

**Land Management Plan
Picnic Point Property
Winnebago County**

PRIMARY GOALS OF THE PROJECT:

In the summer of 2008, the State completed the transfer of surplus land from the Dept. of Health Services (DHS) to the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) to become a State Fishery Area. The Picnic Point land transfer was supported by the Governor, Local Legislative Officials, and many local citizens. The intention of the land transfer is to ensure that the property will remain in a natural state in perpetuity. The deed transfer states "...property shall be maintained in its natural, scenic and open condition and is restricted from any development or use that would impair or interfere with its conservation values and purposes."

In anticipation of this land transfer, the Picnic Point Advisory Committee was developed. The function of the committee was to develop a management plan for the Picnic Point property in conjunction with the DNR, and to solicit public comment. There was general agreement that the property should be kept in a natural state for the benefit of wildlife, fish, and public enjoyment through nature based recreation. The committee believed the primary purpose of the property is to function as fish and wildlife habitat, to preserve the local archeological sites, and to provide an area for the public to enjoy Lake Winnebago and the surrounding shoreline through non-motorized, nature based recreation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE:

This 111.4-acre tract is located along the west shore of Lake Winnebago. The property has over 3700 feet of Lake Winnebago shoreline and consists of 58 acres of agricultural fields and 53 acres of wooded/brushland habitat. To the north is the Winnebago Mental Health Institution (WMHI) and to the south of Picnic Point is the 56 acre Asylum Point Park. WMHI retains and will maintain a 5.0 acre exclusive use area in the Northeast corner of the property.

IMPROVEMENTS AND STRUCTURES:

There are several buildings or structures on the property. A high ropes confidence course was developed in 2002. The patient cemetery was moved to the property in the 1940's. The Picnic Point camp area consists of 4 bunk houses, one vault toilet building, one shower/bath building and a lodge. Additionally, there is a paved road connecting the WMHI facilities with the camp area.

MANAGEMENT OF ADJOINING COUNTY LAND:

The southern boundary of Picnic Point is shared with Asylum Point Park. This 56 acre county park is managed by the Winnebago County Parks Department. To increase the potential benefits to fish and wildlife, this management plan will incorporate the 56 acres of Asylum Point Park. However, authority and final authorization of management activities conducted on County Park land needs to be approved by the Winnebago County Parks Department, the Winnebago County Parks and Recreation Committee and the Winnebago County Board.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS AND PRACTICES:

IMPROVEMENTS AND STRUCTURES:

The DNR has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with WMHI in order for WMHI to continue to manage and maintain the ropes course, the cemetery, the paved road and the Picnic Point camp area. Current WMHI use policies will remain in effect for the use of these facilities. The deed requires the property to be kept in its natural state. Therefore, there will be no new building structures on the property. Additionally, no building will be moved to the property regardless of its historical or cultural significance. Repairs and improvements will be allowed to maintain the structures in a safe and acceptable condition. However, repairs and improvements will not diminish or detract from the scenic beauty of the property (i.e., the use of earth tone colors for shingles or paint). If it is not cost-effective to maintain, improve or repair any building or structure in a safe or acceptable condition, then the building will be razed and removed from the property; and the site returned to a natural vegetative state.

WMHI retains exclusive rights to five acres in the Northeast corner of the property and will continue to use the camp and ropes course for therapeutic and outdoor recreational activities for its residents. To minimize potential interaction between WMHI residents and the general public, the DNR will delineate these sensitive areas with a low-profile, aesthetically pleasing, split-rail wood fence. Signs will be posted on the fence notifying the public of the sensitivity of the area.

The property contains numerous interior fences in various functional conditions. Community groups will be used to remove and recycle the fence materials or dispose of the fences in a licensed landfill.

PUBLIC USE AND PUBLIC ACCESS:

Public access will be allowed for most non-motorized outdoor recreational use such as hiking, fishing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, nature studies and bird watching. Access to the property is via Sherman Road. DNR will develop a small parking area at the corner of Sherman and Snell Roads and post the land as open to the public.

Recreational uses that will be prohibited include: Mountain biking, camping, paintball/air soft pellet games, horseback riding, off-road vehicles, snowmobiles and target practices.

Dogs must be on a leash no longer than 8 feet at all times. Dogs can be off leash only during dog training activities on Asylum County Park property according to county ordinance.

The Picnic Point property and all trails will have a carry-in/carry-out trash policy and no trash receptacles will be provided.

There is a paved road that runs through the WMHI property and runs south along the shoreline to the camp. Only DNR, WMHI and authorized vehicles are allowed to use the road. Maintenance of the road and its shoulder will be conducted by WMHI staff or their designee.

TRAILS:

The Picnic Point Trails sub-committee of the advisory group agreed to limited trail development and proposed two locations for trails. Two additional trails are being proposed. These trails are designed to lead users through the different habitat types located at Picnic Point. Trail development will be limited to brush clearing, signage, and periodic mowing. This will minimize impacts to any cultural sites in the area. All trail locations will be approved by the DNR's Archeologist to ensure compliance with State Historical regulations.

