

Honey Creek Management Plan and User Guidelines

A management plan has been prepared for our property at Honey Creek. The plan will ensure that this important natural area retains its unique characteristics while it is being used to further WSO's goals in research, conservation and education.

by Randy M. Hoffman

This article is presented to inform the WSO membership about the use and management of our Honey Creek property. Over the years there has been a great deal of confusion about the use of our property. Specific points of confusion involve the use of the Falls Trail, camping on our property, the use of the Cox Nature Center, and the location (where is the place, anyway?).

I remember my first visit to Honey Creek. I made my way to the trail, with a little help from *The Passenger Pigeon* or the *Badger Birder*—I don't remember which—and had an enjoyable walk up Honey Creek Valley. Then I tried to find the Cox Nature Center. First I drove west and found only farms. Then I drove back to County Highway PF, still no nature center. Finally, I tried Alder Lane. As I drove to the end, I saw a large farm house with all kinds of activity around it. Firmly convinced this was another farm, I left. It was nearly five years and dozens of visits later that I found the

nature center. Right next to the large house that I was so convinced was a farm. I hope the guidelines, management plan and accompanying map will help clear up these types of problems, which I'm sure others have experienced.

The following guidelines for use and the management plan were developed jointly by the WSO Board of Directors and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Endangered Resources (BER). The BER became involved in 1971, when Honey Creek was designated a State Natural Area. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources defines State Natural Areas as follows:

“State natural areas are devoted to scientific research, the teaching of conservation and natural history, and especially to the preservation of their natural values for the use of future generations. They are not intended for intensive recreational uses like picnicking or camping.

“High quality natural areas are identi-

fied and evaluated by program staff and the Natural Areas Preservation Council. Preservation is accomplished by designation of tracts already in public ownership through cooperative management agreements or by acquisition of privately owned tracts.

“The mission of the Council and one of the goals of the Bureau of Endangered Resources is to locate and preserve a system of state natural areas to protect example of all types of biotic communities and other significant natural features native to the state . . . for education, research, and most importantly to secure long term protection of the state’s genetic diversity for the benefit of future generations. This formidable task is only accomplished through substantial assistance from a number of public agencies, private organizations and individuals.”

The Honey Creek management plan is a flexible document, changes can be made, as necessary, to reflect changes in ownership, status of agreements with our neighbors, or completion of specified tasks. Completion of required actions, as set forth in the plan, will largely be a responsibility of WSO with some help coming from other organizations, such as the Youth Conservation Corp.

GENERAL PROVISIONS OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

This management plan conforms to the DNR’s general procedures for State Natural Areas. It also contains recommendations specific to the management need of Honey Creek and includes exceptions to the general procedures.

The specific management actions have been developed in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources’ Natural Areas Section, recommended by the property manager, reviewed by the Natural Areas Preser-

vation Council, and approved by the Department’s District Director and Bureau of Endangered Resources. The plan will be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, amended to assure that all necessary management considerations are incorporated. Changes to the management plan may be made with the advice of the Council and written agreement of the property manager, District Director, and the Bureau of Endangered Resources.

The primary objectives of these procedures is to preserve the site in a natural condition with little human disturbance. The Department of Natural Resources’ Master Plan Handbook-Standard Land-Use Classification System, will be used to identify authorized land use practices. Sections 23.27, 23.28 and 23.29, Stats., and Section NR 45.13, Wis. Administrative Code, also may apply in regulating use. The land-use classifications used include research natural area or interpretive natural area and critical species natural area. Resource development classifications may also be used, but only in that portion identified as buffer zone. The Natural Areas Handbook provides more detailed guidelines and procedures.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT OF STATE NATURAL AREAS

Removal of plants, plant parts, animals, rocks and minerals, and artifacts is generally not permitted. However, hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking and nut gathering are permitted if not expressly restricted or otherwise prohibited by law or Articles of Dedication. Collecting for scientific purposes may be allowed by Department permit.

Cutting or removal of living or dead trees, standing or down, or other veg-

etation in forest communities, is generally limited to that essential to meet public safety requirements. Cut material will be left within the natural area. Death of trees due to blowdown, fire, flooding, insects and disease is regarded as a normal natural occurrence. The Department and the property manager may consider deviation from this procedure in the event of large scale mortality, on a case-by-case basis, with the advice of Council.

