

Sand Dunes State Forest Stakeholder Advisory Group – Meeting 6: Roads, Wrap-up, and Next Steps

Meeting Summary and Notes

Date: December 5, 2016, 5pm-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.
- 11 audience members during the roads portion; 12 audience members during the main meeting, though not all the same people.
- 9 other DNR staff, 1 facilitator from MN Management & Budget, 1 State Trust Lands employee

This was the sixth and last meeting of the SDSF Stakeholder Advisory Group before the Legislative report on the public engagement process is due (Jan. 15). The meeting began one hour earlier than usual to accommodate a special session on roads-related issues (5-6pm). At the roads meeting, John Korzeniowski provided an introduction, and Stakeholder Advisory Group members Bob Hassett (Orrock Township) and Bob Hammar (local landowner) gave presentations describing their concerns. The main roads issue discussed was that there are township roads crossing state land with no easement. The DNR will add the road easements to the deeds for the parcels of state land that were “acquired” by the DNR (i.e., were in private ownership in the past). State statutes require payment to the Trust for easements crossing Trust Fund land; sections 16 and 36 in Orrock Township are Trust Fund lands. The meeting included a written discussion question sheet (Appendix C) and large group discussion.

The main meeting (6-9pm) focused on re-visiting topics of interest from previous meetings and discussing next steps in the process. John Korzeniowski began by recapping the main concerns DNR had heard during the public engagement process, which included land management issues (conversion/restoration of lands), aesthetics and view sheds, timber harvest methods, health and safety issues, and communication issues.

He then described key agreements that had been reached thus far through the collaborative efforts of the process. These included:

- Contacting all landowners adjacent to a proposed harvest on SDSF land to discuss view shed mitigation options, such as buffer strips
- Experimenting with smaller harvests on a 68-acre parcel schedule for final harvest
- Postponing pine removal around the campsites at Ann Lake
- Experimenting with mechanical removal of buckthorn on a site slated for reforestation
- Ongoing meetings with interested stakeholders once the plan is in the implementation stage

A few people made suggestions in response to the agreement to experiment with mechanical buckthorn removal, including a suggestion that DNR compare cost of mechanical removal to cost of herbicide treatment paired with well monitoring; and a suggestion for landowners to test well water now to establish a baseline.

John then reviewed the results of a poll that stakeholders (including audience members) had completed to determine topics for the night's discussion. The top-ranked topic was conversion/restoration; second-highest was harvest methods (e.g. clearcutting/final harvest), followed more distantly by rare species, wildlife management, and School Trust Lands.

The conversation focused first on conversion/restoration of pine plantations to native plant communities. The facilitator asked participants to focus on specific areas within the Sand Dunes that would be especially ideal/not ideal for restoration efforts. Specific discussion areas included:

- Wetlands could be an area of agreement for restoration, including Larson's Slough.
- Restoration boundary lines could be redrawn, but that net acreage of restoration in the plan should stay the same.
- An SAG member whose home is currently in the forest management zone wished to keep the pine trees behind their home.
- The forest as a whole is appealing, nice to have the expanse
- Snowmobiling trail in the southern unit is beautiful with the pines around it
- Trees could be cut back along Highway 10 so that the ice melts better in winter
- Central area of the southern section has a lot of rare species
- Create 'scenic easements' near private land
- "Site 3" in the northern unit – trees already removed, would be good to continue restoration work there; potential bonding money issue though
- Should restore areas that would maximize wildlife habitat and help create connecting habitat with Sherburne refuge, county land oak savanna, etc.
- Consider areas where taxpayer money has already been invested when making land use decisions

Some attendees pointed to the beauty and recreational enjoyment of the pine trees, while others pointed to the rarity of the oak savanna and the opportunity to create a legacy for descendants by restoring it.

The group also discussed timber harvesting methods. Discussion points included:

- Important to work with logging industry when making decisions
- Logging industry has been fine with harvest methods in Sand Dunes, including clearcutting
- Residents do not like the new shorter rotation age for planted red pines – more land will be cut now
- Urban culture is choking the Sand Dunes – need to figure out a way to get along or logging may not be a viable industry in Sand Dunes
- Clarification about slash: logger can't leave slash higher than 2 feet above the ground

John Korzeniowski also discussed some of the management that would be taking place in the next few months in the Sand Dunes, including a Trust Land timber sale and invasive species removal. Most activity in the Sand Dunes is on hold.