Cultural, historical and nature based interpretation signs will be placed along the trail system to provide public educational and outreach opportunities.

LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:

The DNR entered into a Land Use Agreement with UW-Extension, Winnebago County and the Sherman Road Community Gardens to use the north 5.0 acres of the west agricultural fields for a community garden. The agreement will begin in 2009 and will be valid for 5-years or until UW-Extension can find a more suitable and permanent location. All remaining agricultural lands will be farmed in preparation for conversion to native tall-grass and short-grass prairies. The west agricultural field will be planted using a short-grass and forbs prairie mix. The middle field will be planted into a tall-grass and forbs prairie mix. All trees will be removed from between the west and middle fields, except for any oak or hickory trees. The east field will be converted into an oak savanna. First, the east agriculture field will be planted to a tall-grass and forbs mix. Once the prairie is established in the east field, the DNR will plant a combination of burr, black and white oaks. The mature tree density goal for the east field will be 1-1.5 oaks per acre. A shallow swale separates the middle and east fields. Several small wetland scrapes will be incorporated with the swale to benefit wetland birds and amphibians.

The western two-thirds of Asylum Point Park consist primarily of shrub/carr habitat. This habitat contains approximately 21 acres of upland type and 26 acres of lowland type for a total of approximately 47 acres. This portion of the county land will be maintained in a shrub/carr habitat type through a combination of prescribe burning and mechanical brush removal.

There is approximately 55 acres of predominately forested habitat along the eastern edge of both Picnic Point and Asylum Point Park. The forest has many good quality trees; however, it is dominated by box elder, glossy buckthorn, willow and cottonwoods. The general management plan is to under-plant with black oak, white oak, swamp white oak, shagbark hickory and white pine. These trees will be provided by the DNR's nursery. Once the trees are established, then there will be selective removal of undesirable trees from the overstory. Additionally, there are several areas with a very thick understory of glossy buckthorn and garlic Mustard. These areas will need to be treated with herbicide or mechanical removal prior to under-planting with oaks.

MONITORING:

Monitoring will be conducted by DNR staff several times a year to tract habitat improvements and other land management issues. WMHI security personnel will patrol the property for security purposes.

ARCHEOLOGICAL / CULTURAL HISTORY:

Various sources indicate that the land on which WMHI sits was used by members of the Menominee and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribes. The treaty of 1832 was negotiated between the federal government and the Ho-Chunk includes the land on which WMHI resides. This particular treaty was made at Fort Armstrong, IL on September 15, 1832. Article 1 of the treaty describes the land in question and is quoted here...

The Winnebago nation hereby cede to the United States, forever, all the lands, to which said nation have title or claim, lying to the south and east of the Wisconsin River, and the Fox River of Green Bay; bounded as follows; viz:beginning at the mouth of the Pee-kee-tol-a-ka river, thence up Rock River to its source; thence, with a line dividing the Winnebago nation from other Indians east of the Winnebago lake, to the Grand Chute; thence up Fox River to the Winnebago

lake, and with the northwestern shore of said lake, to the inlet of Fox River, up said river to lake Puckaway and with the eastern shore of the same most southeasterly bend; thence with the line of purchase made of the Winnebago nation, by treaty at Prairie du Chien, the first day of August, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine, to the place of beginning.

The land was surveyed in 1833 by the federal government's General Land Office. The initial land transaction for these sections was executed on April 9, 1840 to Abram (Abraham) Green. There are multiple transactions after that date involving various amounts of money and acreage. The parcels that eventually were purchased by the state of Wisconsin for use as the *Northern Hospital for the Insane* were owned at the time of sale by these individuals: Gottfried Wiedeman, Carl Melicke, Jefferson Eaton and LM Miller.

The Wisconsin Legislature via Chapter 39, Laws of 1870 authorized the purchase of 337.66 acres at a purchase price of \$26,000. The State of Wisconsin contributed \$10,000 and the city of Oshkosh contributed \$16,000. Included in the four parcels is the land on what was then called Asylum Point and what is now called Picnic Point. When the state took ownership from the previous owners, the land was described as being in poor condition, overgrown and unsuitable for crops. Beginning in 1871 and for the first 2 years, the land was farmed on "shares" as the hospital was not yet completed. The hospital began operation on April 21, 1873.

Once the hospital began operation, the land surrounding the hospital proper was cleared of trees, brush, etc. Staff and a segment of the patient population began to grow various vegetable crops. The crops were grown, harvested, and used by the patients and staff of the hospital.

Beginning in the mid 1880s, the hospital began a pig raising operation. In addition, the hospital had a substantial number of horses. There was also a dairy farm operation. Eventually, the dairy operation was moved to what was called the "West" farm, now Oshkosh Correctional Institution.

In the area of what is now the fishing beach, the hospital had an icehouse operation. Hospital staff and patients harvested ice from Lake Winnebago and stored the ice for use during the summer months. To the north of this beach, the hospital had a drinking water line drawing from the lake. In the immediate area, the hospital also located a waste water line. Eventually the waste line was moved to the beach area to insure better separation between clean and gray water. This waste line was moved in 1898.

