (21% to ~23%)
- Mountain biking (21% to 20%)

Activities where survey respondents participated **considerably less** than the statewide average. (*% respondents compared to % statewide average*)

- Wildlife watching (other than birds) (40% to 57%)

#### (b) Purchases of licenses, passes, or stickers.

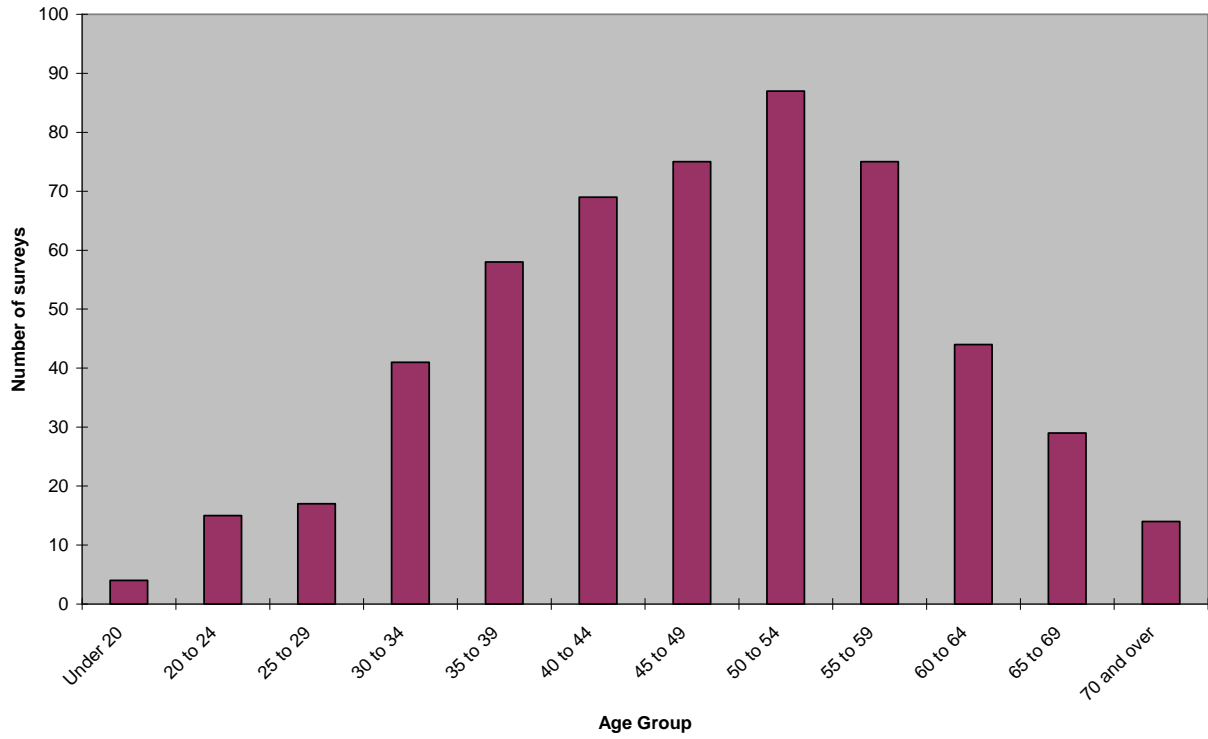
Survey respondents indicated purchases of all types of licenses, passes, and stickers. Of particular note was the large percentage of respondents that indicated they purchased state park stickers (82%) and state trail passes (68%), a level that far exceeds the statewide averages.

#### (c) Age and Gender.

The average age of respondents was 48. This distribution of the age classes can be seen in the graph on the following page. Just over half of the respondents were male (52%).