Rep. Newberger requested that the revised operational plan come before his committee by April 1st. In response, Director Boe suggested that the group convene again in late February to discuss a draft of the plan.

One of the project planners announced that a project evaluation would be distributed by email to the group. Everyone is encouraged to fill out the evaluation in order to help the DNR improve public engagement processes like this in the future.

John Korzeniowski provided some responses to the suggestions related to School Trust Lands from the previous meeting, followed by some discussion. Directors Boe and Skinner provided some closing thoughts, thanking everyone for their dedication to the process. Director Boe said that value-driven processes – such as the DNR’s land use decisions – are difficult, but that he was impressed by the communication channels that were opened with this process. He suggested that the group remain involved, meeting a couple times a year to provide feedback on implementation efforts.

Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

SAND DUNES STATE FOREST – STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP MEETING AGENDA

December 5, 2016

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

- 4:45 Doors Open
- 5:00 Pre-meeting: Road issues in Sand Dunes State Forest
- 5:45 Break
- 6:00 Introductions and goals of this meeting
- 6:10 Revisit key topics from previous meetings (based on poll)
 - Main topics: conversion/restoration; clearcutting/harvest methods
 - Secondary topics: rare species; wildlife management; School Trust Lands
- 7:30 Break
- 7:45 Discussion of next steps in the public engagement process
- 8:30 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: Summary of group discussion

Comments on Conversion/restoration of lands in Sand Dunes State Forest (see photo below)

- Wetlands restoration – general agreement
- Scenic easements around homes – general agreement
- Complete work at Sight #3 – some agreement but concern over some details in restoration
- Maximize wildlife benefits – restore areas to preserve wildlife – no agreement
- Safety concerns on Highway 10, ice on roads from trees shading roadway

