



MARATHON COUNTY FORESTRY/RECREATION COMMITTEE AGENDA

Date and Time of Meeting: Tuesday, July 5, 2022 at 1:30pm

Meeting Location: Conference Room #5, 212 River Drive, Wausau WI 54403

MEMBERS: Rick Seefeldt (Chairman), Tom Rosenberg (Vice-Chairman), Jean Maszk

Marathon County Mission Statement: *Marathon County Government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly or in cooperation with other public and private partners provides services and creates opportunities that make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.*

Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department Mission Statement: *Adaptively manage our park and forest lands for natural resource sustainability while providing healthy recreational opportunities and unique experiences making Marathon County the preferred place to live, work, and play.*

The meeting site identified above will be open to the public. Persons wishing to attend the meeting by phone may call into the telephone conference beginning ten (10) minutes prior to the start time indicated above using the following number: Phone Number: 1-408-418-9388 Access Code: 2483 480 2532. Please Note: If you are prompted to provide an "Attendee Identification Number" enter the # sign. No other number is required to participate in the telephone conference. When you enter the telephone conference, PLEASE PUT YOUR PHONE ON MUTE!

Agenda Items:

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Public Comment (15 minute limit)** *(Any person who wishes to address the County Board, or one of its committees, during the "Public Comment" portion of meetings, must provide his or her name, address, and the topic he or she wishes to present to the Marathon County Clerk or chair of the committee, no later than five minutes before the start of the meeting.)*
3. **Approval of the Minutes of the Tuesday, May 31, 2022 Committee Meeting**
4. **Operational Functions Required by Statute, Ordinance or Resolution:**
 - A. Discussion and Possible Action by Committee
 1. Consider Approving a Winter Fat Bike Trial Season at Nine Mile Forest Recreation Area
 2. Timber Sale Closeouts: Country Forest Products – Contract #681-19
 3. Timber Sale Extension – Tigerton Lumber Company – Contract #660-17
 4. Forest Citizens Advisory Subcommittee Appointments
 - B. Discussion and Possible Action by Committee to Forward to the Environmental Resource Committee for its Consideration - None
5. **Policy Issues for Discussion and Committee Determination for Consideration by Environmental Resources Committee – None**
6. **Educational Presentations/Outcome Monitoring Reports**
 - A. Discussion on potential Dates for a Park and Forestry Tour
 - B. Wisconsin County Forests Association State Budget Requests for 2024-2025
 - C. Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program Reauthorization
 - D. ATV/UTV Trail and Law Enforcement Funding
7. **Next Meeting Date, Time, Location: Tuesday, August 2, 2022 at 1:30pm at 212 River Dr., Wausau, WI 54403, Room 5 or via Webex**
 - A. Announcements/Requests/Correspondence

B. Future Agenda Items: County Forest Citizens Advisory Committee Appointments, Timber Sale Closeouts

8. Adjournment

**SIGNED /s/ Thomas Lovlien
PRESIDING OFFICER OR DESIGNEE**

ANY PERSON PLANNING TO ATTEND THIS MEETING WHO NEEDS SOME TYPE OF SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE SHOULD CALL THE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE AT 261-1500 OR E-MAIL COUNTYCLERK@CO.MARATHON.WI.US ONE BUSINESS DAY BEFORE THE MEETING.

EMAILED/FAXED TO: Daily Herald and other News Media Groups
EMAILED/FAXED BY: Mai Vue
EMAIL/FAX DATE/TIME: June 29, 2022 1:30 p.m.

NOTICE POSTED AT COURTHOUSE:
By: _____
Date: _____
Time: _____ a.m/p.m.

Members present: Rick Seefeldt(c), Tom Rosenberg, Jean Maszk
Staff present: Tom Lovlien-Forest Administrator, Jamie Polley-Director
Others present: Joe Tucker-County Forester, Jeff Sorenson-DNR Liaison Forester

1. Call Meeting to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chairman Seefeldt at 1:30pm, Rm. 3, 212 River Dr., Wausau. Official notice and the agenda for the meeting was posted publicly in accordance with State statutes.

2. Public Comment – none brought forward

3. Approve Minutes – **Motion** / second by Maszk / Rosenberg to approve the minutes from the May 3, 2022 regular Forestry/Recreation Committee meeting. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

4. Operational Functions Required by Statute, Ordinance or Resolution

A. Discussion and Possible Action by Committee

1. Introduction of Jeff Sorenson, Marathon County Forest Liaison – Sorenson introduced himself and gave background information. Committee members and staff introduced themselves and welcomed him.

