

Sand Dunes State Forest Stakeholder Advisory Group – Meeting 5

Meeting Summary and Notes

Date: October 24, 2016, 6pm-9m

Location: Big Lake High School Cafeteria; 501 Minnesota Ave Big Lake, MN 55309

The meeting agenda can be found in Appendix A.

Attendees included:

- 21 stakeholder advisory group members, which included one DNR staff member assigned to the group and one State Representative – Representative Newberger; additionally, one State Senator – Senator Kiffmeyer – joined the meeting and participated with the advisory group.
- 5 audience members
- 12 other DNR and State Trust Land staff, 1 facilitator from MN Management & Budget

The discussion topic of the 5th meeting of the Sand Dunes State Forest Stakeholder Advisory Group focused on land management issues, specifically payment in lieu of taxes, School Trust Fund lands currently in the Sand Dunes, and the DNR's strategic land asset management program and potential impacts to Trust lands in the Sand Dunes.

Two presentations were given by stakeholder advisory group members. As a follow-up to Meeting 4, Donna Bouley shared she and her husband Don's experience of having a prescribed burn completed on their 8 acres of diverse native prairie bordering the Sand Dunes. The Bouleys prepared for the burn by mowing the perimeter of the prairie, trimming trees, removing stumps, and removing hazel brush and invasive buckthorn. They had also spent years slowly eliminating poison ivy from the area through biannual mowing and spot herbicide treatment. There was cost-share grant money available to help them pay for the cost of the burn, which went well.

Ron Geurts gave a presentation on School Trust Lands in the Sand Dunes, providing background on the history of Trust land designation, information on the value of the Trust and the payments to schools, and information on the value of timber harvest versus real estate. He expressed several concerns about the DNR's consideration of transferring more Trust land acres into the Sand Dunes, including concern that the lands could one day be sold for revenue, and concern that having more Trust acres would prevent DNR from being able to transition from even-age managed red pine plantation to multi-age managed white pine forest.

Following the stakeholder advisor presentations, three state employees gave presentations. John Korzeniowski, the SDSF public engagement project manager, provided an overview of Trust lands in the Sand Dunes, showing where they currently are. He noted that the selling of Trust lands mainly happened in the early years of the Trust, and that this was less common in recent years. He also discussed the Dept. of Revenue's payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) program, which provides revenue to counties and townships when state land falls within their jurisdictions.

Aaron Vande Linde, School Trust Lands Director, provided an overview of the Trust and DNR's relationship as a trustee. The Trust began with 8.1 million acres of land, which has been reduced to 2.5 million acres after certain lands were sold. He said that the Trust was incentivized to hold onto as much

of its remaining land as possible, as it is the Trust's major asset. The mission of the Trust is to produce sustainable economic growth – growth that can continue in perpetuity while ensuring sound natural resource management. The Trust is worth \$1.2 billion today, much of which has come from sale of mineral rights.

Trina Zieman, DNR Land Asset and School Trust Administrator, provided an overview of the strategic land asset management (SLAM) program, which aims to improve the value of the state's portfolio of public land assets. A recent audit through the Office of the Legislative Auditor indicated that DNR needed to consolidate more of its scattered lands, including scattered trust lands. As part of that effort, DNR is currently examining the potential of transferring about 1000 acres of scattered trust lands near the Sand Dunes into the Sand Dunes itself.

The presentations were followed by a question and answer period. Stakeholder advisors and audience members submitted questions on notecards for the presenters to answers. Following this, attendees filled in their discussion question sheets and the facilitator led a large-group discussion about concerns/advice related to DNR's management of School Trust Lands in the Sand Dunes, and further questions on the issue.

At the end of the meeting, John Korzeniowski provided feedback to suggestions made at the previous meeting related to wildlife and native plant management in the Sand Dunes. Director of the Div. of Forestry, Forrest Boe, concluded the meeting with some closing remarks.