Control of plant succession with the use of fire, cutting, mowing or water level manipulation, may be employed to maintain a particular natural area type, or control of abnormal animal populations may be employed if provided for in this plan.

Introductions of exotic plant and animal species is prohibited. Reintroduction of an extirpated species, or introduction of a species of concern which is known to inhabit a particular community and edaphic condition may be permitted with the advice of the Council and consent of the Department.

Pesticides including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and biological controls should not be used for plant or animal control. Department approval, with Council review, must be obtained for each case should an exception be necessary. Biological control agents are preferred over chemical agents.

Intensive public use is not encouraged. Any public use which damages vegetation or otherwise impairs natural conditions is discouraged and if necessary will be controlled. Recreational use such as hiking and nature appreciation, and education use which does not degrade the natural features is encouraged.

Attention-drawing signs should be limited to those areas that have a low

site fragility or have established trails. Signs indicating the area's purpose and use limitations are desirable at access points. Boundaries may be marked for the convenience of the property manager, visitors, and adjacent landowner.

Vehicle traffic of all types is discouraged. Existing walking trails and service roads may be maintained and they will be identified on the management plan map. New walking trails may be constructed where use is heavy or where needed to protect sensitive vegetation; these will be identified in the management plan.

No buildings, and other improvements such as fireplaces, picnic grounds, athletic facilities, dam, beach improvements or other waterway modification devices will be constructed. Any public-use or maintenance facility essential to the natural area should be located in buffer zone or outside the natural area.

SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT FOR HONEY CREEK

This 310-acre site (Figure 1) features southern dry-mesic forest (230 acres), northern wet forest (10 acres), hemlock relict (10 acres), pine relict (16 acres), dry prairie (2 acres), southern sedge meadow (5 acres), alder thicket (25 acres), a slow, cold, hard water stream (2 acres), open and shaded cliffs, and a field (10 acres).

Animal species of concern are the pickerel frog (*Rana palustris*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*), Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*), Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*), Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*), and Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). Plant species