2. Department Overview and Committee Orientation

Polley discussed the Department’s mission, organizational structure, facilities, programs, and budget information. She mentioned that the biggest revenue generators for the County are from camping and timber sales. The Department serves the area in quality of life, tourism and natural resources. It’s guided by the County’s Strategic Plan, the City and County’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans and the 15-Year County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Work is done with the help of grants, donations, sponsorships, contracts, and partnerships which include many volunteers. Needs and challenges include staffing and wages, State levy limits, aging facilities, increased demand for parks, and community collaboration on sports facilities. Polley discussed initiatives and future projects. Lovlien discussed other information including Forestry Committee responsibilities and duties, County forest law, the 2022 Workplan and Annual Report, the partnership with the DNR and their time standards, representation on the Forest Citizen Advisory Subcommittee, specifics from the Forestry budget, the timber sale expense/revenue report, Nine Mile event and use regulations, and the Wisconsin County Forests Association.

3. Timber Sale Closeouts – Verso Corporation Contract #673-18 – A closeout summary was previously provided. Lovlien reported that the estimated number of tons was 2675 and 3326.01 tons were cut. Total revenue for this sale was \$38,041.84. Lovlien’s recommendation is to close out Contract #673-18 and return their cash bond. **Motion** / second by Rosenberg / Maszk to close out Contract #673-18 and return their cash bond. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

B. Discussion and Possible Action by Committee to Forward to the Environmental Resource Committee for its Consideration - None

5. Policy Issues for Discussion and Committee Determination for Consideration by Environmental Resources Committee – None

6. Educational Presentations/Outcome Monitoring Reports

A. Wisconsin Trophic Cascade Project – Lovlien had received a request about a project in northern Wisconsin where oak trees would be planted on two sites to assess whether the presence of large predators can reverse negative deer impacts on forest regeneration. He said that Cornell University along with UW-Madison and the DNR want to plant forty oak seedlings each in Nine Mile and Hewitt-Harrison Forest Units so they can determine whether or not having more wolves and bears on the landscape would lessen the deer which would lessen browsing on tree species. Lovlien will be informed when the work will be done and will receive the results of the project when it is finished.

B. Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 Timber Sale Summaries – Lovlien said there had been a significant decrease in stumpage prices from the fall of 2020 to the fall of 2021 which was mainly due to the Covid pandemic and the Verso Mill closing. There has been a significant increase in prices from 2021 to 2022 which is a good sign.

7. Next Meeting Date, Time, Location: July 5, 2022, 1:30pm, Rm. 5 and WebEx, 212 River Dr., Wausau WI 54403

A. Announcements/Requests/Correspondence – Lovlien mentioned that he had responded to a request from the Town of Guenther who had asked about potential opportunity of funds for maintaining a town road. The towns that have forest units have been receiving payments in lieu of taxes through the acreage share payments and also a payment from a share of timber sales. He said it is important to keep the town roads open for timber hauling.

B. Future Agenda Items: Timber Sale Closeouts, Consider Approving a Winter Fat Bike Trial Season at Nine Mile Forest, 2022 County Forest Tour

8. Adjourn – Motion / second by Maszk / Rosenberg to adjourn the meeting at 2:50 p.m. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.



CENTRAL WISCONSIN OFFROAD CYCLING COALITION

**WINTER FAT BIKE TRAILS AT
NINE MILE COUNTY FOREST
RECREATION AREA**



BUILDING A BETTER
MOUNTAIN BIKING
COMMUNITY IN
CENTRAL WISCONSIN



WINTER FAT BIKE TRAILS AT NINE MILE COUNTY FOREST RECREATION AREA

Winter fat biking has become an increasingly popular winter sport in the Midwest. Many major mountain bike trail systems in the Midwest also have winter fat biking including popular destinations like the Cable/Hayward, WI area, Marquette, Michigan, and Duluth, Minnesota. CWOCC is seeking groomed winter fat bike trails at Nine Mile County Forest Recreation Area, an already popular spring, summer, and fall offroad cycling destination. Currently, CWOCC grooms winter fat bike trails at Ringle Trails, Big Eau Pleine County Park, and Praire Dells - Underdown (Lincoln County). CWOCC is ready and willing to work with the Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department and Wausau Nordic Ski Club to make winter fat biking a success at Nine Mile County Forest Recreation Area.

DETAILS OF THE NINE MILE REQUEST INCLUDE:

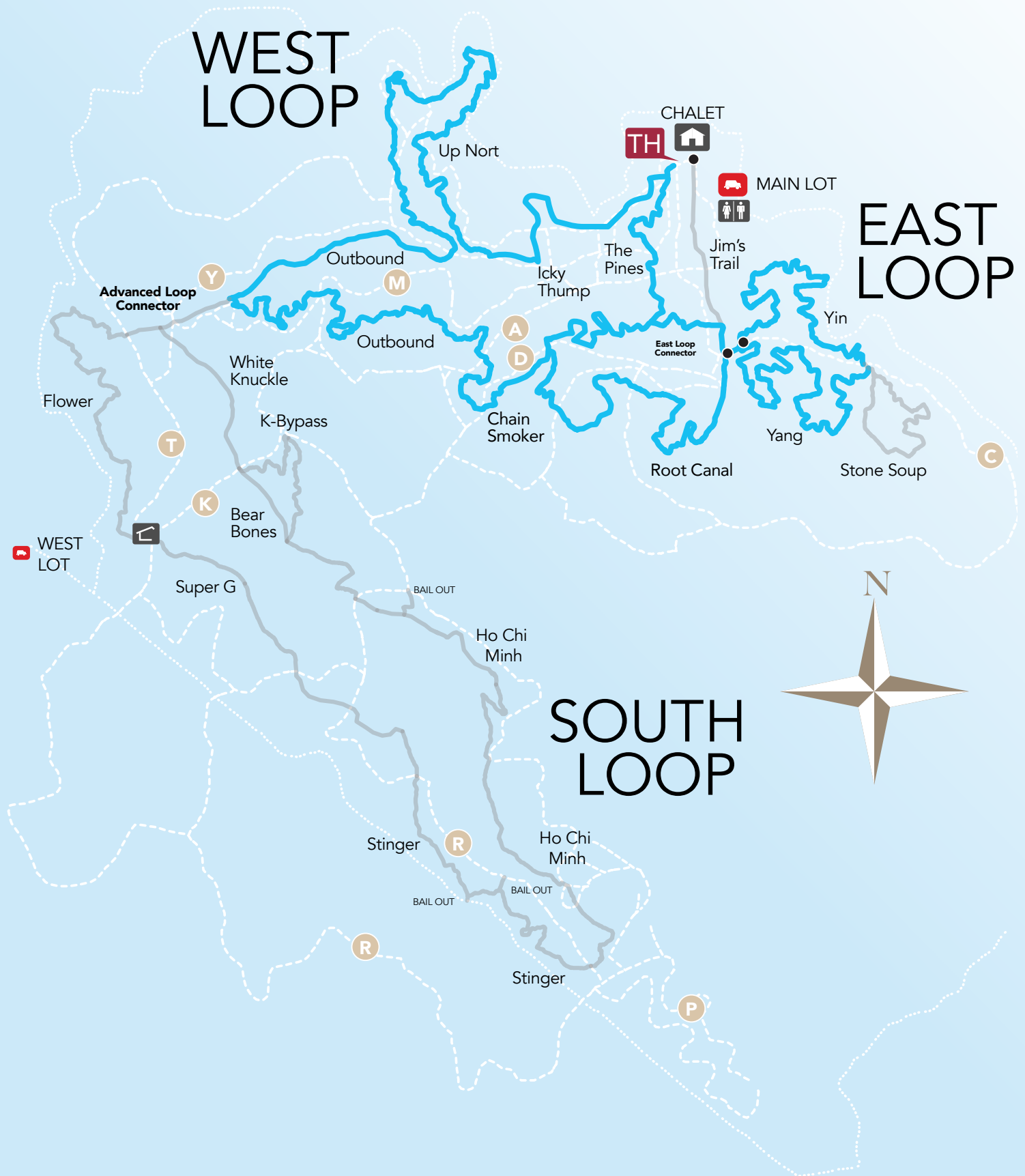
- A new winter fat bike trail pass will be required to ride trails. Winter fat bike trail passes will be \$20 for a seasonal pass and \$5 for a daily pass for the trial season.
- A short section (about ¼ mile) of shared trail along Red Bud Road will be doubled groomed to allow fat bikes and snowshoers to pass safely. This will allow the snowshoers the ability to have a loop where they only encounter fat bikes in that short section of trail.
- Winter fat bike trails would be limited to groomed singletrack (shown in blue on the map), some of which is shared with snowshoe trail.
- Winter fat bikes must have tires at least 3.8" wide.
- Ski trail crossing/yield to skier signage will be added at each intersection of the winter fat bike and ski trail.
- Winter fat bike riders will yield to both skiers and snowshoers..
- When riding at night, fat bikers are required to have headlights.
- No fat biking would be allowed on groomed skate or classic ski trails, except at trail crossings and for special events.
- CWOCC would educate and reinforce trail usage and etiquette to our riders.
- CWOCC will be responsible for grooming winter fat bike trails. CWOCC has successfully groomed winter fat bike trail utilizing volunteers for years.
- Winter fat bike riders would have access to the chalet during open hours.
- CWOCC will communicate trails closures to riders during the Nordic Club's major events, i.e., Snekkevik, Badger State Games, etc.
- *Proposed winter fat bike trail route on following page.*



