

# An overview of the **Wisconsin Land Legacy Report**

## Purpose of the report

Wisconsin has a long and proud history of protecting our exceptional natural heritage. Yet, our landscape is changing rapidly in response to pressures and issues unknown only a generation ago. In an effort to put potential future conservation needs into context, the Natural Resources Board directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to *identify places critical to meet Wisconsin's conservation and outdoor recreation needs over the next 50 years*. Over a three-year period, from 1999 to 2002, the DNR hosted numerous public and staff meetings to gather information, local knowledge, and opinions about Wisconsin's land and water.

Questions asked included:

- Of lands and waters that will be vital for conserving our plants and animals and their habitats, which remain unprotected?
- What gaps exist now (and will likely emerge in the future) in providing abundant and satisfying outdoor recreation?
- How can we most effectively build upon our existing investment in privately and publicly protected lands to fill critical conservation and recreation gaps?
- What do we want our landscape to look like in the year 2050, and what role should protected lands play to reach this goal?
- What special places will our children and grandchildren wish we had protected?

## Messages heard

Of the wide range of issues, concerns, and opportunities that were voiced by citizens, some messages were consistently heard statewide – from downtown Milwaukee to Spooner.



**SAFEGUARD our WATER:** From the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes and the countless streams, rivers, and lakes in between, Wisconsin is blessed with an abundance of water, both on the surface and underground. *Citizens not only want clean water to drink, they recognize that abundant and clean water is critical to maintain our native plants and animals, including a large percentage of rare species.* Additionally, the quality and quantity of our water is a vital component of our agriculture, industrial, and tourism economies.



**KEEP KIDS CONNECTED to the OUTDOORS:** Like the entire country, Wisconsin's population is increasingly urbanizing and at risk of losing a direct connection to our rural heritage. As a result, citizens want to *ensure that everyone has reasonably easy access to the outdoors* – not necessarily “wilderness” settings, but simply places to watch birds, catch frogs, identify plants, and interact with natural habitats.



**PROTECT the PEARLS:** Wisconsin sits at the ecological crossroads of the boreal forest to the north, open prairie to the west, and rich deciduous forest to the south and east. Consequently, a wide range of native habitats once blanketed the state. Small pockets of *high quality natural areas* remain and citizens hope that many of these can be protected for future generations to enjoy and study.

### **Key highlights:**

- Identify places critical to meet conservation and outdoor recreation needs.
- 50 year time frame.
- Public involved throughout 3-year study process.
- Report identifies and describes:
  - **229 Legacy Places**
  - **8 Statewide Needs and Resources**
- Report is an educational resource, not a regulatory document.
- Useful for citizens, local governments, non-profit groups, planners, and others interested in conservation issues.
- 250 pages, full color, 11x17"
- Available for \$15 plus tax.





**KEEP COMMON SPECIES COMMON:** Although Wisconsin has enjoyed striking success helping recover a number of imperiled species (trumpeter swans, whooping cranes, and bald eagles to name but three), many species that used to be frequent visitors to farm fields, woodlots, and wetlands are now experiencing troubling declines. They may not be formally listed as Endangered or Threatened (yet), but citizens voiced concern that more needs to be done to *prevent species from becoming rare*.



**PROMOTE PARTNERSHIPS:** Wisconsin’s lands, waters, and habitats are affected by decisions made every day throughout the state. Citizens want to *collaboratively partner with the Department* –individually, through organizations, and via local governments– to maintain and protect Wisconsin’s natural heritage.

