

Sand Dunes State Forest Stakeholder Advisory Group – Meeting 7

Meeting Summary and Notes

Date: February 21, 2017, 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; additionally, 1 State Representative – Representative Newberger – joined the meeting and participated with the advisory group.
- 14 audience members
- 9 other DNR staff, 1 facilitator from MN Management & Budget

The meeting began with introductions from the Stakeholder Advisory Group and a brief introduction from Division of Forestry Director Forrest Boe. Next, forestry planner Amanda Kueper provided an overview of the final Legislative Report that was submitted on January 13th in fulfillment of the requirements of 2016 MN Session Law Ch. 189 Sec. 47.

Next, project manager John Korzeniowski, along with DNR Central Region staff Liz Harper and Tim Edgeton, provided an overview of key changes to the 2017 operational plan from the 2013 plan, pointing out areas of change on projected maps of SDSF. Key changes included:

- Shortened timeframe of plan from 50 years to 10 years (2013-2022)
- Commitment to discuss potential aesthetic impacts of harvest with adjacent landowners, including discussion of buffers
- Leaving pine trees adjacent to campsites in the Ann Lake Campground
- Thinning pine plantations in the Ann Lake Campground in this planning cycle rather than rotation-age harvest
- DNR will hold annual meetings with stakeholders to discuss upcoming management projects in SDSF
- DNR will have ongoing communication with stakeholders through other methods as well, including field trips and GovDelivery messages as needed.
- Resolution of the Trust land 233rd Ave issue with Orrock township
- Efforts to connect north and south units with a bridge over the St. Francis river
- Pilot experimentation with smaller rotation-age harvests on a red pine stand in the north unit
- Pilot experimentation with mechanical removal of buckthorn on a 20-acre site in the north unit
- Changed from rotation-age harvest to thinning pine stand in southwest corner of southern unit
- Reduced habitat enhancement activities within the planning period
- Shifting to habitat maintenance/assessment in the Bob Dunn Recreational Area instead of selective tree removal for habitat enhancement

The presentation was followed by a question and answer period. Afterwards, stakeholders had time to complete a written feedback worksheet to submit clarification needs, the strengths they saw in the draft plan thus far, and lingering concerns they had of the draft plan thus far. Stakeholders discussed these three areas in small groups, followed by a large group discussion.

At the end of the meeting, DNR staff provided a brief overview of next steps, which include: synthesis of feedback, completion of the draft plan, 30-day public review, public feedback synthesis, and finalization of the plan by summer 2017. Representative Newberger offered some concluding remarks, including mention of an upcoming House bill he would be authoring relating to management of SDSF.

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 B and C. What follows here is a summary of all the responses.

The most commonly expressed clarification needs included the need for definitions of forestry terms in a glossary, desire to see the entire plan rather than just a summary, and communication of the full cost of the public engagement project. The most commonly expressed strengths included leaving the pines at the Ann Lake Campground campsites, and the reception and use of feedback from local landowners and other stakeholders. The most commonly expressed concern for the new plan was disappointment over the reduction of acres dedicated to habitat enhancement for rare features. This was a point of contention, however, as some others expressed concern that the number of acres managed for habitat enhancement may be the same in the long-term, despite the changes to the short-term plan.

Clarifications needed on the draft plan thus far included:

- Need to include a glossary of definitions to clarify terms like “thinning,” “rotation-age harvest,” “selective tree removal,” etc.
- Need to see the whole plan, not just a summary; need more assurance
- Communicate the full cost of this project
- More specific time table of actions needed
- More SAG involvement in discussion of stands marked for rotation-age harvest
- Provide explanation for why rare features management acres were significantly reduced, using sound science
- What will be the use of herbicides and fire? When and how often?
- Need more information about what will occur in the short-term, including maps
- Clarify what will happen to trails – how will north and south unit be connected?
- More specifics needed for what will happen to each stand
- Maps need to be more clear
- Clarity on who is managing the SNA and for what
- What is meant by areas that are “already open” – remnant savanna or harvested woodland/plantation?
- What will happen after harvests in the former Eventual Rare Features Management Zone? Elsewhere in the SDSF? What comes back after a harvest?
- Potentially offer in-depth meetings on specific practices (e.g. prescribed burns, invasive species control) – how and why management is done
- Clarify total number of acres impacted in plan timeframe
- What follows management activities?

