



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
c/o Laurie Ross  
101 S Webster Street  
Madison, WI 53703

November 28, 2016

Dear Department of Natural Resource Board Members,

On behalf of the 3,400 members of the Madison Audubon Society (MAS), thank you for the DNR's long and difficult work on the master plan of Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA) and the opportunity to support many of its provisions and recommend changes to a few.

MAS members live in the counties surrounding SPRA to the east and south. As those who actively conserve, enjoy, and advocate for all of southern Wisconsin's bird species, the habitat they require, and their fellow wildlife species, we have closely followed the DNR's planning process for SPRA and interaction with the conservation organizations most concerned for that land's welfare. Thank you for many excellent provisions in the proposed master plan. In particular, we deeply appreciate the plan's recognition of SPRA's current and future importance to a variety of grassland birds. The plan's emphasis on the restoration of oak openings is sensible and based on a good understanding of the land's natural history. The plan's recognition of the possible use of the bunkers for bat hibernacula is a great idea; we hope that the DNR can work with bat conservation organizations to accelerate the needed improvements to the bunkers.

We also appreciate the DNR's mission to provide a variety of outdoor recreation to Wisconsin's citizens and guests and the complexity of balancing those goals with mix of habitats and the environmental legacy of SPRA's history. For that reason, we accept many of the recreational opportunities presented in the plan that might in some ways detract from a more pure, wildlife-focused restoration of SPRA. A couple of examples are snowmobiling and equestrian activities. We support the plan's many provisions to preserve the human history of the site including working with the Ho-Chunk Nation, highlighting some of the remnants of the farming, and providing information on some of the ammunition-making infrastructure.

The plan does contain two activities that we believe are incompatible with other habitat/wildlife restoration plans, violate the agreement between the National Park Service and the state of Wisconsin governing the transfer of the land, and create an undue burden on the DNR's management of the site. Those activities are allowing motorcycles on some of the trails and rocketry.

Many organizations and individuals have argued exceedingly well on the first two objections. We agree completely with those arguments and were disappointed by the DNR's general and vague reply to those objections, although we note the additional restrictions on both activities in the revised plan. Our third

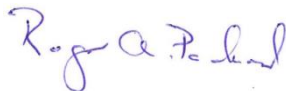
point is based on the refrain stated at numerous points throughout this document that the DNR is increasingly constrained in the money and staff it can devote to SPRA. As a consequence, many important actions might have to be delayed or cut back in the implementation of the master plan. That being the case, why would the DNR take on motorcycling and rocketry at SPRA? Most of the public do not want it and see it as potentially harmful to wildlife or habitat at SPRA. Your partners in this project also voiced strong concerns. More to the point, each activity requires permitting, scheduling, and policing (to make sure the numerous restrictions are observed) that will likely be beyond the capacity of SPRA's staff. There already will not be sufficient staff to do and organize all the great activities that everyone agrees should be occurring at SPRA, and these additional activities impose an additional burden. This burden may also be quite unnecessary because the DNR does not quantify the demand it claims to be meeting in providing for motorcycles and rockets. Even if there is such a demand, the plan does not offer a convincing analysis that SPRA is either the best or only place to host these activities. At the very least, the DNR should conduct the sort of siting analysis and development of alternatives for motorcycle trails and rocket launch sites that it will use to deal with the issue of a shooting range. Finally, if the DNR persists in its commitment to motorcycles and rockets at SPRA, neither activity should be permitted during the bird breeding season.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and to your staff for their work on a difficult but most important project.

Sincerely,



Matthew Reetz  
Executive Director



Roger Packard  
Board President



Topf Wells  
Advocacy Committee Chair