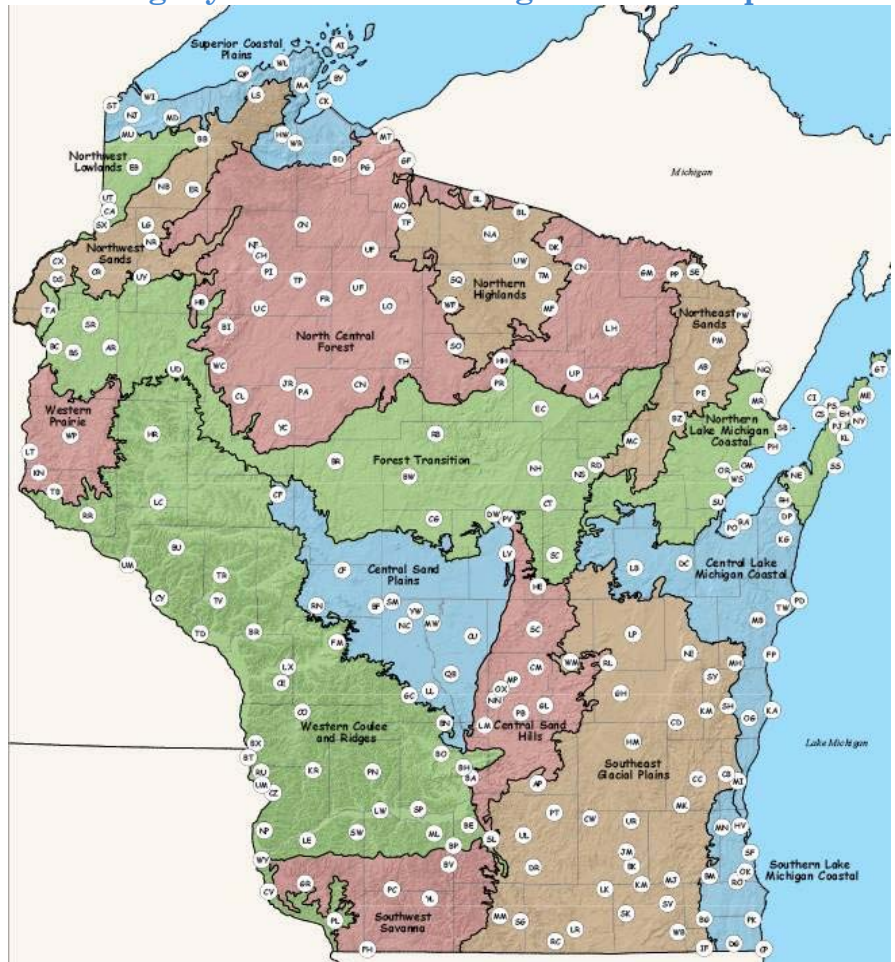
## The Legacy Places

The first step in identifying places critical to meet Wisconsin’s conservation and outdoor recreation needs was to develop criteria regarding the types or characteristics of places believed to be most important. Based on public and DNR staff input, 13 criteria were developed. The second step was to use data on the distribution of various ecological attributes, human population trends, geographical features and other factors, as well as the professional judgment of DNR staff and the local knowledge of citizens, to identify the places that best met the criteria. Collectively, these are the special places that “make Wisconsin Wisconsin.” Public involvement was central to the success of both steps.

The final report identifies **229 Legacy Places** and **8 Statewide Needs and Resources**. The 229 Legacy Places range in size and their relative conservation and recreation strengths. They also vary in the amount of formal protection that has been initiated and how much potentially remains. The Legacy Places are organized in the report by ecological landscapes, shown at right (ecological landscapes are based on soil, topography, vegetation, and other attributes).

The locations of Legacy Places are represented only generally — as dots on maps. *Determining where protection efforts should be focused, which protection strategies would be most effective, and who might be involved will require a more detailed evaluation involving local landowners, citizens, various non-profit organizations, businesses, governments, and others.*

**Legacy Places and Ecological Landscapes**



# The Wisconsin Land Legacy Report

## WHAT THE REPORT IS:

- ◆ A statewide assessment and description of places the public and Department staff identified as most important to meet Wisconsin's *conservation and recreation needs for the next 50 years*.
- ◆ An *educational resource for citizens* to further their understanding of Wisconsin's lands and waters and the natural resources that occur in their part of the state.
- ◆ A *catalyst for dialog* among citizens, non-profit organizations, local governments, the DNR, and others regarding how they hope Wisconsin will look in the future and how today's decisions may impact the land use options that succeeding generations inherit.
- ◆ A comprehensive information source to reference and apply when making land use decisions. The report is *a means to help balance conservation and recreation needs with various other land uses* needed to maintain a healthy environment and a strong economy.

## WHAT THE REPORT IS NOT:

- ◆ This report does *not identify how or when these places should be protected or who should help protect them*. Many partners and stakeholders will need to be involved in evaluating more precisely where protection efforts may best be focused and which protection strategies are most appropriate.
- ◆ The listing of a "Legacy Place" is *not a legal designation* and does not supersede or replace existing state and local regulations.
- ◆ Although public ownership of some parts of some Legacy Places may be appropriate, this report is *not a list of places the DNR wants to buy*. Indeed, public ownership is neither an effective or appropriate means of protecting many of the places identified in the report.
- ◆ The report is *not a new government program or funding source*.
- ◆ The report does *not chart a static course* that future generations must follow.