Summary of Participant Responses and Small Group Ideas

Individuals and the small groups offered a wide range of ideas in response to the discussion questions. Their detailed responses are compiled in Appendices C and D. What follows here is a summary of all the responses:

Concerns about Trust lands in the SDSF:

- General concerns that Trust land in Sand Dunes will be sold someday
- New Trust lands being transferred within Sand Dunes or into the Sand Dunes from other counties:
 - concern that they could be sold someday
 - does not make sense to have more Trust land in Sand Dunes – native timber is low value and better timber comes from non-native tree species
 - do not want Trust lands bordering property
 - mandate to maximize revenue will prevent DNR from ever shifting to a multi-age forest management regime on Trust lands
 - Communication with residents
- No concerns – happy to see rare oak savanna management occur
- At global scale, native ecosystem should outweigh concerns about the Trust
- Orrock township must pay for road easement on Trust land, results in taxation on residents
- Too many open-ended questions remaining about this issue, more clarity is needed
- State should look at all venues for raising Trust funds, to preserve purpose of the Sand Dunes
- That DNR meets its mandate to maximize revenue on Trust land
- How the trust will be compensated if oak savanna is restored on Trust lands
- Sand Dunes Trust lands have not produced income in a decade, and will continue to not produce if restored as oak savanna – how will fiduciary responsibility be met?
- Funds being paid out only from interest (2.5%), not principle – is it enough?

Advice about Trust lands in the SDSF:

- Make as much money off the land as you can without selling it.
- Replant timber to maximize revenue on trust lands.
- Stop conversion on any school trust lands so that Trust acres do not need to be transferred, or until the trust compensation plan is worked out.
- Manage savanna/restored savanna for rare resources, move Trust land to old fields planted to pine plantation.
- Compensate or transfer Trust – risk of Trust selling lands is not in best interest of DNR objectives
- Transfer Trust land from SDSF to another area of the state, and manage SDSF for pre-agricultural vegetation.
- If the real goal is conservation of rare species and ecosystems, remove ALL trust lands to more productive areas.
- Maintain open communications about progress of any inter-country Trust land transference.
- Wait and see how rare species are doing in Sherburne NWR and other converted areas of Sand Dunes before converting more land
- Look for alternative sources of revenue for Trust: recreation, tourism, native seed harvest.
 - Research and review the role of recreation and specifically Anne Lake Campground and Sand Dunes Equestrian Campground on the school trust lands. (E.g.: state parks and forestry division receive no funds from the operation of the campgrounds at SDSF, it all goes into the trust fund (source: state forestry director))
- Quantify ecological land values; consider value of natural places for school kids.

Further Questions about Trust lands in the SDSF:

- Are other forms of revenue being considered on Trust lands? Prairie seed harvest? Recreation?
- Continue communication through multiple mediums with lots of opportunity for feedback.
- As with the rest of land follow the purpose it was originally established for.
- Don't make management decisions on potential Trust lands until decision about Trust land transfer is made (some management on these lands is already happening)
- Land north of co. road 4 east and west of co. road 15 seems underused, should it be more user-friendly?
- How can the stakeholder group effectively contribute to the objectives for the North Metro Region?
- How many acres of school trust lands in SDSF have red pine plantation on them?
- How will residents be notified if Trust lands are offered for sale?
- What is previous and projected income of timber sales on Trust lands in the Sand Dunes?
- What are the expenses for management of the Trust fund?

Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

SAND DUNES STATE FOREST – STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP MEETING AGENDA

October 24, 2016

Big Lake High School Cafeteria
501 Minnesota Avenue
Big Lake, MN 55309

5:30 Doors Open

6:00 Welcome and Introductions

6:10 Main Discussion Topic: Land Management and School Trust Issues

7:10 Break

7:25 Resume Discussion Topic

8:15 DNR Report Back – What we heard at last meeting

8:50 Re-cap of meeting, closing remarks

9:00 Adjourn

9:30 Doors Close

Appendix B: Written Questions for Presenters

These questions were submitted by stakeholders and audience members and answered by the presenters.