### Age of Respondents



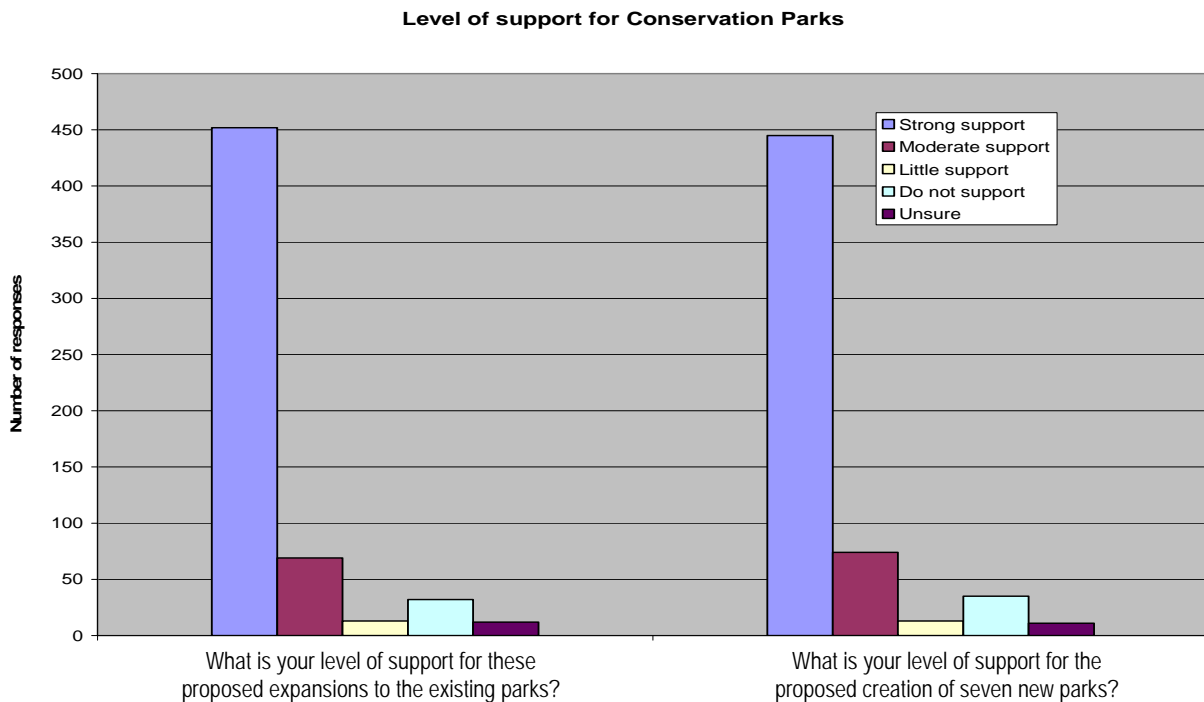
## B. EVALUATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS.

### 1. Results of the survey.

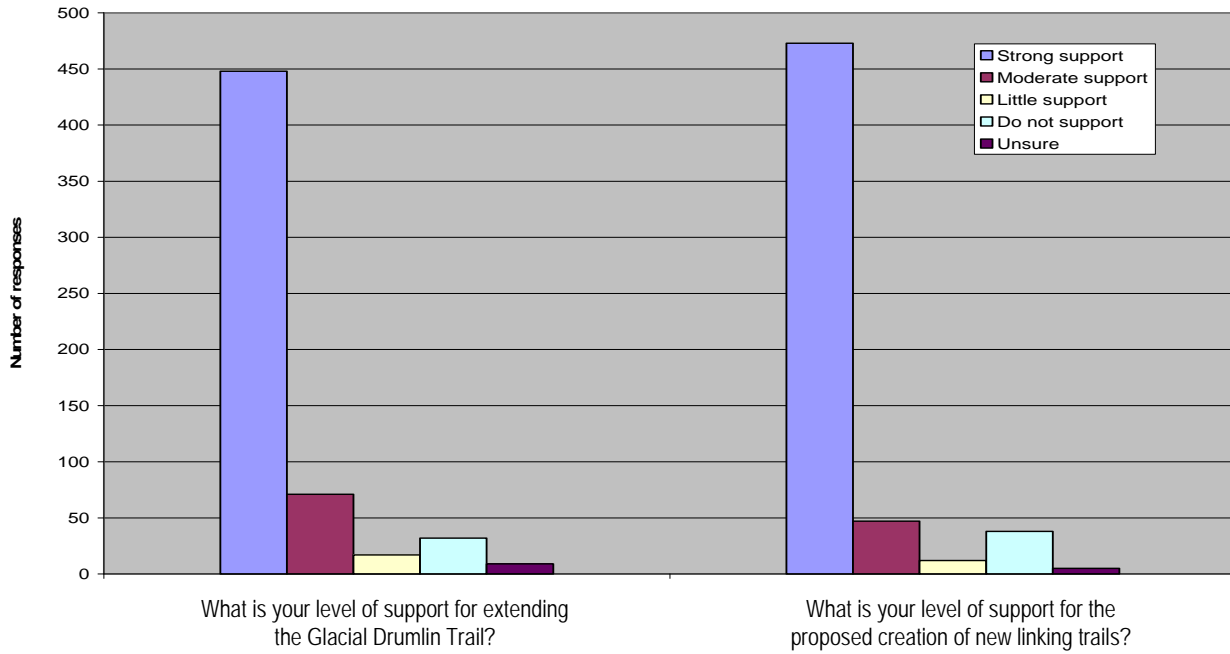
The survey was the primary mechanism by which people provided comments and input about the proposed GHA project. The survey consisted of questions regarding the level of support or opposition to different aspects of the four components of the proposed network.