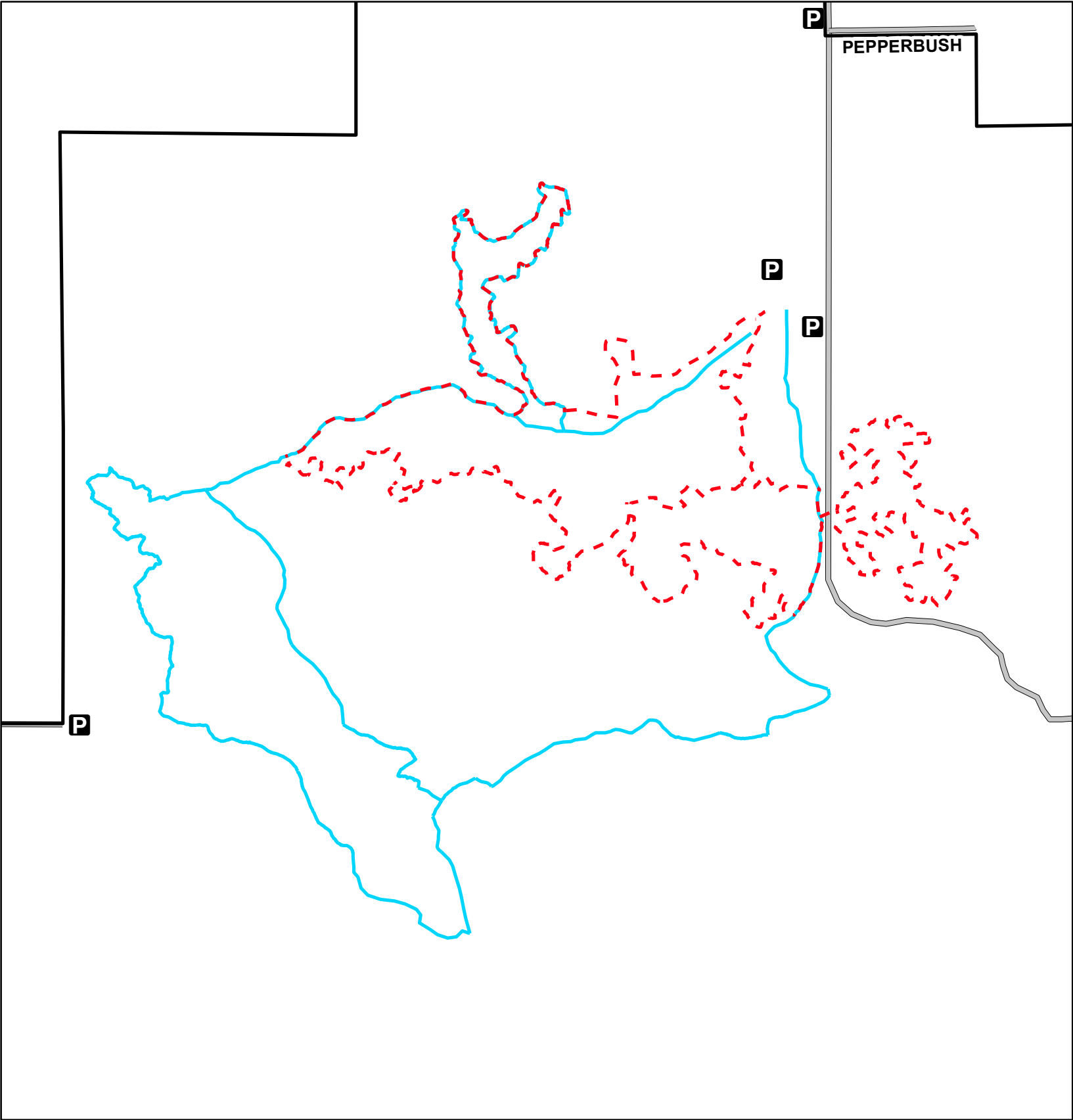
Thank you for your consideration.

Additional questions can be directed to CWOCC representative Aaron Ruff at 715-432-4252

PROPOSED FATBIKE ROUTE



Nine Mile Forest Unit Proposed Fat Bike Trail



Legend

- - - Proposed Fat Bike Trail
- Snowshoe Trail
- P** Parking Lots



Members present: John Burke, Dale Heil, Susan Haug, Paul Klocko, Mike Lane, Aaron Ruff, Gary Weiland-(via Webex), Marcell Wieloch,

Members excused: Greg Klos, Ryan Schleifer, Susan Stomieroski

Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Rec, and Forestry Department staff present: Tom Lovlien-Forest

Administrator, Jamie Polley-Parks, Recreation and Forestry Director-(via Webex), Jeff Sorenson- DNR Forest Liaison

Community Members: Sandi Cihlar, Pat Peckham

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Lane

I. Minutes

Motion by Wieloch to approve the March 16, 2022 minutes. Motion **carried** unanimously.

II. New Business

A. September 2022 Subcommittee Appointments

Lovlien reported that Aaron Ruff, John Burke, Greg Klos, Susan Haug, Mike Lane and Susan Stomieroski terms expire in September 2022. Members should let Lovlien know by the end of June if they would like to remain on the Committee.