- What % of SDSF is school trust land?
- What % of all MN land is state/local owned?
- Where will the proposed new school trust land be located, if the land transfer is done in the future?
- Is DNR still proposing to transfer trust lands to SDSF?
- Who determines this acquisitions, exchanges, sales of lands?
- Do you even sell state land to people who want to buy acres to build a home?
- What public process would be used prior to making trust fund decisions – sales? Transfers?
- Are SDSF lands being looked at to be sold off?
- What was the rationale behind the 2012 legislation to “maximize revenues” from school trust lands?
- How long has SLAM been around? Engage partners and stakeholders how?
- How does turning timber land to oak savanna satisfy the maximizing revenue criteria?
- What is the average timber value of 1 acre of SDSF timber?
- How does this compare to value of native prairie seed harvest value?
- Where would new Trust Lands be located?
- Your slide states that ecological benefits are considered. How are these benefits valued?
- Is there a dollar amount determined what it would take to buy out the trust interests in the SDSF? Could there be a partial buyout? – development?, mineral?, surface?
- In your consolidation process, do you think any citizen would want the trust obligation transferred next to them?
- At what land value could trigger the selling of the land in the SDSF?
- Should the DNR halt conversion to management that does not yield a fiduciary return until the trust issue is settled?
- If the school trust has to (by law) make money, how can it be converted to eco land which makes no money?
- What price would make land in the SDSF saleable?
- What is the time table for North Metro consolidation of school trust lands?
- There will be a gradual removal of pines from the campground – is the campground for campers or for native species? Oaks get health issues like pines, but pines have visual quality and aesthetics.
- Of the 429 school trust land [acres] in long-term forest [management], [how much] is in pine plantation?

Appendix C: Summary of Large Group Concerns, Advice, and Questions in Response to Discussion Questions

Stakeholder comments to the following questions: *What **concerns** do you have about how the DNR is managing the “School Trust Lands” within the Sand Dunes State Forest? What **advice** do you have for the DNR as it manages the “School Trust Lands” within the Sand Dunes State Forest?*

- Because of the mandate to seek maximum funding for School Trust Lands through easement payments from townships, this creates a hardship on property owners. Looking for some level of flexibility in these payments from one governmental unit to another. This may require legislation to provide the flexibility.
- Of the \$1.2 billion in School Trust Land, only 2.5% is used to fund schools per annum. Can more of the principal be used to fund school districts?
- School Trust Lands generate \$35 million in gross revenue but only \$22 million in net revenue. What happens to the difference? What are the expenses for management of the fund? (Comment: it takes 9 month to one year to invest the funds from this revenue amount.)
- What is the potential of long-term disposal of lands? Not in favor of having these lands out of public ownership.
- China ties up mineral rights in Northern Minnesota, how come nothing is done about this. . .?
- What is the value of the trust lands in state forest areas?
- Need consideration given to the recreation value of land in the Sand Dunes State Forest.

Stakeholder comments to the following question: *What **additional questions** do you have about the “School Trust Lands” within the Sand Dunes State Forest?*

- Forest management needs to provide consistent revenue including campgrounds and recreation along with forests.
- Management decision that are non-fiduciary: trust transfer, trust obligation for Sand Dunes as a whole, trust transfer before investment of money
- Conversion of timber land into prairie: is conversion option in trust land?

Appendix D: Discussion Questions and Individual Responses - Full Version

DNR asked each individual advisor to respond in writing to discussion questions provided on a handout. What follows is a transcription of all the responses we received. We also gave audience members an opportunity to share their thoughts, and their comments are presented as well.

Q1: Following the presentation and Q/A, **what concerns do you have** about how the DNR is managing the “School Trust Lands” within the Sand Dunes State Forest?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- I feel we should not take on other county’s school trust land when in the future it may be sold and it will be gone forever from the forest.

Comment 2:

- None – glad to see savanna management as oak savanna is so rare.
- I’m sure , through transfer, the fiduciary responsibilities of the trust will be achieved.

Comment 3:

- Given the poor performance of timber lands in the SDSF, and the fact that the best performing tree species are non-native to the area, it does not make sense to transfer additional trust lands to this forest. At the state and global scale, the native ecosystem value should trump Trust.

Comment 4:

- School trust land causes forestry to seek funds from Orrock township for a road easement across a strip of school trust land. Orrock township does not have funds for this without taxation of citizens. Orrock township tax base causes this payment to come from homeowners, not business or industry. Why not exempt Orrock township from paying another government agency? The mandate for max. revenue must be more flexible.

Comment 5:

- There are still a lot of open-ended questions and undecided positions with the DNR without a lot of direction for the group or clarification on how and when you will get to the answers. I think it will create more anxiety.

Comment 6:

- That they are looking at all venues to raise funds without destroying the purpose of the SDSF.

Comment 7:

- The long-term potential for it being sold. (There is very little that this stakeholder group agrees on, but this is one thing that they do agree on.)