The following four graphs show the level of support for the proposed establishment or expansion of the conservation parks, linking trails, river-based conservation areas, and wildlife & natural areas. Each of the components was strongly supported by the overwhelming majority of respondents.

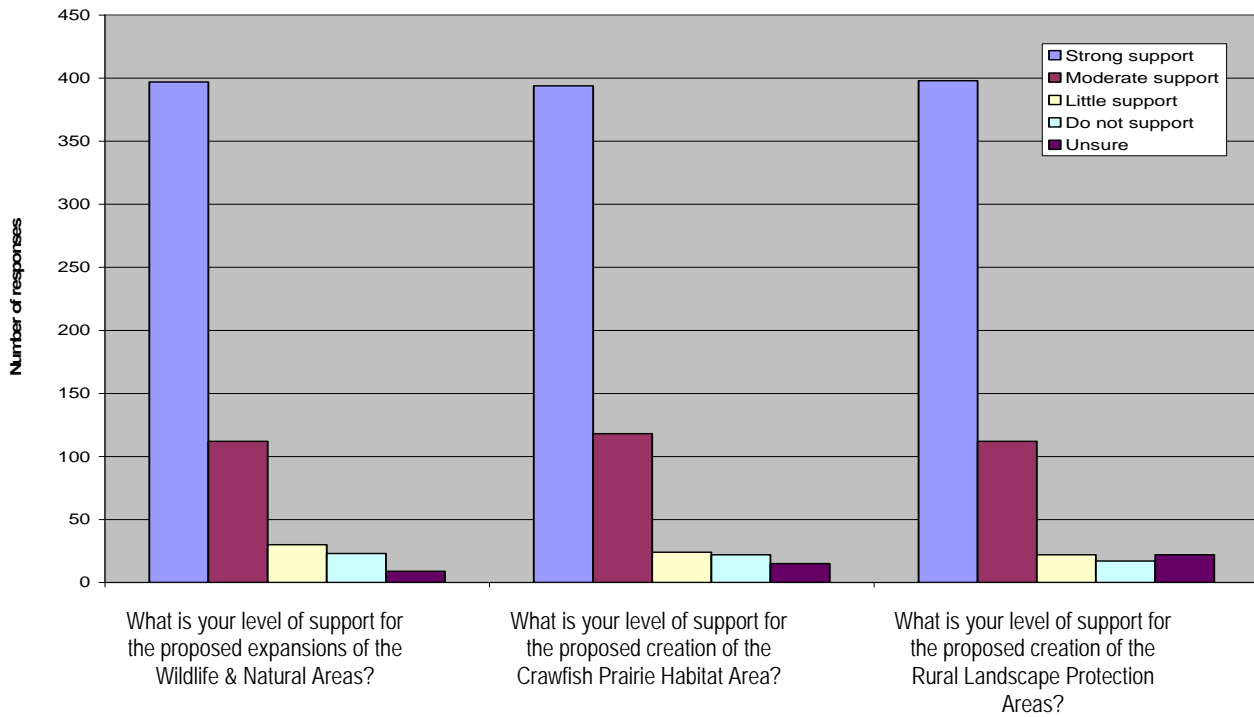
A depiction of support is seen in the following four graphs:



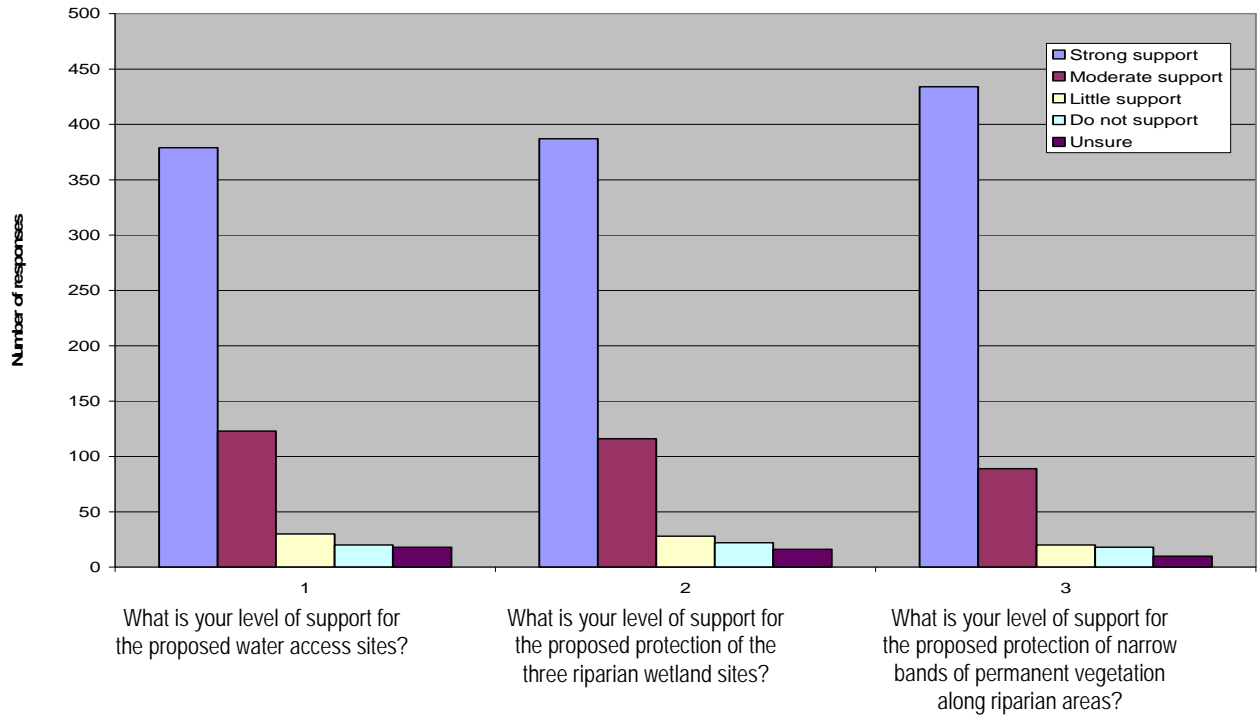
**Level of support for Linking Trails**



**Level of support for Wildlife & Natural Areas**



**Level of support for River-based Conservation Areas**



The survey also asked open-ended questions and provided opportunities for people to submit written comments. These comments ranged from specific requests (e.g., to incorporate more equestrian trails) to general perspectives. Mirroring the perspectives shown on the preceding graphs, the overwhelming majority of written comments submitted with the surveys were strongly supportive of the project. A few people made suggestions for minor modifications or clarifications to the proposal which the Department has integrated if they did not change the purpose or intent of the project or its components.

Some survey respondents submitted comments requesting more significant changes to the plan and others expressed concerns or opposition to the project or specific components. These are described in more detail in section C, starting on page 8.

## **2. Summary of the input from other sources.**

In addition to the survey, a total of 18 public comments were received verbally and in writing at the formal EIS hearing, through e-mail, and over the phone during the comment period. All of this input was in support of the overall project, although several people raised issues that are addressed in section C, starting on page 8.



### **3. Summary of input from community organizations.**

The Department received nine letters or resolutions from organizations active in the Study Area. All letters and resolutions were in strong support of the proposed GHA project as proposed. Letters or resolutions were received from:

- Dorothy Carnes Park master plan steering committee
- Town of Lake Mills Board of Supervisors
- Madison Audubon Society
- Rock Lake Improvement Association
- Joint Rock Lake Committee
- Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium
- Town & Country Resource Conservation and Development
- Rock River Coalition
- Jefferson County Board of Supervisors



## **C. ISSUES OF PUBLIC CONCERN AND OPPOSITION, REQUESTED CHANGES TO THE PLAN, AND DEPARTMENT RESPONSES.**

Comments received over the term of the comment period included 310 supporting the GHA project as proposed and 82 requesting changes to or expressing concerns about specific aspects of the GHA project, or objecting to the project as a whole. These numbers reflect written comments received on the surveys, submitted separately, or spoken verbally at the public hearing.

The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement and the public review process is to evaluate all concerns equally in the context of content not volume. That is, the Department seeks to address all the issues raised regardless of the number of people that may voice a particular concern or perspective. The overall level of support or opposition for a project does influence the Department's assessment of the feasibility of the Department undertaking a proposed acquisition project.

The Department has summarized both written and oral concerns into categories as described below.

### **1. Opposition based on the lack of need.**

#### Comment:

There is no need for a project like the GHA. There is no shortage of places for the public to recreate and the demand is not a high enough to warrant the project. (5 comments received).

