

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance Preliminary Analysis of DNR's Draft Master Plan for Sauk Prairie Recreation Area**

Baraboo, Wisconsin – 20 August 2015

The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance has initiated its detailed review of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Draft Master Plan for the 3,400-acre Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA) released on August 11, 2015. The SPRA is a portion of the 7,400-acre former Badger Army Ammunition Plant near Sauk City. The other major owners of Badger lands are the Dairy Forage Research Center and the Ho-Chunk Nation. The Alliance has been involved with the planning for the conservation future of the Badger lands for nearly two decades, since the plant was de-commissioned in 1997.

The DNR's draft plan is to be applauded for its strong emphasis on extensive habitat restoration, conservation farming, and opportunities for a variety of appropriate low-impact recreational activities, such as hiking, picnicking, bicycling on "family friendly" trails, and cultural and natural history interpretation. The DNR has defined its vision to "capitalize on opportunities to protect, restore, showcase and study natural ecosystems, cultural resources and historic features to the benefit of visitors, local communities and the state."

The Alliance review is evaluating proposed land and recreational uses based on documents which have led to preparation of the draft plan, primarily the 2001 Badger Reuse Committee Report, the 2004 DNR application to the National Park Service's "Lands to Parks" program through which the DNR received this land, the DNR's 2012 Regional and Property Analysis for the SPRA, as well as other pertinent documents. In these documents, the DNR indicated that it would treat the property as a "park," provide for "low-impact recreation" activities and plan for recreational opportunities which are "compatible" with the restoration of the land.

Much of the draft plan reflects and adheres to the vision expressed in these documents. Detailed plans for extensive prairie and savanna restoration with an emphasis on cooperation with adjoining land owners are very encouraging. However, the plan also includes several high-impact recreational activities, including rocketry and the use of motorcycles on bicycle and equestrian trails. Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance President Rob Nurre notes, "ATV trails and a shooting range were previously suggested as possibilities for the SPRA, and we are pleased that these inappropriate uses are not included in the current draft plan. However, ATVs and the shooting range have now been replaced by motorcycles and rockets. Even though these uses are limited to a specific number of days, they do not fit the definition of 'low-impact recreation' which the DNR has committed to. Furthermore, the plan, which includes an environmental impact statement, does not adequately address the potential negative impacts of these activities."

The Alliance is also concerned about the designation of the so-named Magazine Area, the isolated 600-acre area of the SPRA in the south central portion of the Badger land bordering Highway 78, as a “Special Use Area” available for “special events.” This area contains a rare remnant of the original Sauk Prairie which the Alliance has been working to restore for years. The DNR’s own Property Analysis identifies more than 100 acres in the middle of this area to be of “high conservation significance” which “warrants high protection and/or restoration,” particularly as grassland bird habitat. Yet the plan seems to suggest that the Magazine Area is appropriate for activities that would otherwise disturb visitors at other areas of the SPRA. It is unclear how these undefined “special events” would be reviewed and managed so as not to disturb the area of “high conservation significance” or the nesting of the grassland birds.

During the coming weeks, the Alliance will continue our detailed examination of the Draft Master Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area. We will issue additional statements and information to assist the public in understanding the details of this extensive and important plan which will provide direction for the SPRA for years to come. The Alliance encourages everyone who is interested in the future uses of the SPRA lands to carefully review the Draft Master Plan and provide comments to the DNR.

The DNR will hold a public presentation and hearing concerning the plan on Thursday, September 10, 2015 from 4:00 to 8:00 pm at the River Arts Center in Prairie du Sac. The public has until September 25 to comment on the Draft Master Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area.

More information on the draft plan and Alliance’s response is available at: [www.saukprairievision.org](http://www.saukprairievision.org).

The full Draft Master Plan is found at DNR’s website:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/SaukPrairie/>.

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