B. Scheduled Events for 2022 at Nine Mile Forest

Lovlien discussed the schedule of upcoming events at Nine Mile which include the WEMS bike race, a women's weekend, Wausau 24 Bike Race, various cross-country races, Ragnar Race, a biking weekend with camping, and IronBull Granite Grinder Bike Race. He noted that during the bigger races (WEMS, Wausau 24, and Ragnar Race) the trails are closed to the public.

C. Spring Timber Sale Bid Summary

Lovlien reported that all five timber sales were sold. Thirty-two bids were received from fifteen different contractors. The County has worked with all the high bidders previously. There was a lot of interest on the sales which is a good thing.

D. Timbersale Activity at Nine Mile August 11 – October 31

Lovlien reported that some of the mountain bike and ski trails will be affected by an upcoming timber sale that the logger may cut this year. He can only cut in Nine Mile after August 11th and before October 31st. If this becomes active staff will let the user groups know. There will likely be some trail closures and reroutes at times.

E. Wisconsin Trophic Cascade Project

Lovlien had received a request about a project in northern Wisconsin where oak trees would be planted on two sites to assess whether the presence of large predators can reverse negative deer impacts on forest regeneration. He said that Cornell University along with UW-Madison and the DNR will plant forty oak seedlings each in Nine Mile and Hewitt-Harrison Forest Units so they can determine whether or not having more wolves and bears on the landscape would lessen the deer which would lessen browsing on tree species. Lovlien will be informed when the work will be done and will receive the results of the project when it is finished. Questions were answered and discussion followed.

F. 2022 Spring Timber Sale Summary

Lovlien said the summary is a comparison of the bid opening from spring 2021 to spring 2022 and fall 2021 to fall 2022. Comparing the weighted average of high bids in 2022 from 2021 there was a significant increase in prices. When 336 acres were sold in 2021 the County received \$246,000 and when 301 acres were sold in 2022 it received almost \$400,000. The prices have gone back to what they were before the pandemic and the Verso Mill closure.

G. New DNR Forest Liaison Hired

Jeff Sorenson introduced himself and gave some background information. He believes this Committee is very important in helping make forestry decisions. He will be helping Lovlien and Tucker with managing the County forests and setting up timber sales.

H. Member Items

Wieloch said the Conservation Congress held an in-person meeting this year for the first time in three years at Wisconsin Dells in May. It went well and they had very good attendance. They hold district meetings a couple times a year and an also an annual meeting. At the annual meeting they discuss the resolutions that were passed at the spring hearings.

II. Old Business

A. Consider a Winter Fat Biking Trial Season at Nine Mile Forest

Lovlien said CWOCC has brought forth a proposal for a fat tire trial bike season at Nine Mile. A public survey showed that a majority of people support fat tire biking in Nine Mile. There were some concerns about mixing mountain bikes and snowshoes on parts of the trails and also about mountain bikes getting off bike trails and on ski trails. The Nordic Ski Club and the Department support a trial season. Ruff said the fat tire bikes would mostly be using the summer mountain bike trails and would not be on a majority of the snowshoe trails. One small section would be shared and double groomed for bikes on one side and snowshoers on the other. There will be new signage to reduce conflict as far as ski crossings. They believe a trial season would be less complicated then trying it just for a month. Their season would coincide with the ski season and would not open until after the last antlerless gun deer season. CWOCC will be grooming the trails and paying for and installing the signage. Bikers will have to yield to other users. The fee will be \$5.00 for a daily pass and \$20.00 for an annual. This has worked in other places in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Sandi Cihlar, 203083 Bergen Road, Mosinee discussed an experience she had last January where she and another family were startled by a biker coming up behind them while they on the snowshoe trail. It was a person cleaning up after a race. She supports fat tire biking as a sport but asks that Committee consider what is compatible on shared trails and that they keep the safety and well-being of snowshoers as a priority. She hoped there would be some snowshoe trail where bikes would not be encountered and that there would be enough signage letting snowshoers know that some of the trails will have bikes on them. Ruff reiterated that the majority of snowshoe trails are not on fat tire bike trails and the one segment would have two separate groomed trails. Ruff said mountain bikers were used to sharing trails, he couldn't control every one of them, but their group will do alot of outreach and education. Discussion followed. **Motion** by Burke to move ahead with the 2022-2023 fat tire bike trial season and evaluate whether to make it permanent for the 2023-24 season and beyond. Motion **carried** 6-2 with Haug and Lane opposed.