#### Department response.

The intent of the GHA project is not only to meet the increasing demand for outdoor recreation (which both research data and Department and County property managers indicate is increasing), but also to encourage those people who don't currently participate in outdoor activities to experience the outdoors and try different types of nature-based activities.

*The Department concludes that the data on existing and projected future demand for additional opportunities for outdoor recreation indicates a strong need for the proposed project. Supporting data are provided in Chapter II, pages 13 to 52.*

### **2. Opposition based on the lack of money and staffing needed to maintain lands and facilities.**

#### Comment:

It is inappropriate for the state and partner groups to implement the proposed project during very difficult economic times that are requiring cutbacks in a range of government services. Other state and local needs, such as public safety and education, should be a higher priority and funded before the proposed GHA project. (11 comments received).



Department response.

Much of the funding for land acquisition and facility development is proposed to come from the state Stewardship program. This program is funded through the sale on long-term bonds and is separate from other state and local budget initiatives.

The current economic crisis will affect the implementation rate of the project. However, the project is intended to be implemented over several decades and over differing periods of economic strength. It is likely that implementation will accelerate in better economic conditions and wane in difficult ones.

*The Department concludes that despite the very difficult economic conditions, implementing the proposed project would have a positive economic impact in the area and region and like many DNR acquisition projects will be implemented over a long time period. Supporting data are provided in Chapter IV, pages 239 to 247.*

### **3. Opposition to the proposed conservation parks if hunting and trapping are not allowed.**

Comment:

Parks should not be established if they do not allow hunting and trapping. (15 comments received).

Department response.

NOTE: the following discussion pertains only to the lands the Department purchases for the seven proposed new conservation parks. The proposed five expansions to existing parks and preserves are to be accomplished by the entity that currently owns and operates those properties. Those entities (the Jefferson County Parks Department and the Lake Ripley Management District) have developed management plans for those properties and the GHA proposal calls for them to continue managing and operating these properties and expansions according to their policies and property goals.

One of the unique qualities of the proposed GHA project is that its purpose is not only to meet the needs of specific recreation user groups, but also to provide excellent experiences for people participating in a broad range of outdoor activities. However, the GHA project does not propose to provide for this broad range of outdoor activities at every place within the network. Rather, it proposes to provide a range of different outdoor opportunities at places that can provide high quality experiences. The intent is that the proposed network collectively meets the needs of a broad range of outdoor enthusiasts.

The Department is excited about the opportunities that the GHA project could provide to meet the demand for hunting and trapping opportunities in southern Wisconsin. With over 20,000 additional acres proposed to be protected and restored within the expanded and new Wildlife Area properties, the GHA would provide unparalleled hunting and trapping opportunities in southern Wisconsin. Indeed, if fully implemented, the GHA project would encompass over 55,000 acres within the Wildlife Area properties, more



hunting and trapping opportunities than all the land within both the Northern and Southern Units of the Kettle Moraine State Forest combined. Proposed land acquisition to expand and create Wildlife Areas comprises over 70% of all the land proposed to be acquired in the GHA plan. The primary purpose of the Wildlife Areas is to provide high quality hunting, trapping, and fishing opportunities. Other activities may be provided at the Wildlife Areas if they do not conflict with these primary purposes.

The primary purpose of the conservation parks is to provide areas for hiking, recreational and mountain biking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing along with associated activities such as picnicking and wildlife watching. Other activities may be provided at the conservation parks if they do not conflict with these primary purposes.

The draft GHA plan stated the following (page 153):

Although the new and expanded conservation parks would be closed to hunting, portions of larger parks away from use areas could be opened for some forms or seasons of hunting if the Department and the operator of the parks (proposed to be the county) both agree that conditions warrant, which could include the following:

- Population control of a species is needed due to impacts to vegetation, disease management, or other factors.
- The park is large enough that there are areas that could provide a satisfying hunting experience (based on habitats present and size) that have minimal non-hunting use during hunting seasons. As a result, some types of hunting could occur (possibly on a controlled, permit basis) in areas that are not anticipated to lead to conflicts with other users.

#### Typical seasonal use of parks in southern Wisconsin.

When the weather starts to warm up in the spring, people are anxious to get outside and visitation rises dramatically. There is usually a flush of hiking, wildlife watching (particularly for migratory birds), biking, horseback riding, and other activities from mid-April until mid-June. As the heat of summer arrives in July and August, use levels for most activities decline with the exception of outdoor family gatherings. Summer is also a peak time for camping.