- Clarify “site assessment” and what might come from that
- How will Trust fiduciary obligation be met after harvest?
- What type of regeneration is planned for Trust land?
- Will there be further changes to rotation age for red/white pine, on or off Trust land?
- What will happen to immature red/white pine in habitat enhancement areas?
- Need to double-check numbers – they are ambiguous and inconsistent in places
- Clarify how communication around final management decisions will be communicated
- Clarify how buffers will be decided
- Will there be designated old growth oak stands in SDSF?
- What will happen beyond 2022? Especially regarding the former rare features zones?
- How will plan adapt to an evolving forest?
- How were decisions made? What was result of legislative meeting week before the SAG meeting?
- What will the next SAG look like?

Strengths of the draft plan thus far included:

- Leaving the pine trees at the Ann Lake Campground campsites
- Getting stakeholder input
- ongoing public engagement
- Better addresses communication issues with neighbors and community
- Shorter timeframe (2017-2022)
- Addition of the recreation component
- Plan in general is good/clear, addresses main concerns
- Appreciated receiving a letter about an upcoming burn
- Narrower focus is good – more operational
- Roads, Trust land, recreation handled well
- Road easement resolution
- Reduced rare features acreage
- Detailed maps are helpful
- Only disturbing small part of forest each year
- Less rotation-age harvest near residential areas

Concerns about the draft plan thus far included:

- Plan does not adequately address rare features; rare features zones have been greatly reduced and that is disappointing; need to move more quickly on restoration
- Desire to see replanting of trees (e.g. of white pine) on Trust land after harvest
- Not seeing inclusion of educational/rule signage
- 49% of forest managed in 6 years is too much
- Concerned that same number of acres may be restored to native plant communities in the future, despite changes to short-term plan
- Desire to see harvested pine trees replanted
- Does the plan reflect the ‘highest and best use’ of the land?
- Timber harvest of any kind during planning period should address rare species as well, especially in former Rare Features zones – standard practices are not adequate
- SAG should be coordinated with on management of individual stands
- Need a timeframe for addressing School Trust issues

- Final harvest of oak stands
- Make conversations from Representative's meeting with DNR and certain SAG members public
- How will this sort of engagement be funded in the future?
- Details are vague, especially around assessments
- Will white pine be incorporated into pine plantations?
- Too much ambiguity – more SAG involvement needed
- Planned actions are moving things too quickly
- Desire to see rare features recognized in conifer forests
- Don't remove too many trees; no rotation-age harvest
- Timing of clearing, leave corridors if needed
- Concerned about thinnings near road right-of-ways – deadfall?
- What impacts will harvest have on recreation?
- Need to alert community about exactly when and where management will take place (e.g. harvest, burns)
- Unclear how management will adapt to climate change
- Horse trails in SNA – exotic species distribution
- What if the plan is not followed in future?

Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

SAND DUNES STATE FOREST – STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP MEETING AGENDA

February 21, 2017

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

- 6:00 Introductions and purpose of this meeting
- 6:05 Update on Legislative Report
- 6:15 Overview of progress on operational plan revision
- 7:10 Individual reflection using feedback forms
- 7:20 Break
- 7:30 Small group / Large group discussion of feedback
- 8:30 Timeline overview: next steps toward finalizing the plan
- 8:50 Re-cap of meeting, closing remarks
- 9:00 Adjourn
- 9:30 Doors Close

Appendix B: Compilation of small group answers to discussion questions

Clarifications (discussed verbally):

- Will you use herbicides or not?
- The numbers need to be clear and accurate
- What type of regeneration is planned for School Trust lands?
- More clarity about how to connect North and South units
- Maps are too busy; maybe time sequence on maps when things are happening
- How will you deal with immature red and white pine in old forest stands?
- What are the plans for buffers?
- Need glossary in plan; clarify or define terms
- Want to see what is planned for the future beyond 10 years; want to see the whole plan
- The plan is too “iffy.” Need more specifics
- What is the plan for rotation-age harvest? What does that mean?
- More openness in how decisions are made; know there was a legislative meeting and want to understand outcome of that meeting
- Will there be/please hold meetings on topics/actions that impact the community - i.e. when there will be burns
- Communicate to landholders when rotation-age harvest or burns will happen, before they happen
- What will happen after some of these activities? Some action is taken, then what?
- How will the next SDSF Advisory Group work? What will it look like?

