

2022 MARATHON COUNTY FOREST WILDLIFE WORK PLAN

This represents the 2022 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 Forester Liaison 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 through most of 2021. However, DNR Wildlife Technician Paul Napierala accepted a new position in late summer of 2021. After a short vacancy, Wildlife Technician John Soergel has transferred into this position and will assume some habitat management responsibilities on Marathon County Forest.

Flowage Management

Most flowages were managed to keep water levels stable throughout the year. Some flowages were maintained in draw down and some had fluctuating water levels due to beaver activity and heavy rains. Waterfowl production and sightings were variable on Marathon County flowages. Beaver issues and damage were not a major issue early in the summer but became more of a problem in late summer through early fall.

Dike Maintenance:

Muskrat and beaver holes on the flowage dikes are usually patched to maintain their integrity. The dikes were checked in 2021, but rodent damage was minimal, and repairs were not needed. Several loads of patching material were strategically placed throughout Harrison-Hewitt, Bitzke and Nine Mile to facilitate dike patching in the future.

A USDA-Wildlife Services Certified Service Agreement (CSA) was signed by DNR Wildlife Management to trap and remove problem beaver in 2021 on flowages in the Harrison-Hewitt and Nine Mile forest blocks. The USDA removed beaver at East Flowage and Birch flowage at Nine Mile. They also removed beaver and dams at Swamp and Lower Nienow flowages in Harrison-Hewitt. In 2022, DNR once again plans to contract with USDA-Wildlife Services to trap beaver on the flowages due to expected 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. In efforts to keep the cattails from plugging the weir, DNR managed the water level lower in 2021 to keep cattail mats rooted.

A contractor will remove cattails in 2022 as needed. Additional options of removing cattail are being explored by DNR wildlife management and County Forestry staff.

Wild Rice:

Wild rice production was terrific on Lower Nienow and Lower Leo flowages in 2021. Patches of rice were also seen at Nienow, Leo and Swamp flowages in the Harrison-Hewitt unit. In October of 2021, managers purchased 100 lbs. of wild rice and seeded Leo, Nienow and Swamp flowages in the Harrison-Hewitt block.

Flowage Management:

Planned flowage management for 2022 includes a continuation of the flowage drawdown rotation. All the flowages will benefit from being drawn down periodically. Drawdowns reduce undesirable plant species, allow desirable plant species to germinate and return nutrients to the soil. The drawdown plan for 2021 called for drawdowns on Nienow flowage and Nine Mile East #2. However, they were not brought down due to beaver activity and heavy rain events. Steinke flowage was kept drawn down from the previous year to set back lily pad growth. Lower Leo was also kept in draw down due to maintenance needs and the tremendous rice production created by the draw down. Both Lower Leo and Steinke flowage will be kept in draw down through the winter to increase wetland productivity in the future. In 2022, managers plan to draw down Nienow flowage and Nine Mile East #2.

Forest Management

Openings Management:

Maintaining early successional habitat, such as grass openings, is an important part of Central Wisconsin forest management. In 2021, there was no management on forest openings. Twenty-seven openings were scheduled to be managed in 2021, but staff turnover during the normal management period impacted the ability to accomplish these goals. The openings not managed will be added to future work plans.

In 2022, wildlife staff plan to manage twenty-seven openings in the Harrison-Hewitt, Kronenwetter, Leather Camp 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:

Approximately 0.5 miles of forest trails off Guenther Road in Leather Camp and 0.75 miles of forest trails off Springbrook Road in Nine Mile were seeded with a clover/grass mix in the summer of 2021. 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 2022 as requested by Marathon County Forestry staff.

Grasslands/ Hoffman Farm

The large burn unit south of County Road G is recommended to be burned during the fall of 2022. The firebreak will need to be installed during the summer of 2022 to accomplish this burn.

Alder Management:

Wet conditions with little frost prevented planned alder management from being accomplished during the winter of 2020-21. Managers have set a goal of mowing 10-20 acres of alder during the winter of 2021-22. 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, but additional sites will be selected to allow for more options.

2021/2022 Nickel-an-Acre Budget

The following table lists the 2021 Nickel-an-Acre project budgets and expenses. It also includes proposed 2022 projects and the associated spending plan.

Project Activity	2021 Budgeted	2021 Expended	2022 Budgeted
Flowage Maintenance (dikes, spillways, structures)	\$300	\$1254.95	\$300
Flowage Maintenance (brush/cattail removal-dikes)	\$300	\$0	\$300
Wildlife Opening Maintenance	\$900	\$0	\$900
Trail Seeding	\$100	\$0	\$100
Wild Rice Seeding	\$500	\$564.16	\$500
Alder Management	\$500	\$0	\$500
Totals	\$2,600	\$1819.11	\$2,600

After all expenses are subtracted, the Nickel-an-Acre account balance at the end of 2021 should be \$2,462.30. This will increase to \$3,885.71 after deposit of the 2022 allotment.

Submitted by:

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