



Madison Audubon Society, Inc.

Serving Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Iowa, Jefferson, Marquette, Richland, and Sauk Counties

222 S. Hamilton Street, Madison, WI 53703-3201 • 608-255-2473 FAX 608-255-2489
masoffice@mailbag.com ♦ http://madisonaudubon.org ♦ fax 608/255-2489

29 August 2013

Diane Brusoe (Diane.Brusoe@wisconsin.gov)

Wisconsin DNR Planner - LF/6

PO Box 7921

Madison, WI 53707-7921

Re: Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (Badger Army Ammunition Plant) - Master Plan

Dear Ms. Brusoe:

Madison Audubon Society has participated in the planning process for determining the future of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant ("Badger Army") since it was decommissioned in 1997. We commend you for taking on the monumental task of planning for this extraordinary property, involving the public at every step. The State of Wisconsin has an unprecedented opportunity here to conserve, restore, and manage for grassland and shrubland birds and other wildlife in one of the largest, unfragmented landscapes in southern Wisconsin.

We applaud the DNR for recognizing the importance of managing and interpreting the natural, agricultural, historical, and cultural resources of the vast Badger Army property on a landscape scale. It's especially notable that DNR hopes to provide "extensive areas of grassland and oak savanna habitats to support the significant grassland and shrubland bird populations" and plans to restore and enhance "the ecological transition zone between the Baraboo Hills and the Wisconsin River to promote quality habitat for desirable game and nongame species, including rare and special concern species."

It's important to point out, however, that there's a very important opportunity here to put an end to the extensive damage that was instigated on this land over many decades of human use. The DNR says it will provide "interpretive and educational opportunities focusing upon natural history, restoration efforts, *and the impacts of human uses*" [emphasis added]. Instead of allowing active recreation use and a shooting range on the property, however, which would extend the impacts of human use into the future, the DNR should delete both from further consideration.

In addition, as we've strongly urged in previous comments, non-toxic ammunition and fishing tackle be required for any hunting and fishing on the entire property. A heavy burden of lead shot is being deposited on DNR-managed lands throughout the state, and the result is continued contamination of these sites and the predictable negative consequences for our waterfowl, game birds, and other wildlife. Just two or three pellets can kill some bird species. Lead can also cause behavioral changes, making wildlife more susceptible to disease, predation, and accidents.

We would continue to emphasize that management of grassland and shrubland habitat and grassland and shrubland birds *must* be the *primary focus* at Badger. We understand that

population growth in southern Wisconsin presents a need for this land to be used for outdoor recreation and that with 7,354 acres available, it would appear that using a portion for active recreation is reasonable. However, by trying to satisfy all needs, DNR will be at risk of satisfying no one. Why add one more shooting range when there are 40 available within an hour's drive of Badger? By focusing on nonmotorized and low-impact recreation, Wisconsin would go far in promoting the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of our native landscapes by the public – *and* it would be compatible with grassland bird conservation. This would benefit both birds and people while fostering support for conservation of natural systems on both public and private lands here and elsewhere.

Ground-nesting grassland birds are especially vulnerable to disruptions, especially from users leaving designated trails, a temptation in a landscape as open as Badger. Low-impact ecotourism, *especially birding*, is a growing recreational activity that will provide economic benefits to the “heart of Wisconsin conservation”. And, keeping state budgets in mind, managing the property primarily for birds and other wildlife would be very low cost, especially when compared to development for more active recreation.

In early August, the Madison Audubon Society board voted unanimously to support Alternative 4, proposed by the Badger Oversight Management Commission (for the entire text and map, see <http://www.saukprairievision.org/uploadedfiles/File/Alt%204%20Cons%20and%20Low%20Impact%20Recreation%285%29.pdf>). Here is the list of their "**Specific Activities and Uses consistent with Conservation and Low Impact Recreation**":

- Implement plan elements specified in the Badger Reuse Plan;
- Restore large, unfragmented tracts of grassland, wetland and shrubland (Habitat Management Zone)* to support native and migratory birds and wildlife;
- Restore remnants of native natural communities and the species they support (Native Community Management Zone)*; limit access to pedestrian use:
- Provide low-impact porous non-paved recreation trails that complement the topography and resource management;
- Preserve and enhance key vistas through vegetation management;
- Selectively site and construct (through community partnerships) a new visitor center with interpretation and educational opportunities;
- Provide interpretation and education opportunities about this property's history and geographic location, acknowledge Ho-Chunk Nation history and Euro-American histories and displacements, and the design, operation and decommissioning of the Badger Army Ammunitions Plant;
- Provide facilities such as a classroom, parking area, staging area, wash station and bathrooms near the Visitor's Center in the Habitat Restoration Zone;
- Identify and improve primary auto access roads through the property and deconstruct roads no longer needed. Limit vehicle access;
- Provide interpretation and education opportunities for schools and universities;
- Use volunteers to promote community participation in education and to help restore natural communities;

- Provide outdoor research opportunities for ecologists, scientists and students;
- Develop parking, picnic areas and viewing areas in the Expanded Recreational Zone* and to a lesser degree in the Habitat Restoration Zone*;
- Develop a fishing pier, canoe/carry-in boat access, and picnic area at the Lake Wisconsin parcel;
- Provide a multiple use trail connecting the Sauk Prairie area, Merrimac area, and Devil's Lake State Park via Burma road consisting of hiking and biking and a seasonal snowmobile trail on an agreed upon route;
- Designate parcel "M" and "M1" as a Habitat Restoration Zone*;
- Remove any unwanted infrastructure, buildings or debris that remains on the property, with the exception of infrastructure that may provide bat habitat and support bat research.

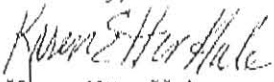
Note (*): The use of the term "Zone(s)" above is to maintain compatibility with language in other DNR proposed alternatives; DOMC members feel this term in most cases is too restrictive and exclusive for Badger lands which often have characteristics of one or more zone types in one area. Exclusive use zones may conflict with the first Value of the Badger Rouse Plan: to manage Badger as a whole.

With 7,354 acres available, Badger Army is one of the very best opportunities anywhere in the state to restore grassland birds, which are declining faster than any other group of birds in Wisconsin. Recent studies of nesting grassland birds at Sauk Prairie Recreation Area and Badger Army have led to its being named a state Important Bird Area, a program that is international in scope and for which sites must meet strict objective, standardized, and science-based criteria. Bird species that have been found here include Eastern and Western meadowlarks, Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper, Orchard Oriole, Bell's Vireo, Dickcissel, and Clay-colored, Vesper, Savannah, Field, Grasshopper sparrows, and more. Many of these species are sensitive to habitat fragmentation and need very large blocks of habitat to successfully breed. In addition, climate change may shift the range of many southern shrubland birds into Wisconsin, one more reason we recommend that management of Badger for grassland and shrubland bird habitat be a very high priority.

It cannot be emphasized enough that Badger Army is an unprecedented opportunity in a world that is "too much with us" in the numbers of people and the noise we create. Let's honor the past by addressing the harm that's been done and by restoring the land for the future of our birds and wildlife - and us. Let's envision the future as depicted by the Victor Bakhtin painting of the expansive prairie with its diverse wildlife. Future generations will thank us for having the vision to take those actions that will "complement each other and those of the surrounding land owners, enhancing the health, culture, and economy of the Badger lands and the surrounding community."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Khren Eitter Hale
Executive Secretary