

6.6 Appendix F. Cover Type Conversion Goal Process

The process to set 10 and 50-year cover type acreage goals for the Aspen Parklands subsection started with Priority Open Landscape Area designation. Area wildlife staff began the designation process by reviewing DNR Wildlife's 2002 "An Assessment of Open Landscapes for Management of Brushland Wildlife Habitat in Northern and Central Minnesota" report which included LTA summaries for the Aspen Parklands subsection. Staff also reviewed other spatial and descriptive information by subsection or LTAs. This information included pre-settlement vegetation (from Marshner's map); bearing tree, corner, and line note information from the original public land survey; current land cover; current forest inventory data; forest management activities; habitat management history including burn units, shearing projects, etc.; detailed county soil survey information including classification and drainage class; NPC occurrence by LTA; openland species occurrences including records from the natural heritage database and locations of surveyed sharp-tailed grouse leks; management emphasis areas; conservation lands; and, boundaries of public natural resource management units (i.e. WPAs, SNAs, etc.).

Based on the above information, local field knowledge, and management objectives for particular areas, wildlife staff nominated all or portions of LTAs as Priority Open Landscape Areas. These Priority Open Landscape Areas were classified as either Openland (a habitat consisting of an open complex of vegetation with <1/3 total cover by shrubs and/or trees) or Brushland (a habitat consisting of a semi-open complex of vegetation with >1/3 total cover by shrubs and/or 1/3-2/3 total cover by trees). These nominated areas and associated management recommendations received interdisciplinary review and finally SFRMP team approval. The final product of this effort was a management agreement and designation map (see: Priority open landscape area and special management area designations map in *Appendix M: Maps*).

The next step in the cover type acreage goal process was identifying all aspen, balm of Gilead, and offsite aspen stands as T, O, S, R, and C stands (see aspen/balm of Gilead section of Chapter 4). "C" stands were to be converted to a grass or brush cover type. Area forestry and wildlife staff initially identified these aspen management areas with some interdisciplinary review based on the information, designations, and area input mentioned above. After an initial SFRMP team review of the aspen management areas, an interdisciplinary DFFC subgroup was formed to set cover type acreage goals and address some questions and concerns about the amount of "C" stands (18,878 acres) and their ecological appropriateness. This subgroup used an existing shapefile of soils information for the Aspen Parklands subsection to evaluate the Area's "C" and "R" selections. Soils queries were developed for NPCs that could have become an A, Bg, or AX stand and may be appropriate to convert back to an LG, UG, LB, or UB cover type. The DFFC subgroup used NPC scores based on this information and the CSA Cover Density codes to compromise on a lower C stand acreage (~15,500 acres) and increase the R stand acreage to account for the change.

The SFRMP team approved these changes to the C stand acreage and the following cover type acreage goals: the initial treatment of all C stand acreage will occur in the first 2 decades of the plan with approximately equal portions in each decade, approximately half of the O stand acreage will be treated in the first decade to increase the oak cover type acreage, over the next 50 years convert approximately 300 acres of ash/lowland hardwood to white cedar targeting MHn44c, WFn53, and WFn55 NPCs, the 80 acres of NP will be

converted after the first 10 years of the plan likely to non-forested cover types, and WS acreage will be moved out of plantation into appropriate NPCs.