B. Status on the Snowmaking Proposal at Nine Mile Forest

Lovlien said the Nordic Ski Club has received a re-estimate on their snowmaking system and contracted with Star Environmental which had determined there was water available for snowmaking. Star Environmental did a wetland delineation and a basin design but unfortunately their design didn't have a safety shelf and slopes that would be allowed in a forest situation. The County still needs an estimate on what the cost is to replace the electric line and/or lighting system if or when the construction of a snowmaking system is done. Also, Star Environmental had developed a concept plan and an engineer believes more work needs to be done to determine whether or not the basin is going to hold the water so it can be pumped through the system that would fit in the delineated area and/or how the safety shelf would be built so it wouldn't need fencing. A firm estimate and a Memorandum of Understanding is needed before fundraising can begin. The County Board needs to know what they are going to accept as a donation because the Nordic Ski Club can't own the system. Burke felt some of the parties involved will have to meet again to answer the remainder of the County's questions.

C. Final Antlerless Deer Quota's in Marathon County

Lane said the County Deer Advisory Council has finalized the quotas of 7,000 at their last meeting. There will be 2000 bonus tags for private land and an additional 200 bonus tags for public land. He also noted there will not be an antlerless season, holiday hunt, or an extended archery season.

D. Forest Carbon 101 Article and Discussion

Lovlien said the County is studying a proposal from Blue Source. He said Blue Source bases the carbon sequestration on what the County forest is not harvesting and pays the County for what they are growing. If a contract is entered, the Department will not be doing anything different than it is now. County forests have to provide optimum production of forest products which is the law. The DNR has reviewed it and doesn't see a problem as long as counties continue to manage and harvest timber as they have in the past.

IV. Remaining 2022 Meeting Dates – September 14, December 14, 2022 (date changed from December 21) at 6:00 pm.

V. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Wieloch. Motion **carried** unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Thomas Lovlien - Secretary

CLOSE OUT TIMBER SALES

Sale 681-19

COUNTRY FOREST PROD

	Estimated	Cut	
Oak Pulp	300 Tons	322.51 Tons	Oak Pulp
	300 Tons	322.51 Total Tons Cut	
Red Oak Sawlogs	30 MBF	37.26 MBF	Red Oak Sawlogs
	30 MBF	37.26 Total MBF Cut	

Total Revenue for Sale: **\$18,414.35**

Balance: \$3,144.35

Bond Amount: \$3,817.50

Bond Type: Cash Bond

Recommendation: **Close Sale and Return Cash Bond**

TIMBER SALE EXTENSION REQUEST

Staff Recommendation:

Timber Sale Extension to August 30, 2022 for Contract #660-17 Tigerton Lumber Company to complete the final close out paperwork, invoice and receive final payment from contractor.

MARATHON COUNTY RENEWAL OF TIMBER SALE CONTRACT

Contract No. 660-17

Renewal # 3

The Marathon County Forestry / Recreation Committee has approved your request for a renewal of Contract No. 660-17 entered into between Marathon County (hereinafter referred to as County) and Tigerton Lumber Company (hereinafter referred to as purchaser) on July 5, 2022.

Said Contract refers to the following described property: Town of Reid, Sec. 6, T27N, R9E.

The Marathon County Forestry / Recreation Committee is willing to renew this contract until the 30th day of August, 2022 at the following prices:

Mixed Hardwood \$15.50, Red Oak \$6.50, Red Pine \$8.00, Red Oak Logs \$425.00, Red Maple Logs \$300.00, White Oak Logs \$375.00 - 0% increase.

As a condition of renewal, the terms and requirements contained in the attached original contract No. 660-17 are incorporated herein as if fully set forth.

If these conditions meet with your approval, please sign below and return the original to the Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department, Forestry Division, 212 River Dr., Ste. 2, Wausau, WI 54403-5476, so that this agreement can be attached to your existing contract.

DATE: _____

PURCHASER: _____

DATE: _____

COUNTY: _____

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS ON FOREST CITIZENS ADVISORY
SUBCOMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS – JULY 5, 2022

1. Aaron Ruff – Mountain Biking – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024
2. John Burke – Cross Country Skiing/Snowshoeing – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024
3. Greg Klos – Conservation – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024
4. Mike Lane – Hunting – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024
5. Susan Haug – Birding – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024
6. – Equestrian – Expiring Sept. 1, 2024

DNR BUDGET SUPPORT FOR WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS

Wisconsin counties hold significant acreage of lands enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (State Statutes 28.10 & 28.11). Citizens of Wisconsin value these County Forests because they provide reliable raw materials for the forest products industry, as well as public access and recreation opportunities on more than 2.4 million acres of forested lands. These county forests are a large part of what makes northern Wisconsin unique and collectively make up the largest public forested land holdings in the State.

Sustainable forestry and public land management are critically important to our state's economic health. County Forest lands are managed by individual counties for the benefit of all citizens of Wisconsin. County forests produced over 938,000 cord equivalents of wood products, valued at \$44,600,000 during calendar year 2021, helping to fuel the \$24 billion forest products industry in Wisconsin. In addition, the abundant recreational opportunities provided by our programs are an important part of the State's vital tourism industry.

