

DNR: Seeking public comment on proposed master plan variances for three state-owned properties

Posted on Wednesday, Sep 21, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking public comment on variances to the master plans of three state-owned properties, including Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area, Kettle Moraine State Forest – Northern Unit and Willow River State Park.

As described in Chapter NR 44 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, a master plan variance is a change in the use or management of an area that is consistent with the area's land management classification and objectives. A separate master plan variance for each property is available for review.

[Willow River State Park](#) is a popular park in St. Croix county featuring spectacular views of Willow Falls and the Willow River Gorge. Prairie remnants, miles of scenic hiking trails, family and group campgrounds, lakeside picnic areas and a nature center are all found within 2,800 acres of rolling countryside. The [proposed master plan variance](#) would remove the nature trail designation from the Hidden Ponds Trail. Under Chapter NR 45 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, pets are not allowed on nature trails. The Hidden Ponds Trail allows hiking, is ADA accessible and is groomed in the winter to make it easier to traverse. Removing the nature trail designation would provide park visitors (requiring more accessibility) a place to hike with a pet year-round. The proposed variance is in response to a request made to the department to provide more accessible winter trails open to pets at Willow River State Park.

Located in portions of Sheboygan, Fond du Lac and Washington counties, the [Kettle Moraine State Forest – Northern Unit](#) offers year-round recreation among world-

famous glacial landforms. Visitors can swim at three beaches, enjoy challenging mountain biking trails or groomed ski trails, hike the Ice Age Trail, take in a nature program, or just escape among 30,000 acres of rolling, wooded hills and prairies. The [proposed master plan variance](#) would extend the land management approved in a 2009 master plan variance until a new master plan for the property is completed. Specifically, the proposed variance would continue an approved annual timber cut of 440 acres to improve forest health.

[Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area](#) is located in Dodge County, near the City of Horicon. The property contains portions of Horicon Marsh, the largest freshwater cattail marsh in the United States. This renowned marsh is now home to the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center. The [proposed master plan variance](#) would close 78-acres of the property to all hunting. The proposed area to be closed to hunting is near residential areas of the City of Horicon which are currently open to archery-hunting only. This variance is being proposed in response to concerns expressed by local residents and officials.

The public can review the draft variances by visiting the [DNR's Property Planning webpage](#), and clicking [Willow River State Park](#), [Kettle Moraine State Forest - Northern Unit](#) or [Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area](#).

Questions or comments should be submitted by Oct. 5, 2022, to the staff listed on the website for each variance or directly to Phil Rynish, DNR Property Planning Section Chief at Phillip.Rynish@wisconsin.gov or 608-977-0286.