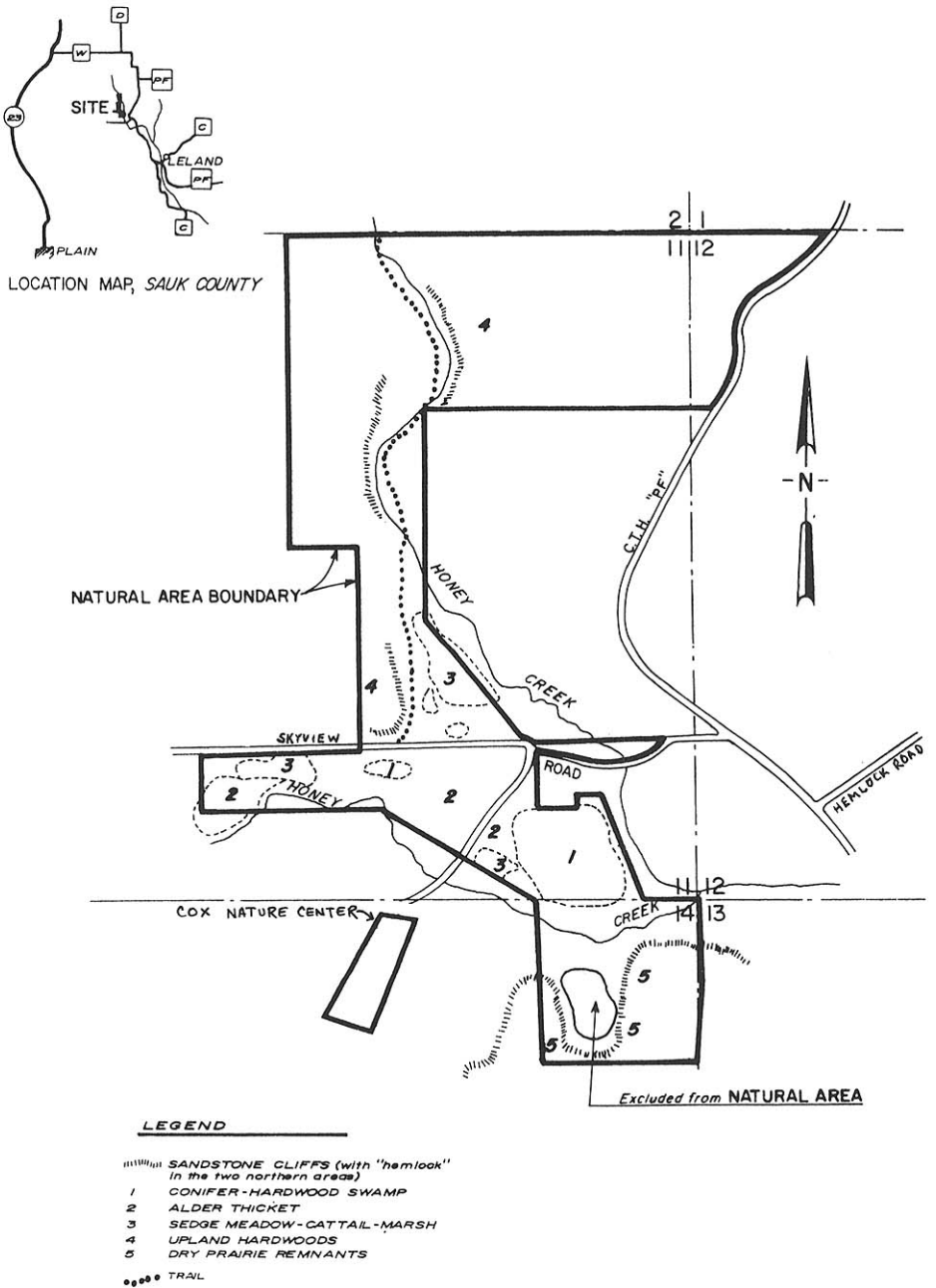


Figure 1. A map of the Honey Creek area.

of concern are bog bluegrass (*Poa paludigena*) and kidney-leaved sullivantia (*Sullivantia renifolia*). Management objectives are to preserve rare species, heterogeneous habitats, and to provide visitors with a rewarding experience while viewing the natural environment.

Management Challenges.—Several specific problems have been identified that can be solved by proper management procedures. Woody species are encroaching on the prairie areas. Facility-related problems include: boundary fences, survey markers and property boundaries lying outside current boundary fences, vandalism, trail maintenance, old structures and trash.

Management of Ecological Communities.—On the four small dry prairies, woody species that are shading out the prairie must be removed by hand. For agricultural fields, a crop agreement between the current lessee and WSO is being renegotiated. Results of the new agreement will be incorporated into the management plan. For the Southern Dry Forest, Northern Wet Forest, Hemlock Relict, Pine Relict, Southern Sedge Meadow, Alder Thicket, Open and Shaded Cliff, and Slow, Cold, Hard Water Stream, no specific management is required.

Management of Rare Species.—The largest known Wisconsin population of bog bluegrass occurs on both sides of the access road, within the alder thicket and northern wet forest. Because this plant is very sensitive and susceptible to fire and canopy disturbance, fires within the alder thicket and northern wet forest areas must be prevented. Any canopy disturbance during road maintenance operations must be eliminated or mini-

mized by cooperative agreement with the township road maintenance crews.

For the Kidney-leaved Sullivantia and the Pickerel Frog no specific management is required. For the Great Blue Heron, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Yellow-throated Vireo, Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, vesper Sparrow, and Field Sparrow no specific management is required. However, through natural succession to a more mature and intact forest situation, a shift in species composition is to be expected.

Monitoring and Public Use.—Breeding Bird Censuses have been run continuously for 18 years. The Breeding Bird Censuses should continue to run annually. The population of bog bluegrass should be monitored on a regular schedule. Inspections of the area should be done once a year, and the results reported on Natural Areas Inspection Sheet Form 1700–21.

All group use for educational purposes must be coordinated through the site steward. Research use is encouraged. All trapping is prohibited. Spring turkey hunting is prohibited. Fall and winter hunting is permitted. Notice will be given to adjacent landowners by word of mouth that there is no trapping or spring hunting. If there is a problem with spring hunting or trapping, the property boundaries will be posted to restrict hunting or trapping. Trapping does not include bird-banding. All off-road vehicle use is prohibited, except when it is necessary to carry fence materials over frozen ground and emergencies.

Facility Development and Maintenance.—All boundary fences must be inspected and maintained annually. WSO

is responsible for one-half of the boundary fence. Repairs or replacement should be scheduled using volunteers or the Youth Conservation Corp. Emergency repairs should be made by the person whose cattle have escaped or by the site steward.

