

9 December 2016

Subject: Upcoming vote on proposed master plan for the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area

To the DNR Board,

Please do not approve the proposed master plan for the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area. The plan is very good except for 5 items, which do not accord with the Badger Reuse Plan (of which DNR was signatory) and agreements between the DNR and National Park Service:

1. Off-road motorcycle use.
2. Model rocketry.
3. Dog training and trialing during the bird nesting season.
4. Leaving the door open for a future shooting range.
5. Turkey hunting that extends into May, when it discourages use by school groups.

These uses conflict with the Reuse Plan's goals to have only low-impact recreation on the property, to help reconcile and resolve past conflicts, to protect the rural landscape, to protect and enhance the property's natural features and the critical role of the Badger lands within the broader landscape, and to contribute to local economic stability and sustainability.

The Badger lands are extensive, with seemingly enough room, and little-enough recreational history, to accommodate a multitude of potentially conflicting new uses. Yet these same qualities provide unique opportunities to provide quality experience for silent sports, and appreciation of nature and history away from the noise and distraction from which, increasingly, we find it hard to escape. So also for the grassland wildlife, which needs large tracts of habitat—such that, in areas like the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant, every acre becomes more precious by reason of the expanse surrounding it.

Add to this the unique and incredible opportunities here, for preserving and interpreting our own regional and national history, and for actively engaging in and developing our abilities to restore land—and the potential for creating something very special becomes compelling.

I am a recently retired DNR ecologist. During my 35 years with the department I worked on many projects dealing with the effects of our management and land use on plant and wildlife populations, recovering endangered species, evaluating the ecological significance of publicly and privately owned areas throughout the state, making management recommendations, and helping the public and staff understand and get involved with these issues. I conducted bird, amphibian and mammal studies at the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant, which resulted in its Important Bird Area status, and informed the master plan. As one of the founders and first chair of the Badger History Group, I collected, studied, interpreted and helped preserve its human and natural history. I worked hard on the original Badger Reuse Committee and on the DNR master planning technical team.

As you fully know, it is a complex and ongoing task, and a critical responsibility to manage our public lands wisely: providing quality recreational and interpretive opportunities and resource use, while ensuring the longterm health of the plant and animal communities, and the air and water resources on which we and our fellow creatures all depend.

This task has been before us—the DNR, Ho-Chunk, DFRC, US Army and citizenry—for nearly 20 years at the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant. It has been a long haul, with a complex and instructive record of its own. This tract of land is full of history and meaning for the Sauk County community: the Native people who were displaced 180 years ago; their successors who experienced their own displacement and the conversion from farms to a federally-run industry; the families and businesses that depended on the plant during its production years; and through the process of re-purposing that threatened to tear the community apart as old wounds were opened but—through hard work and coming to understand shared values—ended up transforming our way of seeing this land and brought us together. This history and this process are also significant regionally and nationally. Books, theses, documentaries, papers, memoirs, exhibitions, programs and a museum have all been dedicated to it.

It is important that decision-makers do not forget that process, and the investment and engagement it represents and continues to engender in the public. It is fair and foresighted that DNR honor the commitments it made, if it expects trust from the public who share its dedication to caring for our natural resources and our future.

This commitment should prompt DNR to acknowledge and work with local and regional organizations, municipalities and individuals that have a long and proven track record to care for the Badger lands and help it reach its full cultural and ecological potential. These highly invested partners have continually provided expertise, on-the-ground effort and funding. They have engendered public awareness and involvement. All, with the sincere goal of wisely managing the land that they love, and to which they and future generations belong. They are guaranteed to be longterm partners. Though sometimes at odds with the public management agencies, and with each other, they are engaging in the true democratic process by which we learn, make wise decisions, and guide our future. Especially as the public is being asked to assume more responsibility for managing our resources, DNR can hardly afford to ignore them.

Most sincerely,

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