

Comments from the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center

Re: DNR Master Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreational Area

Introduction

As one of the three major land owners of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP), the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center (USDFRC) will be greatly affected by the designated uses, level of activity, and ability of the DNR staff to effectively monitor the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA). The USDFRC thanks the DNR for the excellent relationship our two agencies have had in the long process of determining the best way to manage the former BAAP as a whole, while also meeting the distinctly different legislatively mandated purposes for each agency's use of the property. The congressional mandate for the USDFRC is to conduct comprehensive research programs which support the environmental and economic sustainability of integrated dairy systems; but the USDFRC does further support a strong continuing partnership with the DNR and others to improve the ecology and environmental sustainability of the SPRA.

Consequently, the USDFRC is generally very supportive of the Draft Management Plan for the SPRA, including the designation of one public entrance to the property, the emphasis on land restoration, and the limitations on intensive/invasive uses such as an ATV track or shooting range. The USDFRC will continue to support DNR efforts to restore the SPRA land to native or preferred species and improve wildlife habitat through agronomic practices and other means such as the removal of invasive species.

Specific USDFRC concerns with the SPRA Draft Management Plan are limited, but detailed below.

Magazine Area Uses

Because the Magazine Area is surrounded on three sides by USDFRC land, the USDFRC is most concerned with proposed activities in this area. As adjacent land owners, the USDFRC priority is to have this area dedicated to non-invasive activities and land/habitat restoration. The DNR states (page 73): "Because the Magazine Area is separated from the rest of the property, it provides a unique opportunity to potentially host special events that do not disrupt visitors to the main part of the property." The USDFRC perspective is that the opposite is a preferred alternative: Because the area is separated from the rest of the property, it is an ideal place for those who want to find the peace and solace of an unspoiled, quiet area, and as a primary location for native prairie and wildlife habitat restoration.

Additionally, because the Magazine Area is separated from the rest of the SPRA property and essentially land-locked by the USDFRC:

- It will be more difficult for the DNR to monitor activity taking place here, both approved and unapproved.
- It will be much more likely that the public trespasses onto USDFRC property.
- There will be more motorized traffic going through USDFRC land to get to the Magazine Area for specific activities.
- There will be a greater risk of accidents or conflicts between SPRA visitors and USDFRC farm vehicles.

For these reasons, the USDFRC strongly requests that no dog activities, dual-sport motorcycle or other motorized vehicle activities, or unspecified "special events" take place in the Magazine Area. However, if these activities are ultimately allowed in the Magazine Area, here are more specific USDFRC concerns and requirements.

Dual-Sport Motorcycles:

For all trails to and/or through the Magazine Area, the USDFRC requests that the events be held on weekends and holidays when the USDFRC is less apt to be moving through the area with farm vehicles. We request that roads needed for USDFRC farm vehicles **not** be closed for the dual-sport

motorcycle trail. And we request that the SPRA manager work with the USDFRC farm manager to find the best times and places for this activity.

Off-leash dog access:

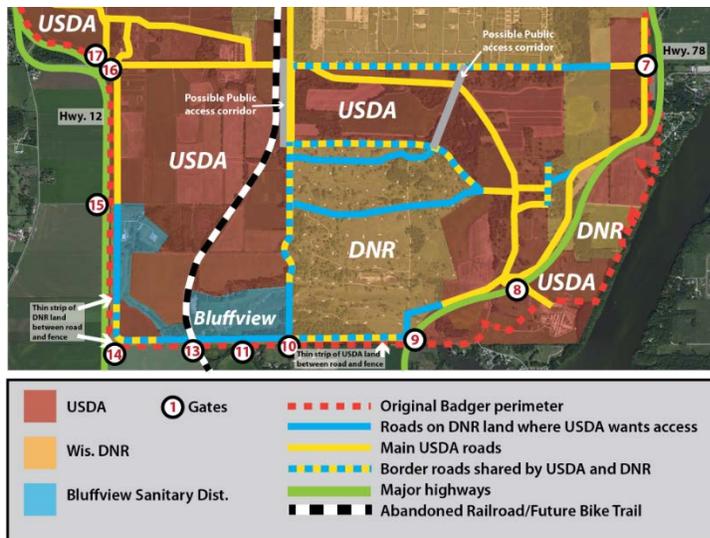
Unless the DNR is planning to build a chain link fence around the Magazine Area, the USDFRC is extremely concerned about having off-leash dogs here. The USDFRC conducts grazing research with heifers on pastures adjacent to MA3, from April through October. These pastures have been designed for management intensive rotational grazing, with a system of fences, lanes and a water supply; so moving the heifers elsewhere is not an option. The USDFRC is concerned that dogs that are free to run will be tempted by cattle, bark at and/or chase them, and potentially cause the cattle to stampede and trample research pastures and/or break through electric fencing resulting in losses of valuable research investment, creating liability issues for dog owners, and potentially compromising dog and cattle health and well-being. If dogs are to be in the Magazine Area, we request that they be on leashes from April 1 through October 31.

Special Events:

The USDFRC requests that these events be non-invasive (such as bird watching or other nature-related events) and be conducted whenever possible on weekends or holidays when the USDFRC is less apt to be moving through the area with farm or research vehicles. To keep traffic at a minimum if special events are held in the Magazine Area, the USDFRC requests that the events be limited to those that do not require people to be coming and going all day; and that the total number of people participating not exceed available parking capacity.

Road Access for USDFRC, Especially in Magazine Area

Earlier in the planning process the USDFRC indicated that it would like to have east-west access through the Magazine Area for farm vehicle traffic. Two existing roads were indicated (see map, solid blue lines). The map on page ii of the Draft Master Plan does not show these two roads as going all the way through on the east side of the Magazine Area. The southern road goes through as a trail; will this remain as a roadbed that USDFRC vehicles can use? The northern road shows no road or trail going through; will the existing roadbed be kept so that USDFRC vehicles can use it?



Similarly, there are references to the Army and Bluffview Sanitary District needing access to certain areas in the former BAAP (page 18, II.B.1.b.), and about the need for public access to Thielke Cemetery and the Hillside Prairie (page 73, II.B.3.f.). But there are no specific references to the USDFRC's need for road access through the Magazine Area. A specific reference should be added to the final plan that acknowledges this critical need for the DFRC.

Other Uses

Rocketry:

The USDFRRC is concerned about the location chosen for the Rocket Area on the SPRA because of the close proximity to USDFRC land. The USDFRC is concerned that there are no formal protocols and/or regulations for rockets landing on USDFRC property. Owners of wayward rockets will logically want to retrieve them which could be potentially damaging to crops and/or research projects. There is an additional potential threat to crops (mature winter wheat and straw) due to fire, which would also need to be prevented proactively with restrictions on time of year, type of rockets used, etc. The USDFRC respectfully suggests that the launch site be moved further away from the boundary with USDFRC to the North and East to limit the possibility of a rocket landing out of bounds on the USDFRC, and that the SPRA manager work with the USDFRC farm manager to find the best times for this activity.

Respectfully submitted,

U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center

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