Strengths (discussed verbally):

- Leaving trees in the campground
- Asking for our input and using it. We seem to be making a difference.
- Leaving the pines in the campground area
- Reducing rare features area for the short term
- Road easement process
- Inclusion of neighbors in Sand Dunes planning process
- Using the option of mechanical control for invasive species over herbicides in pilot
- Reduction of forest conversion in the short term
- Use of thinning as opposed to rotation-age harvesting in places
- Shorter time frame to do some activities
- Good high quality maps
- Listening to stakeholders and adjusting the plan
- Communication to and involvement by the community around the forest
- Keeping the trees at Ann Lake
- The addition of recreation management efforts

Concerns (discussed verbally and written on Post-it Notes):

- Does the plan reflect the highest and best use of this land (which is growing pine trees and residential)

- Need educational signage in public areas
- Campground should be opened up for rare species
- What recreation changes after forest management activities
- What will come back after rotation-age harvest?
- Evolving Forest – how does the plan adapt?
- Will there be educational /rule signage?
- Will the plan be adhered to?
- Iffy
- No clearcuts without replanting
- Timeline to address Trust
- Are you maintaining the long-term value to the School Trust land?
- 49% affected forest in 6 years – what does this mean?
- Thinning trees close to road need to take into account road mgt (e.g. shadows maintain icy roads)
- What is future of former Eventual Rare Features Management zone?
- Need to proceed more quickly to open up and restore oak savanna
- Outside rare feature areas address how rare species will be addressed
- Things are going too fast
- Will plan be followed after changes in legislature and DNR staff?
- Still planning to convert the same amount of acres
- Not enough conservation focus
- Concerned that the cost of this effort is not funded

Appendix C: Discussion Questions and 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: Based on what you have heard today, what aspects of the draft plan need more clarity?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- More of a time table.
- It seems like everything is going way too fast.

Comment 2:

- Need a glossary of definitions of the verbage you folks at the DNR use.

Comment 3:

- Better definition of terms is needed: clear cut, rotation age harvest, thinning, selective removal, etc. There does not appear to be a standard definition to guide the actions taken.

Comment 4:

- We need specifics about what will happen, specifically, stand by stand. Of particular interest are stands marked for rotation age harvest – need more SAG involvement
- Using best available science – explain the significant reduction in acres for rare feature management

Comment 5:

- Need clearer, updated maps – these 2 are very confusing
- I realize this plan is for the SDSF, but adjacent neighbors do not differentiate between SDSF and SNA – especially regarding burning (since the pine plantations are already gone). Who is managing the SNA?
- Areas that are “already open” were mentioned. Does this mean savanna remnants? “Clear cut” oak areas? Or “clear cut” pine?
- Are there areas in the ‘Eventual Rare Features Mgt Zone’ where clear cut pine is to be regenerated or is it to be converted to oak woodland, or oak savanna?
- I would like to see more short term maps in the plan as were shown on the screen

Comment 6:

- Need a plan

Comment 7:

- Having the glossary available to stakeholders as soon as possible
- Potentially offering in depth info meetings on specific practices, how they work in detail – controlled burns, invasive species – not only how management is done but why, etc.

Comment 8:

- Number of acres – 49%?
- Use of herbicides and fire?
- School trust, no re-plant no value

Comment 9:

- The 98% that I haven't seen

Comment 10:

- More specifics with regard to meanings for areas delimited on maps. For example, what does “site assessment” mean, what are the potential outcomes of the assessment, etc. What “surprises” might pop up from assessments?

Comment 11:

- How the Trust fiduciary obligation is met as oak is harvested.
- What happens to immature red and white pine that is a component of an oak stand – in the rare features area.
- Map of potential regeneration harvest in the next 2 cycles (through 2032)
- Is the DNR going to change the rotation age of red pine on non-Trust land? White pine on Trust?

Comment 12:

- Mpls Park Board is now using goats, think about it! (Natural) set an example for others. Herbicides?

