

# 2019 MARATHON COUNTY FOREST WILDLIFE WORK PLAN

This represents the 2019 Annual Wildlife Work Plan, pursuant to the fifteen-year Comprehensive Plan for the Marathon County Forest.

## Personnel

Marathon County spent most of 2018 with a DNR Wildlife Technician vacancy. The position was temporarily filled through the summer but was vacated in August. In early November, the DNR hired Paul Napierala to a FTE Wildlife Technician position based out of Wisconsin Rapids. Paul will cover Marathon County as part of his work duties. Assistance to the County Forest Administrator and DNR Liaison Forester will be provided in all wildlife matters concerning the County Forest.

## Flowage Management

Water levels on most Marathon County flowages were above average during the spring and summer of 2018. Managers monitored flowages to keep them at ideal water levels throughout the year. Waterfowl and shorebird production and sightings seemed to vary on Marathon County flowages. Beaver sign was limited during the spring and summer months but did increase in the fall.

### **Dike Maintenance:**

Muskrat and beaver holes were not patched in 2018. Rodent holes are a maintenance issue on many of the dikes. The USDA-Wildlife Services was not contracted to trap and remove beaver in 2018 due to increased costs and lack of beaver sign in the spring. Beaver problems were limited throughout the year, but USDA did remove some beaver at East Flowage in Nine Mile and Lower Nienow in Harrison-Hewitt in the fall as part of the forestry contract. In 2019, DNR plans to contract with USDA-Wildlife Services to trap beaver on the flowages due to increasing beaver damage. DNR wildlife is also exploring the idea of contracting with USDA-Wildlife Services to trap beaver at an area level.

### **Bern Flowage:**

Bern flowage has been affected by floating cattail masses that have accumulated on the West 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. There are still multiple acres of cattails to be removed from the flowage. A contractor is scheduled to remove cattails during November of 2018 and will continue to remove cattails in 2019 as needed.

### **Wild Rice:**

Wild Rice production varied on many flowages in 2018. Rice production was slightly down on Lower Nienow and Leo flowages compared to previous years. Patches of rice were seen at Nienow, Leo, Lower Leo and Swamp flowages in the Harrison-Hewitt unit and the East and Birch flowages at Nine-Mile. Wild rice seeding efforts have fluctuated recently as availability of wild rice seed has been inconsistent. In 2018, managers purchased 100 lbs. of wild rice and seeded Leo, Lower Leo, Nienow and Lower Nienow flowages.

### **Flowage Management:**

Planned flowage management for 2019 includes a continuation of the flowage drawdown rotation. All the flowages will benefit from being drawn down periodically (every 3-5 years). Drawdowns reduce undesirable plant species, allow desirable plant species to germinate and return nutrients to the soil. The drawdown plan for 2018 called for drawdowns on Steinke and Nienow flowages. Steinke flowage was not brought down due to beaver problems in front of the structure. Nienow flowage was not brought down due to lack of staff availability. In 2019, managers plan to draw down Steinke and Nienow flowages.

### **Herbicide treatments:**

In 2018, dikes and trails between flowages were not sprayed due to reduced staff availability. In 2019, managers plan to spray thistle, tansy and spotted knapweed with Milestone during the growing season.

## **Forest Management**

### **Openings Management:**

Maintaining early successional habitat, such as grass openings, is an important part of Central Wisconsin forest management. In 2018, twenty-two forest openings (31% of the total) were treated in Marathon County in the Harrison-Hewitt, Kronenwetter and Leather Camp blocks. The openings were treated by hand with brush saws, chainsaws and herbicide applications. Openings management was mostly paid for through turkey stamp dollars. Thirty-four openings were scheduled to be managed in 2018. Several of the scheduled openings were checked with no management needed. The other openings not managed will be added to the work plan for 2019.

A GIS management database was set up in early 2010 to ensure that each opening was treated in a timely fashion. The openings are typically managed on a 3-4-year rotation. In 2019, managers plan to manage thirty-four openings in Harrison-Hewitt, Nine-Mile, Kronenwetter, Leather Camp and Burma. Funding for this management will be paid for by turkey stamp and Nickel-an Acre.

### **Trails:**

Several forest trails on the Nine-Mile and Harrison-Hewitt units were seeded with a clover/grass mix in the spring and summer of 2018. 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 likely need to be seeded throughout Marathon County in 2019. Turkey stamp funding has been secured for any spring or early summer trail projects.

### **Alder Management:**

Alder mowing for regeneration purposes continued in Marathon County in the early winter of 2018. Approximately 12 acres was mowed at two different locations in Leather Camp. With Drummer Grant (Ruffed Grouse Society) and Nickel-an-Acre funding in place, alder shearing in the winter of 2018-19 should be productive if the weather cooperates. Multiple sites in Leather Camp County Forest have been selected for alder mowing. Additional sites in Harrison-Hewitt will be selected as another option. Managers have set a goal of mowing 10-15 acres of alder during the winter of 2018-19. Meeting these goals will rely on acceptable weather conditions as well as having equipment and an operator available. Contactors may be hired to accomplish this work if DNR staff and/or equipment are unavailable.

## **Grasslands/ Hoffman Farm**

In previous years, managers have always mowed the Hoffman Farm to knock back the growth of cool-season grasses and promote the establishment of warm-season grasses and native forbs. In 2018, managers planned to conduct a prescribed burn on Unit 4 of the Hoffman Farm. Due to wet conditions, vacancies, and burn priorities, this burn was not accomplished. In the spring of 2019, Unit 4 will once again be looked at to burn. The firebreak will need to be freshened up beforehand to make sure the burn could be done safely. The rest of the units will be put on a 4-5-year burn rotation instead of a mowing rotation.

### **2018/2019 Nickel-an-Acre Budget**

The following table lists the 2018 Nickel-an-Acre project budgets and expenses. It also includes proposed 2019 projects and the associated spending plan.

<b>Project Activity</b>	<b>2018 Budgeted</b>	<b>2018 Expended</b>	<b>2019 Budgeted</b>
Flowage Maintenance (dikes, spillways, structures)	\$400	\$0	\$500
Flowage Maintenance (brush/cattail removal-dikes)	\$300	\$0	\$400
Wildlife Opening Maintenance	\$200	\$0	\$400
Trail Seeding	\$0	\$0	\$100
Wild Rice Seeding	\$400	\$410.80	\$400
Alder Management	\$500	\$523.26	\$500
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$1,800</b>	<b>\$934.06</b>	<b>\$2,300</b>

After all expenses are subtracted, the Nickel-an-Acre account balance at the end of 2018 should be \$2289.63. This will increase to \$3693.63 after deposit of the 2019 allotment.

Submitted by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Brandon Stefanski, DNR Wildlife Biologist, Marathon County

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paul Napierala, DNR Wildlife Technician, Marathon County

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tom Lovlien, Marathon County Forest Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Arnold Schlei, Chairperson, Marathon County Forestry/Recreation Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chad Keranen, DNR Forestry Liaison, Wausau