Comment 8:

- The transfer of school trust lands, if this occurs. How will we know if some are going to border our property, and timber harvest occurs again. Will we be notified?

Comment 9:

- Is the DNR's first concern to maximize revenue or is it bugs and snakes?

Comment 10:

- Do not want lands from other county's transferred to SDSF

Comment 11:

- I'm concerned about the DNR proceeding to convert school trust lands to "open landscape" without first figuring out how to compensate the trust for loss of income.

Comment 12:

- Have no concern at this time, the presentations were interesting.

Comment 13:

- We need to take another look at why only 2.5% of the 1.2 billion dollars in trust fund money is used for education – why so small a percentage?

Comment 14:

- Other than timber harvest, it is unclear what value SDSF lands would have for the Trust. Are there other revenue generation methods being considered? If not, then sale of property is a real concern, even though this was stated as not being considered.

Comment 15:

- Does recreation generate revenue on school trust lands? If so, what?

Audience:

Comment 1:

- The gentleman representing the trust stated that the SDSF trust lands have produced zero revenue for a decade, and he also said that if it's converted to an oak savanna that it would not produce anything either. Either way, we haven't met our obligation to produce funds on those lands.

Comment 2:

- No concerns.

Comment 3:

- Really the long view of the impact no trees will give to the income from that land.

Q2: Following the presentation and Q/A, **what advice do you have** for the DNR as it manages the "School Trust Lands" within the Sand Dunes State Forest?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- Make as much money off the land as you can without selling it.

Comment 2:

- Manage savanna and restored savanna for rare resources (oak savanna and associated rare plants and animals). Move the Trust lands to old fields that have been planted to pine plantations for timber.

Comment 3:

- Compensate or transfer Trust. SDSF already faces too many management challenges, and the risk of the Trust selling its lands is not in the best interest of the DNR objectives.

Comment 4:

- Continue communication through multiple mediums with lots of opportunity for feedback.

Comment 5:

- As with the rest of land follow the purpose it was originally established for.

Comment 6:

- Right now there are management decisions being made and implemented, to manage SDSF lands for non-fiduciary results (sale south of Kringlands, lopping of pine plantations). These lands are potentially recipients of trust obligation. Advice: don't waste taxpayer money until the final trust ownership is decided.

Comment 7:

- The DNR must manage school trust lands for max revenue. The only revenue available here in SDSF is sale of timber. Timber sales must be replanted.

Comment 8:

- Plant two trees for every tree that is harvested, like it was stated at an earlier meeting.

Comment 9:

- Stop conversion on any school trust lands, until the trust compensation is worked out.
- Move "open landscape" management to less acres so that school trust land in the sand dunes can stay where they are.

Comment 10:

- I hope that you don't make the land behind us trust land. I live on [redacted].

Comment 11:

- Be very open in your communications pertaining to progress of land transference – one county to another.

Comment 12:

- If the real goal is conservation of rare species and ecosystems, remove ALL trust lands to more productive areas.

Comment 13:

- Apparently fiscal stability and profitability overrides desires for DNR forest change. Does not sound like flowers and grass seed harvest is a profitable option.

Audience:

Comment 1:

- If the lands within the Bob Dunn Recreation Area cannot be managed effectively for forestry, can a dollar value be calculated for recreational use? Sand dunes/Bob Dunn SFRA is the most popular state forest campground and second highest revenue producing campground in the system. The trails, beach, and DUA(?) area of immense recreational value to the western Sherburne county community and beyond. What value can be placed on that?

Comment 2:

- I look at the use of the land north of co. road 4 east and west of co. road 15. I in the last 20 years have almost never seen a person on foot or horseback walking that grass land. Only during hunting do I see a few walk to(?) roads. Is that good enough? Should it be more user-friendly?

Q3: Following the presentation and Q/A, **what additional questions do you have about the “School Trust Lands” within the Sand Dunes State Forest?**

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- Will they be replanted with white pine? Or will they be replanted at all? In my opinion we all can wait and see how rare species are doing in the Sherburne and in the already converted areas in the Sand Dunes. If they are doing well and growing maybe allocate more land, but if they are not doing well, maybe go back to plantation.

Comment 2:

- DNR should look to alternative sources of revenue with less ecological impact. Native seed harvest. Tourism. Etc. Value of natural places for school kids!
- What happens when federal regulations prohibit the Trust’s highest and best use.

