

2021 MARATHON COUNTY FOREST WILDLIFE WORK PLAN

This represents the 2021 Annual Wildlife Work Plan, pursuant to the fifteen-year Comprehensive Plan for the Marathon County Forest.

Personnel

Assistance to the County Forest Administrator and DNR Liaison Forester will be provided in all wildlife matters concerning the County Forest. The DNR Wildlife Biologist and Wildlife Technician positions assigned to Marathon County were filled throughout 2020. However, Covid related work restrictions throughout the spring and early summer restricted DNR staff's ability to accomplish some of the planned work.

Flowage Management

Flowages were managed to keep water levels stable throughout the year. Waterfowl production and sightings were variable on Marathon County flowages. Beaver issues and damage were down from previous years, but their presence in some flowages prevented water manipulation activities.

Dike Maintenance:

Muskrat and beaver holes on the flowage dikes are usually patched to maintain their integrity. The dikes were checked in 2020, but rodent damage was minimal, and repairs were not needed. Nienow, Lower Nienow, Leo, Lower Leo, Swamp and Whiskey flowage dike tops in the Harrison-Hewitt unit were mowed during the summer.

The USDA-Wildlife Services was not contracted to trap and remove problem beaver in 2020 on flowages due to funding constraints. The USDA did remove beaver at East Flowage and Steinke Pond at Bitzke Refuge during their normal trapping efforts on County Forest. A private trapper also removed several beaver out of Birch flowage during the fall of 2020. In 2021, DNR plans to contract with USDA-Wildlife Services to trap beaver on the flowages due to increasing beaver damage.

Bern Flowage:

Bern flowage is chronically affected by floating cattail masses that have moved to the Northeast side of the flowage. These cattail masses occasionally plug the dam. Contractors have removed cattails for several years along the dike and weir with an excavator. This technique has proven to be effective at keeping the water flowing and water levels stable. There are still cattails that need to be removed from the flowage as they move closer to the weir. A contractor removed cattails during November of 2020 and will continue to remove cattails in 2021 as needed. Additional options of removing cattail are being explored by DNR wildlife management and County Forestry staff.

Wild Rice:

Wild rice production was down on Lower Nienow flowage compared to previous years. Patches of rice were seen at Nienow, Leo and Swamp flowages in the Harrison-Hewitt unit and the East #2 and Birch flowages at Nine Mile. Rice production at Lower Leo was excellent following a 2019 planting.

In October of 2020, managers purchased 109 lbs. of wild rice and seeded Lower Leo, Nienow, Lower Nienow and Swamp flowages.

Flowage Management:

Planned flowage management for 2021 includes a continuation of the flowage drawdown rotation. All the flowages will benefit from being drawn down periodically (~ every 5 years). Drawdowns reduce undesirable plant species, allow desirable plant species to germinate and return nutrients to the soil. The drawdown plan for 2020 called for drawdowns on Steinke, Nienow and Nine Mile East #2 flowages. All the boards were left pulled at Steinke flowage and was drawn down most of the year after the beaver dam was removed. Nienow flowage and Nine Mile East #2 were not brought down due to beaver and Covid work restrictions. In 2021, managers plan to draw down Nienow flowage and Nine Mile East #2.

Herbicide treatments:

No herbicide treatments took place by DNR wildlife management staff in 2020.

Forest Management

Openings Management:

Maintaining early successional habitat, such as grass openings, is an important part of Central Wisconsin forest management. In 2020, 13 forest openings were mowed in the Harrison-Hewitt, Ringle and Leather Camp units. Twenty-seven openings were scheduled to be managed in 2020. The openings not managed will be added to future work plans.



Openings mowed in Ringle in 2020

In 2021, wildlife staff plan to manage twenty-one openings in the Harrison-Hewitt and Nine Mile units. We were also awarded a \$2,500 grant from the Ruffed Grouse Society that will allow for renovations of twenty degraded openings in Kronenwetter and Leather Camp over a two-year period. This renovation project will enhance 15-20 acres of wildlife openings in those two units.

Trails:

Several forest trails (~ 1 mile) on the Harrison-Hewitt, Ringle and Leather Camp units were seeded with a clover/grass mix in the summer of 2020. Seeding trails post-logging prevents erosion and provides a valuable food source for ruffed grouse and other game and non-game species. Trails and log landings will be seeded in Marathon County in 2021 as requested by Marathon County Forestry staff.

Alder Management:

Poor conditions prevented planned alder management from being accomplished during the winter of 2019-20. Managers have set a goal of mowing 10-20 acres of alder during the winter of 2020-21. Meeting these goals will rely on acceptable weather conditions as well as having equipment and an operator available. A contractor will likely be hired to accomplish this work. Multiple sites in Leather Camp County Forest Unit have been identified for alder mowing.

Grasslands/ Hoffman Farm

In 2020, managers planned to conduct a prescribed burn on the Hoffman Farm unit south of County Road G. Due to very wet conditions and burn priorities, this burn was not accomplished.

The large burn unit south of County Road G is recommended to be burned during the fall of 2021. The firebreak will need to be installed during the summer of 2021 to accomplish this burn.

2020/2021 Nickel-an-Acre Budget

The following table lists the 2020 Nickel-an-Acre project budgets and expenses. It also includes proposed 2021 projects and the associated spending plan.

Project Activity	2020 Budgeted	2020 Expended	2021 Budgeted
Flowage Maintenance (dikes, spillways, structures)	\$500	\$278.70	\$300
Flowage Maintenance (brush/cattail removal-dikes)	\$500	\$0	\$300
Wildlife Opening Maintenance	\$500	\$446.21	\$900
Trail Seeding	\$100	\$0	\$100
Wild Rice Seeding	\$400	\$529.28	\$500
Alder Management	\$500	\$0	\$500
Totals	\$2,500	\$1254.19	\$2,600

After all expenses are subtracted, the Nickel-an-Acre account balance at the end of 2020 should be \$2228.88. This will increase to \$3,639.95 after deposit of the 2021 allotment.

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