Comment 13:

- I look forward to see the time period and specifics of the rotation age harvest areas. Some slides show some of this, but not enough detail
- Glossary - thinning

Comment 14:

- More positive assurance as to your plan

Comment 15:

- Define “rotation age harvest” i.e. clear cut or what – what happens after “harvest”?

Comment 16:

- Seems and some agree the numbers of acres don't add up. Too much ambiguity – sounds like too much of kicking the can down the road. No assurances.

Comment 17:

- Selective tree removal vs. clearcut (sites)
- Posting sites

Audience:

Comment 1:

- Explain why and where rare features management reduced from 513 acres to 213 acres! MN Native Plant Society supports increasing rare features management acres!!

- Why reduction of [illegible] management acres?
- Clarify trails

Comment 2:

- Perhaps should emphasize that each year as decisions are made the final cut, thin, etc. will be shared. I don't think some understand.

Comment 3:

- Recreation management – when and how will trails be addressed and worked into the process.

Comment 4:

- I am concerned about the vague time lines and no real start dates on any one area. The definition of thinning is very unspecific. I do understand that nature rarely follows a single line but we certainly can. I am disappointed that we still have not seen any plan resembling the final draft.

Comment 5:

- How much this process cost the taxpayers (\$100,000) need to be made clear to citizens.

Comment 6:

- In the oak savanna areas will there be stands of oaks that will be left as old growth? 100 to 2 or 3 hundred years? Seems to me all areas needn't be harvested for wildlife and esthetics.

Q2: What do you see as the strengths of the draft plan? What works?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- Getting our input

Comment 2:

- Like the fact that you are leaving the trees at the Ann Lake Campground
- We received a letter that the DNR was doing a prescribed burn in our neighborhood. Appreciated the letter.

Comment 3:

- [none]

Comment 4:

- Narrower focus is good, better job at operationalizing it.
- Better addresses neighbor communication concerns.

Comment 5:

- The outline is nice to have – I think without more of a complete draft – it is difficult to say what works or not

Comment 6:

- Created more confusion

Comment 7:

- Adding recreation management will help with clarity on what is planned – transparency for stakeholders
- Efforts to increase communication and community involvement

Comment 8:

- Campgrounds
- Our input is appreciated

Comment 9:

- The on-going public engagement

Comment 10:

- It is apparent that the DNR took great pains to listen to input from the meetings. The key concerns I have are addressed, however, it is crucial that communication is kept open with stakeholders and other community members.

Comment 11:

- What I see as the “minor” components of the plan (roads, Trust, recreation) are handled pretty well.

Comment 12:

- I think it is great you’re leaving trees in campground – that works! I do understand you will not leave diseased trees and unsafe branches. The campers will be grateful.

Comment 13:

- Listening to the stakeholders and adjusting the plan

Comment 14:

- Too iffy.

Comment 15:

- What are the long term plans well beyond 2022?
- Glad to hear the campground plans.
- Road easement solutions are welcome news.
- Glad to see reduced rare features and acreage

Comment 16:

- DNR is listening and trying to be sensitive to local residents.
- I like one proposed in-forest land swap with the school Trust BUT it doesn’t answer fundamental questions for townships in general. If the DNR is not a road authority how can they assume R-O-Ws are DNR and must be reimbursed or even compensate the School Trust. We need legal opinions on this issue. I’m sure many other townships will be following this issue.

Comment 17:

- Detailed maps are helpful.
- Helpful adding recreation to plan

Audience:

Comment 1:

- [none]

Comment 2:

- Maintaining recreational values i.e. at the campground
- Making sure that only a small part of forest is disturbed in any one year
- The plan in general is good even if some are not happy

Comment 3:

- The focus on the 2017-2022 timeframe

Comment 4:

- You have backed off on clear cutting around neighborhoods, but still want to eventually make it a rare feature – despite clear lack of support. It's a huge forest, pick a better spot. Leave a healthy buffer.

Comment 5:

- Plan gives good view of where DNR is heading

Comment 6:

- [none]

Q3: Where do you have concerns? What changes went too far or not far enough?

Stakeholder Advisory Group + State Representatives:

Comment 1:

- We need to replant the south school Trust in white pine, no ego.