With the cooler fall weather and the color season, use levels pick up again and there is a peak in activity in September and October. For many activities, there is a decline in participation starting around mid-November, although hiking remains very popular until the snow begins. Once a base of snow is established, usually towards the end of December or early January, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular as long as good snow is present, typically until about the end of February or early March. With the arrival of warmer and drier conditions, the cycle starts over in mid-April.

Although overall visitation to parks typically rises and falls throughout the year, some parks and some portions of parks consistently receive high or low levels of use. Many factors influence visitation rates at parks (e.g., location, size, type and quality of facilities, and weather). Given the unique nature of the proposed GHA network, visitation levels and timing may or may not follow typical patterns.

This approach was proposed for two reasons. First, the Department does not want the new conservation parks to become refuges that conflict with species management needs and goals in the state. Second, this approach was used to recognize that some areas of the parks may have only minimal use during certain hunting seasons. The plan calls for the ability of the Department and the operator (planned to be Jefferson County Parks Department) to establish areas of the conservation parks for some hunting seasons when and where they would not conflict with the primary intended uses (trail-based recreation and associated activities) of the parks. This is consistent with the approach used by the Department throughout the State Park system.



If the Department is successful in acquiring relatively large acreages for the proposed parks and visitation levels follow the patterns seen at many other parks in southern Wisconsin, then the Department expects it will be possible to incorporate different hunting seasons into the seven new parks in ways that supplement the use by the parks' primary users (hikers, bikers, horseback riders, cross country skiers, wildlife watchers, picnickers, and others). Specifically, the following hunting seasons could be incorporated into areas of many of the proposed parks:

- Deer hunting during the 9-day gun season.
- Deer hunting during the 11-day muzzleloader season (following the 9-day gun season).
- Deer hunting during the late archery season (following the 9-day gun season until the close of the season in January).
- Turkey hunting from Wednesday through Friday during the first four time periods of the statewide spring turkey season (the first time period begins the Wednesday nearest April 13<sup>th</sup>).

Depending on the success of these hunting opportunities, use levels of different activities, size of the park, habitat management needs, and other factors, additional managed hunting seasons or periods may be incorporated as well. Seasons will be established through a combination of signage at the parks and changes to administrative code.

It is also the Department's intent that the parks not become refuges for white-tailed deer or other species of management concern. Although the seven parks are proposed to be modest in size (about 400 acres on average), it is possible that they may harbor populations of deer high enough to cause damage to native vegetation or conflict with the Department's efforts to control herd size. As such, it may be necessary to open an entire park to some limited hunting seasons to address management needs.

If the Department acquires land for the new conservation parks (or the linking trails or river access sites, too), then an "**implementation plan**" would be developed for the property and a **land use agreement** would be entered into with Jefferson County to manage and operate the parks. The implementation plan will describe in more detail and map the specific natural and cultural resources, existing land cover and vegetation characteristics, and other unique features present on the land that is acquired.

Chapter III of the GHA plan describes each proposed park, linking trail, and river-based access site, their intent, general goals and objectives, and potential recreation activities that the properties are likely well suited to address, and proposed facilities. Using these parameters, the implementation plan will also describe what recreation activities would occur in which parts of the property, what facilities would be developed, what habitats would be managed and restored, and what land management techniques would be used. It is the Department's intent that the development of the implementation plan and the land use agreement enable the establishment of a managed, permit-based system that provides high quality experiences for hunters while minimizing conflicts with non-hunting recreational use of the property.



If the GHA project is approved by the Natural Resources Board, the Department would pursue a change to Administrative Code in 2010 to authorize deer and turkey hunting as described in the implementation plans on lands the Department acquires within the seven new conservation parks. The decisions that the Department and operator make during the development of the implementation plans with regard to which portions of the new parks would be open to hunting and for which seasons will take place within the framework of the adopted rule.

It is also the Department's intent that the future users of the property help design the implementation plan. The Department will assist the County in ensuring that public involvement in the planning process that is commensurate with the complexity of the planned uses for the subject property occurs. All implementation plans and amendments would need to be approved by the Department Secretary and the Jefferson County Parks Committee prior to facility development or management actions on Department-owned property.

*The Department concludes that the GHA plan accomplishes the intent and purpose of the parks and integrates hunting opportunities in ways that supplement and don't conflict with other park users. The Department will clarify the language in the plan to describe the hunting opportunities that could be incorporated into the parks.*

#### **4. Concern about a loss in public hunting and trapping opportunities if the conservation parks are established.**

Comment:

Public hunting and trapping opportunities would be taken away if the conservation parks are established. Areas open to private hunting and trapping would no longer be available if the conservation parks are established. (11 comments received).