Comment 3:

- This was an enlightening set of presentations. I would like to know how this group can effectively contribute to the objectives for the North Metro Region?

Comment 4:

- Do what you say.

Comment 5:

- How many acres of school trust lands in SDSF have red pine plantation on them?

Comment 6:

- Quantify ecological land values.

Comment 7:

- How can I be notified when you eventually offer these lands for sale?

Comment 8:

- Mostly answered

Audience:

Comment 1:

- How do you propose to make the school trust lands generate money for the trust?

Comment 2:

- The division of eco services needs to research and review the role of recreation and specifically Anne Lake Campground and Sand Dunes Equestrian Campground on the school trust lands. E.g.: state parks and forestry division receive no funds from the operation of the campgrounds at SDSF, it all goes into the trust fund (source: state forestry director)

Comment 3:

- Is there a requirement that “X” many acres of SDSF must remain in school trust lands? If not, why not transfer land and consolidate school trust land in another area of the state. Then manage SDSF in a manner that gets it back closer to its pre-agricultural state – virgin prairie/oak savanna?

Comment 4:

- What exactly is the amount of money generated going back 10 years? What is projected income to come following the proposed timber sales of immediate areas?

Appendix E: DNR Responses to Suggestions from SDSF Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 4 – Wildlife and Native Plant Management

SUMMARY of recommendations to DNR from SDSF Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 4: Wildlife and Native Plant Management

Suggestions that we can incorporate or already incorporate in our work...

- Identify locations of fragile species and STAY AWAY, especially hairy gamma grass on exposed dunes
 - **Response:** Areas sensitive to disturbance are often left out of tree harvest areas entirely, or the season of operation may be restricted to frozen ground conditions. Hand management may also be used in certain situations, rather than heavy equipment, in order to protect sensitive habitats.
- Management practices should be based on science; use science-based adaptive management tools to restore, protect, and manage rare plants and wildlife
 - **Response:** Science plays a very important role in informing the management decisions made in the Sand Dunes, as well as in informing the management practices used. It should also be recognized that policy and public input play important roles in management decision-making as well. Final decisions are made to balance a diversity of needs and values, informed by available scientific information.
- Provide information on soil infiltration rate and half-life of chemicals used; provide info on application methods.
 - **Response:** This information is available, contact Nicholas Snavelly for details (Div. of Ecological and Water Resources) nicholas.snavelly@state.mn.us

Suggestions that require discussion...

These suggestions are either already reflected in the current operational plan (which is under discussion), or are reflected in part, but some discussion or clarification of the suggestion is needed:

- Manage to increase rare wildlife species numbers; manage for declining species, especially if they are largely restricted to the Sand Dunes (e.g. Leonard's skipper)
 - **Response:** Restoration and enhancement activities outlined in the operational plan aim to provide quality habitat conditions for all wildlife, including declining, rare and endemic species.
- Reestablish prairies/savannas to extent possible
 - **Response:** The operational plan seeks to establish a balance between managing for rare species (through savanna restoration) and continuing to meet timber and recreation needs in the Sand Dunes.
- Protect rare and endangered plant species
 - **Response:** The operational plan seeks to protect and strengthen the populations of dozens of rare species and species of greatest conservation need in the Sand Dunes.
- Control exotic plant species if possible
 - **Response:** The operational plan seeks to control invasive species such as buckthorn, non-native honeysuckles, and Amur maple to the extent feasible. This will be influenced by the amount of staff time and funding available, as well as the extent of infestation.