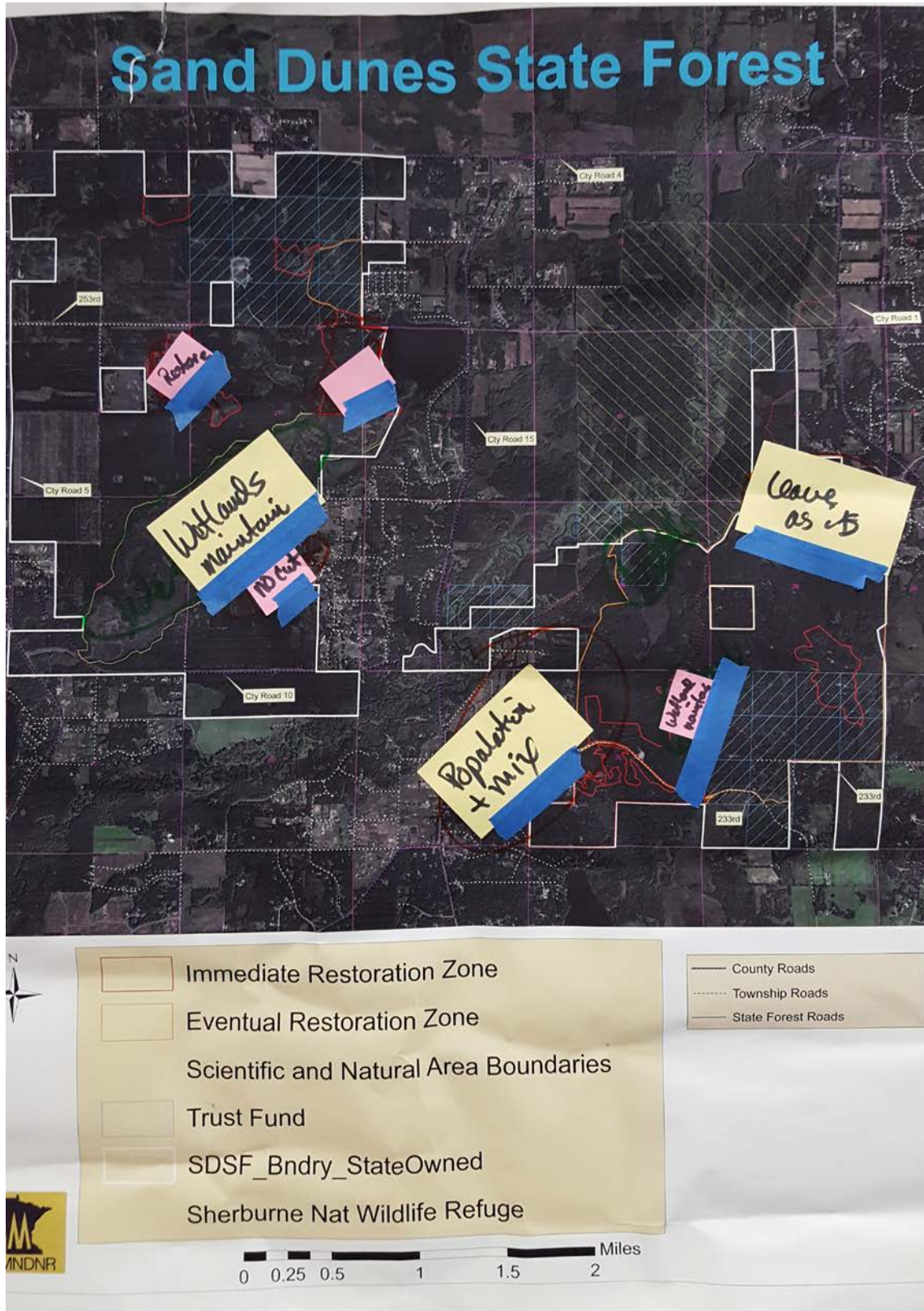
Comments on harvest techniques

- Forest management thinning happens about every 8 to 10 years for pine and about every 15 years for hardwoods like oak.
- Return on investment on timber sold is 4%
- Establish parameters in plan to work with logging industry to have minimum impact on roads

Future meeting date for Stakeholder Advisory Group

- Tuesday, February 21, 2017 (or best date that week)

Photo: Map of Sand Dunes with notes by facilitator



Appendix C: Roads Discussion Questions and Responses - Full Version

During the roads discussion (5pm-6pm) 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.

Though quite a few people attended this portion of the meeting, few responded in writing to the discussion questions. A couple of questions from attendees are addressed below (labeled “DNR Response”).

Q1: What additional questions do you have about DNR’s management of roads within the Sand Dunes State Forest?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- Opportunity to require terms and conditions before issuing easement.
 - Mowing: timing and frequency
 - Seedmixes: native only
 - Measures to avoid rare wildlife impacts
- Rare species exist within these proposed ROW, may not be in DNR best interest.

Comment 2:

- Is the road in the north Sand Dunes, Township road past Sherer’s that is, does Sherer have legal access?
DNR Response: The DNR understands the township road (253rd Ave.) ends at the east line of section 17. This leaves about ¼ mile of State Forest road travel to reach the parcel in question which would mean currently there is no legal access. The parcel referred to is the East ½ SWSW Section 16-34-27.

Comment 3:

- None

Audience:

Comment 1:

- Has the DNR studied the pros and cons (e.g. financial, environmental, etc.) of keeping the roads vs. closing the roads and restoration of native habitat? If so, please provide comments evidencing analysis.
DNR Response: No studies have been done on this issue. The road segments have been in use for at least 35 years and in some instances longer. Several private residences use these roads for access to their homes.

Comment 2:

- Lots of damage done on roads 233rd and 142nd Street (Livonia) Sect. 31. Logging trucks and kids on corner wrecking road. Also lots of garbage dumped on fire road off 233rd.

Q2: What additional perspectives, suggestions, and/or advice do you want to share with us about DNR's management of roads within the Sand Dunes State Forest?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- Consider cost sharing with Township and DNR to buy out Trust along roads. Could reduce net-cost for Townships and help achieve restoration goals.
- Consider atypical easement – *road surface only*. Don't want to lose native prairie roadsides. *Don't grant 33-foot easement*. Rare species – including 100% of known plains hognose hibernacula within the State Forest – are within a few feet of the road surface.

Comment 2:

- Pursue the *total* buyout of the School Trust in the SDSF. Then this issue will be much more manageable.

Comment 3:

- The DNR should take a more active part in taking care of the right of ways and tree overhang.

Audience:

Comment 1:

- Consider losing more roads and restoring the landscape!

Appendix E: 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