Comment 2 [Donna Bouley]:

- There is nothing mentioned in the plan about adding signage in the state forest, and many people have asked for that, specifically, to tell people not to litter, or for educational purposes

Comment 3:

- [none]

Comment 4:

- All timber harvest (including thinning) to occur in '17-'22 NEEDS to also address rare species. Standard practices not adequate.
- Need to memorialize former Immediate and Eventual Management Areas so that timber harvest prescriptions does not adversely affect resource (even if not primary focus)
- New plan needs to include early coordination with SAG on the stand by stand level!
- Plan does not adequately address rare features. Immediate rare features areas reduced by ~66% and Eventual by >97.
- Plan needs to include time table to address school trust concerns – not just vague language
- Plan “works” with SAG members to retain pine in campsites, but at the same time calls for final harvest of oak stand – makes no sense.

- Address cost this process has generated, and how it is an unfunded legislative mandate.
- Newberger is one stakeholder on the SAG yet is organizing meeting with DNR leadership with only some of SAG member present. These conversations need to be shared with entire SAG.

Comment 5:

- My concerns are for management of rare features, expanding oak savanna habitat as quickly as possible. I'm concerned that this effort has been hindered.
- What is this effort costing? Will this kind of public meeting effort be adopted statewide and what will it cost? How will it be funded?

Comment 6:

- 49% in 6 years – is too much

Comment 7:

- The amount of Immediate and Eventual Rare Features management acres that were reduced to address between now and 2022 – that was very disappointing
- Many of the details are still vague – especially in regards to the assessments that are needed.

Comment 8:

- School Trust – no planting = no money
- Tree thinning near roads

Comment 9:

- The “eventual rare species area,” still wants to convert half of the SDSF into open landscape.
- “Plan at a glance” says that most stands that are harvested at rotation age will be allowed to regen to the same type...what about our discussions to add a white pine component in the pine plantations.

Comment 10:

- The general nature of the presentation leaves a lot of opportunity for disagreeable objectives to creep back into the plans. As a stakeholder I would like to be involved in review and possibly assist in creation of aspects of the plan.
- Continuity – change plan every few years.

Comment 11:

- My main concern deals with the “major” part of the original plan – the conversion of the forest to open landscapes. The long range vision is to still convert the same amount of acres. This amount of conversion is what triggered the original concerns. Would like to see reduced acres to open landscapes and recognition of rare features that occur in conifer forest.

Comment 12:

- Don't cut too many trees and allow them to grow to 120 years. Highest and best use for the land is trees, they have proven themselves, and residential and cutting trees too close to our properties.

Comment 13:

- Timing of clearing and options for leaving corridors if needed.
- Educational signage – now, 5 years, 30 years – keeping the public informed.

Comment 14:

- Concern: Replace the pine trees that have been cut.
- Change that went too far/not far enough: Not replacing the trees that have been cut.

Comment 15:

- No clearcuts. Replant replant replant

Comment 16:

- When “thinning” need to get close to the R-O-Ws so deadfalls don’t cost the townships.
- So let’s settle it now rather than work arounds first. I’m for the land swap in the interim. BUT let’s settle this for other townships.

Comment 17:

- What recreation changes will take place after timber harvest site is completed? Will educational signage change the way we view things.

Audience:

Comment 1:

- Reduction of habitat restored
- 513 to 2-13 – immediate 60%
- 1.328 acres to 8 acres eventual rare features management – 99

Comment 2:

- Have system to show exactly each year what area and when is to be cut or burned. Email list or Facebook group or website are possible ways.

Comment 3:

- I’m a bit concerned that the habitat/rare features enhancement area in the south section was so greatly reduced. My hope is that the next plan 2023-2033 reincorporates the area.

Comment 4:

- It seems that a huge portion, almost half are slated for work, that is based on future assessments. Let’s take shorter steps – nail down the next fiscal year in more precise terms. The 10 year view is nice and needed, but what’s going to happen the next 12 months.

Comment 5:

- Reduction of acres of “Eventual Rare Features Management” is too excessive (decreased by 99%)
- Reduction in acres of “Immediate Rare Features Management” is too excessive (decreased by 66%)
- No mention of how management will adapt to climate change (pine forest biome is moving north)

Comment 6:

- In SNA areas I believe horse trails should be prohibited; exotic seed dispersal.
- Habitat management areas should not be reduced.

Appendix D: 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