An informational sign should be erected and maintained along the trail. This sign should not be visible from the road. A registration box should be erected and maintained next to the nature center. A gate should be erected and maintained at the entrance of the hiking trail. This gate should be constructed in such a manner as to allow pedestrian access while permitting vehicle access for maintenance and emergency use by use lock and key. Wooden parts of old outbuildings should be removed and burned and any remaining holes should be filled. Several pieces of old farm machinery located near the cropped field should be removed. The Falls Trail should be managed as a primitive type trail. Fallen logs should be removed only when they pose a serious safety hazard. Mowing should only take place around the nature center parking lot and on "pads" for two camp sites. Survey markers located in 1974 should be relocated and marked.

Effects of Management Actions.—Protective measures should ensure continued survival of the rare plant species. Rare animal populations will gradually change as the forest fills in and matures. Facility clean up and maintenance should enhance visitor perceptions and help promote member usage.

GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS

The Board of Directors of WSO encourages the use of our Honey Creek

Property by members, as well as outside groups. These guidelines should aid members and group representatives who have never used this property in planning meetings and outings.

General Information.—The Cox Nature Center is normally closed from December 1 through March 31.

The Falls Trail north of Skyview Road is open throughout the year but is not groomed or plowed in the winter.

The outhouses at the south end of Alder Road south of the Cox building are open throughout the year.

Visitors are asked to observe the posted guidelines at the beginning of the Falls Trail and to be familiar with the Management Plan and its ramifications.

For hiking on the Falls Trail, no prior notification of intent to visit is necessary.

Those participating in WSO Work Weekends or scheduled field trips and campouts at Honey Creek do not have to provide any prior notification of attendance.

Cox Nature Center and Camping.—Use of the Cox Nature Center must be by prior appointment. Campers should also give prior notification.

Use of the nature center by outside groups of up to twenty people is encouraged. Arrangements should be made by appointment at least one month before the planned meeting date. Appointments can be made through Gordon Cox at 608-544-5081 (Honey Creek) or 608-752-8670 (home). Current President Randy Hoffman also has access to the Cox Nature Center.

Campers and individuals just wishing to park overnight at the camping area adjacent to the Cox Nature Center should check in at the house at the end

of Alder Road or call Gordon Cox to provide prior notification of plans.

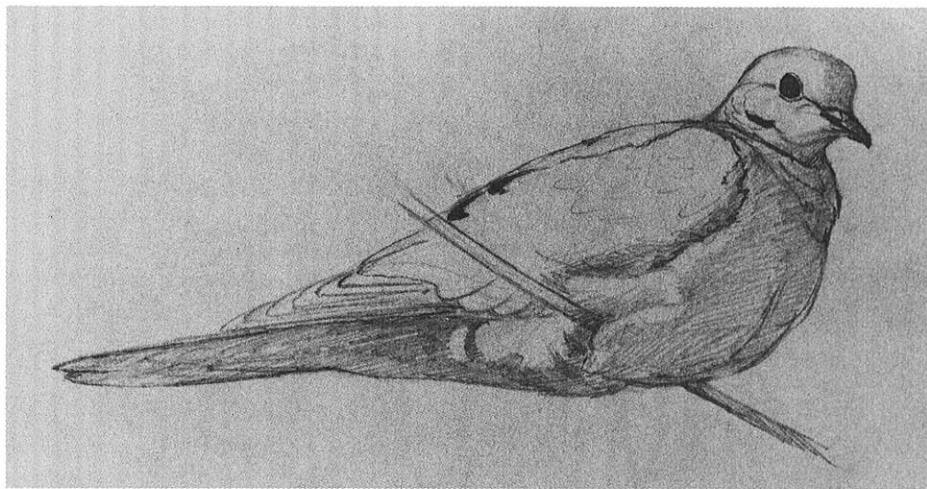
Research.—WSO encourages use by *bona fide* researchers. A brief description of the work should be sent to the WSO President; ongoing surveys explicitly sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources are permitted without notification. Collection of all plant materials and animals, except during the

fall hunting season is prohibited. Requests for research related collecting must be directed to the President of the Society well in advance of such activities.

Randy M. Hoffman

Bureau of Endangered Resources
Wisconsin Department of Natural
Resources

Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707



Mourning Dove by Jonathan Wilde



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

THOMAS SCHULTZ '78

White-breasted Nuthatch by Thomas R. Schultz