Beginning in the 1880s, a 1000 tree orchard (primarily apple) was started in a location to the west of Picnic Point and this operation was discontinued in the 1950s.

Various directors encouraged the plant operations staff to use the remains from the coal-fired boilers to provide paving materials on the main road to Picnic Point and other "farm paths" in the area. It was common for patients and staff to walk to the "Point" during many months of the year for various leisure activities.

In 1900, the hospital started a zoo for various animals. Included in the zoo were deer and other animals donated by Oshkosh community residents. There is no documentation as to its exact location, but it was assumed to be located in the area where the maintenance shops are currently located.

In the 1940s, the hospital cemetery was relocated to the Picnic Point area. The Julaine Farrow museum has a map, which shows the cemetery layout along with the original logbook, which lists the patient name, date of death and grave location. In talking with individuals who have been a part of the hospital's grounds crew, the cemetery and its contents were moved intact

from the previous location. The original cemetery location was north and east of what is now Drug and Alcohol Correctional Center (Kempster Hall). Some of the individuals interred there have had their remains moved by their families to other cemeteries in the State.

The Picnic Point portion of the site has also had extensive archeological studies, beginning in the late 1930s. The artifacts collected are currently in the Oshkosh Public museum collections.

The hospital land south of the main site was designated as a state wildlife area in 1929. The area has been posted and has not been hunted on since the 1950s. If there has been a need to move animals (i.e. raccoons), they have been live trapped and moved to another location in Winnebago County.

In 1966, the facilities at Picnic Point were built. The donated labor and donated materials came from various community organizations in the greater Oshkosh area. The architectural services were donated by two Oshkosh architects. \$10,000 was raised by the Winnebago County Mental Health Association, beginning in August 1966. The capacity of the facility was established at 25. There was a formal dedication of the facility on October 29, 1967.

In 1969, a parcel of land (approximately 80 acres) was transferred to Winnebago County for use as a county park. The park is called, Asylum County Park. Another parcel of land (primarily the shoreline) was transferred to the Department of Natural Resources at the same time. In the late 1980s, the Legislature approves a land swap between the DNR and the county to make their respective land parcels more compact.

In 2000, a fishing pier was installed at the fishing beach. It has been used for patient activities only.

The land has had regular security coverage since 1988. Individuals not affiliated with either the Winnebago Mental Health Institute or the Wisconsin Resource Center have been asked to leave the area. Access to Picnic Point has been limited to patient and staff groups associated with the site.

In 2002, a new ROPES course was established. The previous ROPES location, adjacent to the Picnic Point road, was severely damaged by a major rain/wind storm.

A minimum of three interpretational signs will be placed on the property and incorporated into the trail system. These signs will acknowledge the lengthy history of occupancy of picnic point and highlight some of the significant cultural and historic events of picnic point.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

The Picnic Point property is located on the northern edge of the city of Oshkosh. Because of its proximity to the city, the parcel will receive moderate to heavy use by the public for a variety of recreational activities. The Picnic Point Advisory Committee was created to help develop a management plan for the property and solicit public comments. The community can provide invaluable support to accomplish some of the land management practices recommended in this management plan. Some of the activities local Boy Scout, Girl Scout, civic organizations, conservation organizations and school groups can assist the DNR with are planting trees, controlling invasive species, and trail maintenance and development.

HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING:

The DNR will develop casting areas along Lake Winnebago for shore-fishing.

Picnic Point and Asylum County Park are both located within the boundaries of the *Winnebago State Hospital Game* Refuge as described in S. NR 15.01(19)(b) Admin. Code. This refuge was established in 1929 as a year-round game refuge and prohibits any person from hunting or trapping.

ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS:

The Picnic Point property is located in the City of Oshkosh. This will create issues for some of the land management activities implemented in this management plan. The agricultural fields are proposed to be planted into native prairies and oak savannas. The recommended and cost-effective maintenance practice for these types of habitat is prescribed burning. Currently fires are prohibited within Oshkosh city limits. The DNR will have to work with the City to get clearance to conduct prescribe fires at picnic point.

Two sub-committees were formed at the conclusion of the first advisory committee meeting. One sub-committee was developed to look at deer issues. The committee agreed that bow hunting for deer should be allowed on the property for the following reasons: 1) reduce car/deer collisions in the area; 2) reduce damage to native plants; 3) reduce the potential for nuisance deer complaints from adjacent landowners. The committee agreed upon a deer population goal of between 6-10 animals. This is based on the current WDNR Deer Management Unit 66 Goal of 25 deer per square mile (640 acres) of deer range. Picnic Point and Asylum Point Park property contain approximately 170 acres of deer range. To facilitate hunting, the City of Oshkosh would need to be petitioned to relax all ordinances that prohibit the discharge of a firearm. Additionally, the DNR would need to rescind the year-round game refuge designation described in S. 15.01(19) (b) Admin. Code.

On the eastern side of the property, there is a small dump/trash pile. This pile will need to be cleaned-up and disposed in a sanitary landfill.