Their success, in no small part, is due to the strong relationships they've built with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), especially the Division of Forestry, over the decades. In addition, the work they accomplish is dependent on the grants and financial assistance they receive from the DNR annually. In addition to sustainable funding for the counties, it is vital for the DNR, Division of Forestry to maintain their core budget. Through their funding, several entities receive critical assistance throughout the year. Specifically, for the county programs, the DNR supports staff funding and positions, such as time standard hours and administrator grants, which allow the counties to accomplish their annual goals and priorities.

CURRENT STATUS: We have built a system over the years which has created substantial reliance on the DNR for assistance, both financially and technically. However, without technical assistance (time standard hours) and financial support (grants) keeping pace with inflation and the complexity of the county forest system, both in scope and scale, the impact realized by our county forests is diminishing every year.

RECOMMENDATION: WCFA continues to be concerned about the loss of a dedicated funding source for Wisconsin's productive forestry programs and respectfully requests the Legislature support the DNR's budget requests to increase funding available to support the county forest system through the following initiatives.

1. **County Forest Administrator Grant** – Per §28.11, the DNR agrees to “fund all of the following for one professional forester in the position of county forest administrator or assistant county forest administrator: 1. Up to 50% of the forester's salary. 2. Up to 50% of the forester's fringe benefits, except that the fringe benefits may not exceed 40% of the forester's salary.” The amount the DNR's allocates for this grant annually is quickly consumed by the ever-increasing costs of salary and fringe.
 - **Request:** The allocation amount should be increased by a minimum of 5% each year of the biennium to cover these costs.

2. **Sustainable Forestry Grant** – Because the Sustainable Forestry Grant is taken from the same pot of money as the County Forest Administrator Grant, as salary and fringe costs grow with inflation, the less becomes available for forest management work accomplished through these grants.
 - **Request:** Allocate the full \$250,000 for this grant, above and beyond what is made available for the County Forest Administrators Grant, essentially making the Sustainable Forestry Grant whole once again.

3. **Wildlife Habitat Grant** – The Wildlife Habitat Grant has been at \$0.05/acre since 2010. However, it has also been prorated for the last several years, as the funds are being redistributed elsewhere. Even so, \$120,000 doesn't go a long way on 2.4 million acres of publicly owned land.
 - **Request:** At a minimum, the Wildlife Habitat Grant should be made whole with no proration occurring. Secondly, we request the Wildlife Habitat Grant be increased back up to \$0.10/acre as it states in statute.

4. **Time Standard Hours** – Time Standard Hours are critical to the county forests' mission. Division of Forestry personnel complete essential tasks on behalf of the counties. The time standard allocation has been more or less 46,000 hours for 20 years. A recent needs assessment exercise, using calculation formulas established by the Division of Forestry, WCFA and the Counties, showed a need of over 52,000 hours. However, due to other priorities and staffing shortages, the Division is still only able to supply 46,000 hours, a proration of 88%. Given the increasing complexity of the county forest system, both in scope and scale, more work is having to be done with the same number of hours received.
 - **Request:** The allocation of time standard hours should be increased to 52,000 hours. This will require an increase of the Division's position authority and the hiring of an additional 3.3 FTE staff to support the county forests mission.
 - It should be noted that we do not want to diminish the work of the DNR on their own lands, for their own priorities and are not suggesting reprioritizing work or reallocating staff time.
 - **Request:** Going forward, the allocation of hours should be seriously reviewed every time a needs assessment is completed. It would be appropriate to adjust the allotment of hours based on the actual need over time as programs, services, funding and staffing shifts.

Rebekah Luedtke, Executive Director
Wisconsin County Forests Association
715. 539.1097
rebekah@wisconsincountyforests.com

KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

Authorized in FY 2011, the County Forest Subprogram has been one of the most cost effective and efficient uses of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds. It is one of the few uses of the Stewardship funds which actually produces revenue and a positive rate of return on its investment, most of which goes back into local coffers to be invested elsewhere.

Wisconsin counties hold and manage significant acres enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (State Statutes §28.10 & §28.11). Citizens and visitors of Wisconsin value these County Forests because not only do they provide reliable raw materials for the State's \$24 billion forest products industry, they also ensure public access and recreation amenities on more than 2.4 million acres of forested lands in 30 Wisconsin counties. These county forests are a large part of what makes Wisconsin unique and collectively they make up the largest public forested land holdings in the State.

The State's investment in the County Forest Subprogram currently leverages 50% local match, and to date, this subprogram has resulted in the acquisition and enrollment of 26,942 acres of additional public lands, in 15 county forests, into §28.11, at a total cost of \$41.6 million, \$20.8 million being Stewardship funding. Besides being open for public recreational use into perpetuity and providing numerous environmental and socio-economic benefits, these lands have already generated over \$1.6 million in revenue to county governments from the sale of timber, reducing local tax burdens. These timber sales are estimated to have produced another \$2.85 million of economic benefits as additional jobs and businesses utilize these forest products.