Department response:

The only DNR land within the boundaries of the proposed seven new conservation parks are approximately 80 acres of land within the proposed North Shore Moraine Park. These lands are currently open to all hunting and trapping seasons. The GHA plan does not propose any changes to the existing uses of this tract and as such it would continue to be open to all seasons. If adjacent or nearby land is acquired for a park in this area it would not limit any hunting or trapping use of this 80 acre parcel.

For each component of the proposed GHA network (parks, linking trails, wildlife areas, river-based conservation areas), the Department seeks to incorporate outdoor activities that supplement but not conflict with their primary purposes and users. Hope Lake Park presents a unique situation in meeting this approach.

The public does have access rights to Hope Lake through a small outlet stream. As such, the lake can be legally hunted and trapped as long as hunters and trappers stay in the water or on the lake bed. Because of this existing public use, the lake bed of Hope Lake is not included in the proposed park boundary and existing public hunting and trapping opportunities will remain unchanged.



Privately owned land within Department project boundaries are used and managed by their owners in a wide variety of ways for a wide variety of purposes. Some landowners hunt and trap on their land with friends and families; other landowners don't. Some landowners ride ATVs, motor bikes, horses, and mountain bikes on their land; others don't. Some landowners farm their land; others mine gravel, harvest trees, or restore prairies. These existing uses all influence the property's attributes and ability to meet future uses, including potentially becoming part of a park or wildlife area. However, unless specific rights to properties are retained by legal agreement in the acquisition process, existing private uses and users of land the Department acquires do not determine future public uses.

*No DNR lands currently open to hunting and trapping would be affected by the establishment of the proposed new conservation parks. The Department concludes that for lands it acquires for different components of the GHA project, future uses should be driven by the plan rather than the existing private uses.*

**5. Request to allow hunting and trapping in the conservation parks.  
Request to acquire land for all the conservation parks under the  
Department's "state recreation area" authority to allow for trapping  
and additional hunting in the parks.**

Comment:

Hunting and trapping should be allowed in all the conservation parks. Acquire land for the proposed new conservation parks under the Department's "state recreation area" authority to allow for trapping and additional hunting seasons in the parks. Explain the Department's change from initially planning to acquire the proposed parks under its "state recreation area" authority to its "state park" authority. (25 comments received).

Department response:

From the initiation of the planning process for the GHA project, the **intent of the conservation parks has been to provide high quality trail-based opportunities along with associated activities including picnicking, wildlife watching, and nature education.** Other uses could be incorporated if they did not conflict with the primary purposes of the parks.

The Department has the authority to acquire lands for the following purposes: park, forest, natural area, habitat and fisheries area, wildlife area, stream bank protection, trail, and recreation area. The Department evaluated different options regarding under what authority to acquire lands for the conservation parks. Indeed, the Department evaluated property designation options for the proposed linking trails, wildlife area expansions, new habitat area, and river-based conservation areas and initially considered designating *all* the lands that it would acquire within the proposed GHA project as "recreation areas." However, the Department concluded that designating all the lands it acquires within the GHA project as recreation areas would not provide adequate clarity for the different intended primary uses of the various components of the network.



The Department considered acquiring properties for the conservation parks under its “state recreation area” authority because of the flexibility this designation provides in terms of both providing and limiting different uses in different portions of a property. However, the Department ultimately concluded that acquiring land for the parks under the “state park” authority would be most consistent with the proposed uses of the properties and be least confusing to the public and staff in terms of implementing the project. Before the draft plan was released for public comment, the Department changed the proposed designation of these seven properties to “state park.” The proposed intent, purpose, and uses of the parks did not change as a result of this administrative decision.

Although the Department intends to work with the Jefferson County Parks Department (the proposed operator of the new parks) in identifying where and which hunting seasons could be incorporated into the parks without unduly affecting their primary users, by law trapping is not allowed on lands acquired under state park authority. Although trapping would not be allowed within the parks, the Department believes that the GHA project, through protecting and restoring over 20,000 acres of high quality habitat open to all trapping seasons, would provide significant trapping opportunities to meet demand.

*The Department concludes that acquiring land for the new conservation parks should be done using its state park authority.*

## **6. Request for additional equestrian trails on the conservation parks, wildlife areas, and linking trails.**

### Comment:

Include more equestrian trails on the parks and wildlife areas. Include horseback riding as one of the targeted uses on the linking trails. (45 comments received).