- There must be a balance with managing native plants and species with the Forest.
 - **Response:** The operational plan is the result of a thorough process involving many conversations within the DNR to determine the appropriate balance of rare features management and timber/recreation management the Sand Dunes. The DNR feels that the operational plan reflects a balance between plantation forestry and native ecosystem management, as both will continue in the Sand Dunes. Current conversations with the public are an attempt to create better balance with social values in the Sand Dunes.
- Focus more on rare species than common species in management plan.
 - **Response:** The operational plan focuses primarily on restoring and enhancing native habitat and vegetative conditions which benefit all wildlife, both game and non-game, common and rare.
- Go for maximum biodiversity in plants and wildlife, and expansion of habitat
 - **Response:** The operational plan seeks to create a balance between a diversity of ecological, social, and economic needs in the Sand Dunes. So while rare features habitat will expand, other activities such as timber harvest and recreation will also continue in the Sand Dunes.
- Endemic berry bearing shrubs should be introduced for local and migrating birds and pollinators
 - **Response:** The operational plan focuses on enhancing the native plants that are currently present in the Sand Dunes and allowing them to expand naturally.
- Timbering should be a secondary interest in the Sand Dunes.
 - **Response:** Timber harvest will remain an important environmental and economic activity in the State Forest. In addition to the economic (\$43 in value-added economic activity generated for every dollar of timber harvested) and social (supports living-wage jobs in both rural and urban communities) benefits of timber harvest, it is also critically important from an environmental standpoint because:
 - Commercial timber harvest is the best tool we have to create forest 'disturbance' that benefits wildlife habitat and forest health.
 - Wood is an excellent raw material choice from an environmental standpoint due to lower energy use, carbon storage benefits, and its ability to be recycled compared to alternatives.
 - Minnesotans will always have a need for raw materials, so limiting timber harvest here means that we will either need to use less environmentally sustainable materials such as plastic, cement, and metals, or we will have to source our timber elsewhere – possibly more sensitive landscapes with potentially less environmental oversight, such as tropical rainforests.

These suggestions are not currently reflected in the operational plan, and require further discussion or clarification before a decision can be made:

- Economic suggestions:
 - Determine economic impacts (local and statewide) of management plan.
 - Make sure to finish projects that are started – concerns that this will be difficult in a political climate
 - DNR needs to prioritize oak savanna/prairie projects in Outdoor Heritage and other funding requests

- **Response:** DNR has conducted past economic analysis of pine management in the Sand Dunes State Forest. We are working to update this information. In the meantime, the 2008 pine management economic analysis is available upon request to Amanda Kueper Amanda.kueper@state.mn.us
- Protect wildlife from disturbance during management activity (especially reptiles and amphibians that do not travel as freely)
 - **Response:** Management activities such as prescribed burning, brush grinding and invasive species removal are planned for small patches during restoration and enhancement, often 5 – 30 acres at a time depending on goals and objectives. Small patches ensure there are plenty of “refuge” opportunities and surrounding undisturbed areas for wildlife to use. Seasonality, weather conditions and timing of treatments is also considered to reduce wildlife impacts.
- Continue to allow hunting in the Sand Dunes and consider adding food plots where trees have been cut
 - **Response:** Current plans do not propose restricting or eliminating hunting. High quality native habitats such as oak savanna communities are preferable to planted food plots for forage and cover. While the DNR does use wildlife food plots in some areas, these are typically intended to provide a winter food source on smaller properties surrounded by larger areas devoid of natural wildlife habitat (i.e. harvested agricultural fields).
- Do what is affordable – oak savanna cannot pay for itself.
 - **Response:** The DNR must be able to consider other values beyond revenue generation on unique or sensitive ecological landscapes, due to the many non-monetary benefits. However, there may be other opportunities for revenue generation on oak savanna landscapes besides timber harvest in the future, and the DNR would be open to exploring these.
- Have a moratorium on converting to oak savanna to observe what happens in the Sherburne NWR
 - **Response:** DNR has a responsibility to the people, wildlife, and ecosystems in the Sand Dunes. We are concerned that deferring appropriate management into the unspecified future will be detrimental to the landscape.
- Suggestions related to plantation pine:
 - Consider white pine native to Sand Dunes and treat it accordingly
 - Maintain pine mixed with oak to retain biological, structural, and functional diversity
 - Preserve some pines for future old growth (100-200 years) as example to the public of what could be elsewhere.
 - Accelerate removal of pine plantation and encroaching forest and shrub expansion into native prairie land oak savanna
 - **Response:** Based on available evidence, DNR ecologists have concluded that while white pine has historically been found in low quantities in the Anoka Sand Plain, it is unlikely that it was found in the Sand Dunes specifically. However, white pine is presently part of the Sand Dunes landscape and will remain an important component in the future. Regardless of historical status as native or non-native, we are concerned that leaving white pine in the southern unit of the Sand Dunes will conflict with management goals for rare features in that landscape, as white pine would compete with native plants for space and resources.