County Forest land acquisitions are proven to be of great value for Wisconsin, both for citizens and visitors. According to the USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Survey, the average price per acre for forest land transactions in Wisconsin in 2018 was \$2,349/acre. The average price per acre for County Forest land acquisitions under the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is approximately \$1,547/acre, with \$773/acre coming from the Stewardship Program, a 300% decrease from open market prices.

Stewardship funds have been critical to the recent growth of Wisconsin's County Forests, and many counties plan on utilizing the program in the next decade. It is doubtful many of the public land acquisitions would have taken place without the availability of these funds, and many counties would not have a land acquisition program without it. County funding is limited and often not readily available when willing sellers come forth. Lands to be purchased under the County Forest Subprogram are prioritized under a ranking system developed between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Wisconsin County Forests Association. This ranking system only moves forward potential acquisitions which are sound, high-quality investments, and that often provide many environmental and economic benefits to the counties and the general public.

Lands to be purchased must be within established County Forest boundaries, often reducing costs and increasing efficiencies of future management activities in the area.

In addition, Wisconsin's County Forests are critical to the state's outdoor recreation opportunities providing 9,130 miles of managed snowmobile trails, 1,730 miles of ATV trails, 504 miles of designated hiking trails, 460 miles of ski trails, 396 miles of bike trails, 3,340 campsites, 280 boat landings, and many more. To keep pace with ever-expanding demand, investment in the development, restoration, and modernization of facilities is essential.

Developments such as parking lots, trailheads, restrooms, and other amenities are highly-valued by residents and tourists, but are currently not eligible uses of County Forest Subprogram allocations or carry-forward balances. Investments in nature-based recreational development on county land in counties with land enrolled under Wisconsin's Forest Law will further increase the State's return on investment in the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Wisconsin County Forests Association supports the reauthorization of the County Forest Subprogram of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and maintaining the \$5 million annually set aside under 2015 Act 55 to provide land acquisition grants to counties. We also request statutory language be amended to allow nature-based recreational development grants under the County Forest Subprogram of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund at the 50% match level.

CURRENT STATUS: The State's investment in the County Forest Subprogram currently leverages 50% local match, and to date, this subprogram has resulted in the acquisition and enrollment of 26,942 acres of additional public lands, in 15 county forests, into \$28.11, at a total cost of \$41.6 million, \$20.8 million being Stewardship funding.

RECOMMENDATION: Request the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship County Forest Subprogram be reauthorized and funded at FY2019-2020 levels, and be amended to allow nature-based recreational development grants under the County Forest Subprogram.

ATV/UTV TRAIL & LAW ENFORCEMENT FUNDING

Wisconsin counties hold significant acreage of lands enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (State Statutes §28.10 & 28.11). Citizens of Wisconsin value these County Forests because they provide reliable raw materials for the forest products industry as well as public access and recreation programs on more than 2.4 million acres of forested lands. These county forests are a large part of what makes northern Wisconsin unique and collectively make up the largest public forested land holdings in the State. As part of the recreation programs, these county forests host and/or manage over 80% of the official, off-road, ATV trail systems in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides aids for the management of these ATV/UTV trails through grants funded from machine registrations, trail passes, and gas tax allocations. The grant programs provide for trail development, rehabilitation and maintenance as well as law enforcement aids.

The ATV/UTV sport has seen dramatic growth over the last 5 years, with an increase of over 25% in registered machines. This steady increase in machines has resulted in a significant surplus of revenues over expenditures and a large "fund" balance in the segregated ATV account. At the same time, trail sponsors are struggling to maintain trails with the existing funding allocations. Higher traffic volumes, coupled with ever larger machine size and power, result in trail sponsors (primarily counties) not having sufficient funds to maintain trails.

CURRENT STATUS: Currently, grants are awarded to local units of government at a rate of \$600/mile for ATV maintenance and an additional \$200/mile for UTV maintenance. The program also offers aids to Sheriff's Departments for reimbursing ATV/UTV patrols.

In addition, local Sheriff Departments are struggling to provide appropriate levels of law enforcement for the growing use and pressure. The most recent funding cycle for WDNR ATV/UTV patrol aids resulted in a 63% pro-rate in reimbursement funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the annual summer UTV maintenance funding from \$200/mile to \$400/mile, which would result in an additional annual allocation of approximately \$425,000. This will provide assistance in trying to manage trail impacts from increase numbers and size of ATV's and UTV's on trail systems
2. Increase the annual budget allocation for county ATV law enforcement aids from \$750,000 to \$1,250,000. This will provide short term elimination of the pro-rate within the law enforcement reimbursement program.

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