### Department response.

Based on the input received it is clear that there is a largely unmet demand for equestrian trails in Jefferson County.

The GHA plan calls for the potential establishment of equestrian trails at the four largest of the proposed new parks. In addition, many of the linking trails are proposed to incorporate horseback riding along with biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Many respondents expressed significant support for the concept of potentially having separate but adjacent trails within a linking trail corridor for different users (e.g., one trail for bikes and one for horses). Yet, the creation of these proposed horseback riding opportunities may not be adequate to meet the existing demand.

It is likely that there are few opportunities to incorporate horseback riding into the existing public lands within the proposed GHA project. Most notably, much of the land within the eleven existing Wildlife Areas is low and wet during significant portions of the year and not well suited for intensive uses. Uplands tend to be scattered and typically not large enough to route a trail long enough to warrant development.



As a means of helping address the demand for additional equestrian trails in the GHA project, the Department revised and clarified the plan in two ways. First, the Department added the potential to incorporate an equestrian trail at the Storr's Lake Wildlife Area. The original master plan for this property included the possibility of incorporating a horseback riding trail if it was part of a larger regional network of equestrian trails. This approach was used in recognition that the wildlife area by itself did not include sufficient suitable land to establish enough equestrian trails to provide a meaningful experience. The part of the proposed master plan addressing the Storr's Lake Wildlife Area did not include continuing this option. The Department included this option to the master plan.

Second, the Department added clarifying language to the portion of the master plan for the wildlife areas regarding the proposed expansions. Although much of the 15,000 acres proposed to be added to the existing wildlife areas are lowlands and not suitable for trail development, it may be possible to route some limited trails across these expansion areas on some of the pockets of uplands. Again, given the limited amount of trails that could be sited due to the prevalence of wetlands, the trails on the expansion areas would need to be part of a larger regional network in order to be able to provide a meaningful riding experience.

The Department is sensitive to the demand for horseback riding in the area and hopes that the GHA project can make a significant contribution to helping meet the demand that exists throughout southern Wisconsin. With these changes and clarifications, for the current time the Department prefers to implement the GHA proposal before making additional changes. As the project is implemented, the Department and partners can evaluate the project's ability to meet equestrian needs and make additional adjustments and amendments as needed.

*The Department will add and clarify language in the plan to provide the opportunity to incorporate equestrian trails at Storr's Lake Wildlife Area and the proposed expansions to the wildlife area properties if the trails are part of a larger regional network. If the trails are developed as proposed at the conservation parks and the linking trails and are not adequate to meet the needs of the horseback riding community, the Department will evaluate options to amend the plan to provide additional equestrian trails. Supporting information regarding demand for horseback riding can be found on pages 24 to 31 of the GHA plan.*

## **7. Request to add ATV riding as an allowable use on the linking trails.**

### Comment:

Include ATV riding as a targeted use in the conservation parks and on the linking trails. (3 comments received).

### Department response:

The GHA plan evaluated the possibility of incorporating motorized uses into all four components of the proposed GHA network. Given the pattern of land use throughout the Study Area, public opinion and demand, and compatibility issues, it was determined that incorporating ATVs, motor bikes, four-wheel trucks, and other similar motorized



vehicles into the GHA network was not feasible. The Department recognizes the need for motorized trails and recreation areas in southern Wisconsin and has been working with the motorized user groups in evaluating options for establishing additional ATV riding areas in the southern part of the state.

*The Department evaluated a range of activities to incorporate into the proposed network and concludes that incorporating ATVs and other motorized uses into the GHA is not consistent with the primary goals of the project. Supporting information can be found on pages 35 to 37 and 124 to 126 in the GHA plan.*

## **8. Add additional linking trail segments.**

### Comment:

Add additional linking trail segments between specific destination points. (2 comments received).

### Department response:

Although the GHA plan proposes approximately 100 miles of linking trails, many additional options exist (see page 256 of the GHA plan for linking trails that were evaluated but not selected). However, the Department believes that at this time it is not feasible to attempt to link all potential destination points (e.g., cities and villages, parks, wildlife areas, other features) as part of the GHA project.

*The Department concludes that the GHA project will be best served by concentrating on the linking trails that are proposed. In the future, if it becomes clear that the proposed linking trails are not adequate or if important connections have been missed, the Department will evaluate options to amend the plan to provide additional linking trails.*