In terms of removal timing, it is important to seek a balance between timber, recreation, and ecological goals when deciding on timing of pine removal. Regarding old growth, as pine plantations are not as diverse as natural forests, it is unlikely that any pine stands in the Sand Dunes would make good candidates for Designated Old Growth land.

- Suggestions related to public input:
 - Collaborate with local residents to form plan.
 - Do not let a vocal few stall the great restoration work underway and planned
 - **Response:** This public engagement process for the Sand Dunes is intended to help DNR understand the diversity of values, concerns, and feedback from members of the public who are interested in the Sand Dunes. Once we have collected this range of suggestions, a summary of the process and resulting recommendations will be presented to the Commissioner of the DNR for consideration as to how the final plan will be formed.
- Plan with the local fire, sheriff, hospital first before burn season
 - **Response:** Safety is the DNR's highest priority. In most cases, the sheriff's office is contacted before a burn. However, the DNR recognizes the need for more conversations around this issue, to ensure that we have a consistent plan in place for adequate communication with local emergency departments and the public concerning prescribed burns.
- Work closely with Sherburne NWR when conducting burns, and to plan management through the best available research
 - **Response:** DNR is open to discussions with the Sherburne NWR about cooperative management efforts, especially concerning prescribed burns on adjacent lands.
- DNR should identify and explain the assumptions used to inform decision-making (e.g. historic land cover)
 - **Response:** DNR relies on the best available science and information we have to inform our management decisions. However, the suggestion to be clearer about limitations to our information is noted and will be taken into consideration.

Suggestions that would be very difficult to implement...

- No hunting or trapping unless species are spoiling the ecosystem
 - **Response:** State Forests are generally open to hunting and other recreation. Some Scientific Natural Areas (including Uncas Dunes) are also open to hunting. Annual hunting seasons and regulations are implemented in a manner to maintain the resilience of game wildlife populations on public and private lands. There is not currently a need or intention for limiting hunting recreation opportunities within Sand Dunes State Forest.
- Continuing to manage monoculture pine plantations seems to conflict with wildlife goals
 - **Response:** Pine plantations are part of the overall mosaic of wildlife habitats on the landscape within Sand Dunes State Forest. Depending on growth stage and time of year, pines do provide benefits to wildlife species including browse, cover, perches, roosts, and nesting opportunity. In addition, pine plantations mixed with other native plant communities across a landscape provides "edge" and transition habitat which is important for many species.
- Oak savanna may be better suited in State Parks.
 - **Response:** The Sand Dunes State Forest is an extraordinarily unique place in Minnesota, and the world, as it contains globally imperiled oak savanna habitat. The opportunity to

restore this particular habitat to this degree is rare on state lands in Minnesota and opportunities on non-Park lands like the Sand Dunes need to be considered.

- Acquire additional farms and pastures, outside the forest, equivalent to what you want to convert
 - **Response:** The cost to acquire additional lands surrounding the Sand Dunes would be significant. Eight hundred acres (the approximate amount of acreage in the Sand Dunes to be restored to oak savanna) of agricultural land in Sherburne County could cost in excess of 5 million dollars. DNR does not have the resources to purchase any new land in the Sand Dunes at this time.

Potential Misunderstandings:

- Keep doing what you have been doing for last 50 years.
 - **Response:** The DNR has changed many things about our approach to management over the last 50 years, as we have learned more about best management practices to protect soil and water, sustainable timber harvest, and Minnesota's native plant communities. While the DNR takes pride in the important work done over the decades, we strive for continuous improvement. To continue our work unchanged into the future, in the face of new knowledge and evolving social and ecological needs and pressures, would not be in line with our mission.
- Prairie is not the cover wildlife need, and the amount in the Sherburne NWR is already sufficient.
 - **Response:** Many species of wildlife depend on prairie and oak savanna for habitat, including many rare species in the Sand Dunes. As oak savanna habitat has been so depleted in the Minnesota over the last 150 years, these species will need all the space that we can provide in order to remain resilient against current and future ecological pressures.
- Do not remove all non-native species, such as red-cedar, as these have become key habitat for bull snakes.
 - **Response:** Eastern red-cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a native species to the Sand Dunes. However, it can become overpopulated in the absence of fire. While the operational plan calls for reducing numbers of red-cedar in certain areas, complete removal is not a goal.
- I don't believe there is an accurate model to predict the supposed global warming issue you think will change the pines. If so please reference that study.
 - **Response:** Our information about anticipated climate changes in Minnesota comes from the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Research Station:
 - US Forest Service's [Climate Change Tree Atlas](#)
 - Handler et al. 2014, "[Minnesota Forest Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment and Synthesis: A Report from the Northwoods Climate Change Response Framework Project](#)".