## How to use the report

There are many ways to apply the information in the report. Readers can use it to gain a sense of past achievements enjoyed by conservation and recreation organizations and agencies in protecting some of the state's jewels. The report also provides a clearer picture of the breadth and diversity of places that are believed to be most important to meet future conservation and recreation needs and how where one lives fits into a statewide perspective.

Maybe most importantly, citizens can use the *Land Legacy Report* to help envision how they want Wisconsin to look in the future and what they believe needs to happen at local, county, and state levels for their vision to become reality. Countless decisions made every day by landowners, businesses, and government representatives affect how Wisconsin's lands and waters are used and what options future generations will have to use and enjoy these resources. By providing a "greenprint of opportunities," the report may help citizens evaluate the day-to-day decisions that they and others make in a broader context.

The Department intends to use this document to organize and evaluate its efforts to protect and maintain Wisconsin's wealth of land and water resources. The Department also intends to use the report as a means to continue building partnerships with local and county governments, regional planning commissions, conservation and recreation groups, business interests, Tribes, the academic community, and many others to collaboratively address the "who, how, what, where, and when" of implementing protection strategies.



## Next steps

Although the report is the culmination of years of work and extensive public input, it is really just the beginning of a dialog that the Department and its partners look forward to having with the people of Wisconsin about the landscape we will leave our children and grandchildren.

In the coming year, the DNR would like to begin meeting with a variety of interested groups and governments throughout Wisconsin to hear your ideas about how Legacy Places can best be protected. How can local citizen's visions for Legacy Places in their area be implemented? Which Legacy Places are priorities for which groups? How can efforts by a variety of organizations and agencies to protect lands and waters best be coordinated to maximize efficiency? What protection strategies are most appropriate for a particular Legacy Place? How can the Department best use its staff and resources to help citizen's vision for the state in the year 2050 become a reality?

## Summary

Wisconsin is recognized as a leader in natural resource stewardship. We understand that a healthy, sustainable environment is essential to our prosperous economy. We also recognize that the opposite is equally true: a vibrant, growing economy is essential to a well-managed and well-protected natural resource base. *Together, our environment and economy allow Wisconsinites to enjoy an exceptional quality of life.*

Clearly, we need to build houses, roads, schools, industrial structures, commercial districts, and the many other facilities that support our growing population and expanding economy. But we must ensure that our developed infrastructure does not impair either our environment—and the natural ecological processes that support it—or our farm, forest, recreation, and tourism industries. Finding an appropriate balance among our interrelated needs for a healthy environment and a strong economy is difficult. Part of finding that balance requires knowing the location of the places that will be critical to meet future conservation and recreation needs.

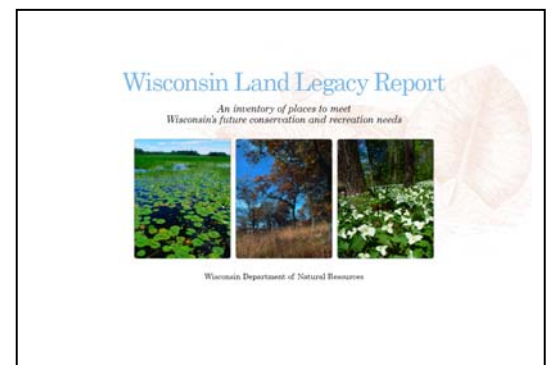
## Keeping in touch

For updates and additional information, visit the web site:

[http://dnr.wi.gov/master\\_planning/land\\_legacy/](http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/land_legacy/)

If you have questions, comments, ideas or would like to be added to a mailing list to receive information about the implementation of the Land Legacy Report, contact us at:

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## Ordering a copy of the Wisconsin Land Legacy Report

The full report (Publication number LF-040-2006) is available for **\$15** plus tax at your local **DNR Service Center** or can be ordered through the state's Document Sales Office at **800/362-7253**. The Document Sales Office charges an additional \$8 for shipping and handling, plus tax, and accepts Visa and MasterCard.

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