For further information, please see our full response on our Question and Answer page for this project: <http://dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/sand-dunes/faq.html>

Appendix F: Summary of Field Tour – October 22nd, 2016

The Saturday before the 5th stakeholder advisory group meeting, the DNR hosted two back-to-back field tours to demonstrate different management objectives in the Sand Dunes. A total of 19 guests plus 5 DNR staff attended the tours.

The tours stopped first at the Ann Lake Campground to talk about the pine removal strategy near the campsites. Next, the groups visited a recently harvested red pine stand that had young white pine growing up underneath. Finally, the group visited a recently restored oak savanna in the Sherburne NWR; the site had been largely cleared of pine and invasive species, and 90% cleared of red pine and black cherry. A 30-50% canopy cover of scattered oak species and other hardwoods remained, and the site was scheduled for a prescribed burn and forb seeding.

AGENDA:

What: DNR will host a field tour so that stakeholders can view unique forestry, rare features, and recreation management in and around Sand Dunes State Forest.

When: Saturday October 22nd, 2016

Time: Tour 1 – 10am-NOON
Tour 2 – 1pm – 3pm

There will be two time slots, which are first come, first served. Please RSVP by Wednesday Oct. 19th. If demand is low, we may cancel the second tour (they will be the same).

Where: Tour groups will meet at the **south Orrock trailhead on 233rd Ave NW**. DNR can provide transportation for the tour for about 10 people; beyond that we will need to rely on a few volunteers to drive their personal vehicles around.

Who: DNR land managers from our forestry, fish and wildlife, and ecological and water resources divisions will lead a short tour of selected sites within and near Sand Dunes State Forest for members of the SDFS Stakeholder Advisory Group and interested members of the public.

Other info: Join DNR staff that manage and study Sand Dunes State Forest for about 2 hours of guided field visits that will showcase some of the unique features of the area and demonstrate traditional and innovative management going on in the forests, savanna, and campground. Walking will be minimal and not strenuous but come ready to walk and stand “off-trail” for 20-30 min at a time. Poison ivy is abundant in the area and although it will be past its prime by the end of October closed toed shoes or boots and long pants are highly recommended. Bring a camera, your questions, and be ready to have fun!

Stops:

- **Forestry practices:** We will visit a recent timber harvest nearby that showcases some of the traditional forest management that has been a feature of this area for decades.
- **Rare features management:** We will visit an oak savanna area to give stakeholders an idea of what oak restoration sites may look like in the Sand Dunes in the future.
- **Recreation:** We will stop at the Ann Lake Campground to talk about tree management in the campsites and other areas of the campground.

Appendix G: Reference Information

Where to Find Information about the Sand Dunes State Forest:

1. Link to the Anoka Sandplains Subsection Plan and Appendix C - Operational Plan for the Sand Dunes State Forest:
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/subsection/anoka/plan.html>
2. Instructions on how to subscribe to the DNR GovDelivery service to receive information about recent and upcoming activities in the Sand Dunes State Forest:
 - Go to this address <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/emailupdates/index.html>
 - Fill in your email address in the white box (scroll down to the yellow area labeled "General Public"), then click on "GO"
 - If you are a new subscriber, you will be asked to confirm your email address first. Fill in the form and click "Submit" at the bottom of the page. You should receive an email confirming that you have signed up.
 - Next, under "destinations" check the box next to Sand Dunes State Forest. Scroll to bottom of page and click on "submit."
 - You will automatically receive any future GovDelivery messages sent to the Sand Dunes list.
3. Link to DNR Website With Information About All Minnesota State Forests:
http://dnr.state.mn.us/state_forests/index.html
4. Link to DNR Website for the Sand Dunes State Forest:
http://dnr.state.mn.us/state_forests/sft00045/index.html
5. Lake Maria State Park phone: 763-878-2325
6. Little Falls Area Forestry phone: 320-616-2450