

Feasibility Study and Environmental Analysis

**Wolf River State Trail**  
**(Crandon to White Lake State Trail)**

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A report to the Natural Resources Board prepared by:

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## **INTRODUCTION: THE FEASIBILITY STUDY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS**

This document is a combined feasibility study and environmental analysis (EA) intended to avoid duplication by including the required information for both types of studies. Both the feasibility study and the EA function to provide the public and decision-makers with a factual, unbiased analysis of a proposal, and must identify reasonable alternatives in order to help make an informed decision. This comprehensive document combines information regarding the feasibility of acquiring an additional five miles of abandoned corridor (Crandon Line), information from an environmental assessment conducted in 2002 on 33-miles of the “Crandon to White Lake State Trail”, and information detailing the overall environmental impacts of the entire 37-mile soon-to-be-renamed Wolf River State Trail.

A feasibility study is used to determine whether it is practicable for the Department to establish, acquire, develop, and manage new property. The study takes into account the physical and biological environment and its capabilities, the views of the public and of landowners adjoining the property, and the availability of funding and staffing to accomplish the project’s purpose adequately. Furthermore, a feasibility study presents boundary alternatives, general land management strategies, and ensures integrated ecosystem management principles are considered.

The feasibility study also must meet the requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) and its implementing codes. Certain DNR actions require an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Wolf River State Trail study requires an EA under NR 150 of Wisconsin’s Administrative Code. The EA process is used to evaluate the likely impacts of a proposed project, primarily on the natural environment. The EA also helps determine whether an activity’s impacts will be significant, and therefore warrant an EIS.

Upon completion of the comprehensive document, the Department will public notice the report for review. Comments received throughout the following public comment period will be included in this document. The final study then is forwarded to DNR Administration for presentation to the Natural Resources Board where the Board will make a decision on the proposed action. For additional information contact Terry Jordan, Parks and Recreation Specialist, at 810 W. Maple Street, Spooner, WI 54801, (715)635-4121, [terry.jordan@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:terry.jordan@dnr.state.wi.us).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This feasibility study considers the Department's acquisition of approximately five miles (4.62 miles) of abandoned rail corridor in Forest County to extend the "Crandon to White Lake State Trail." The trail currently runs from the Langlade/Menominee County line north through White Lake and Lily in Langlade County along a stretch of the renowned Wolf River and into Forest County ending approximately five miles south of Crandon. The Department now has the opportunity to acquire the "Crandon Line" needed to extend the trail into the city.

Acquiring the proposed Crandon Line is consistent with the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* and contributes to regional trail opportunities. When completed, the trail has the potential to connect with a number of trails and communities in the Northern Region network including Crandon, White Lake, Antigo, Rhinelander, Tomahawk and Eagle River.

Originally established as the "Crandon to White Lake State Trail", the Department has conferred with Langlade and Forest Counties to consider a more concise trail name. The consensus is to rename the trail as the "Wolf River State Trail." The Department's Parks and Recreation Program is in the process of submitting to the Natural Resources Board the required forms to rename the trail. The Department anticipates approval of the name change, and therefore will refer to the extended trail as the "Wolf River State Trail."

Langlade County has completed a draft master plan for their segment of the trail. The Department and Langlade County also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Cooperative State Trail Easement indicating Langlade County will be responsible for the development, operation and maintenance of the trail. Upon acquisition of this proposed segment, Forest County will begin their master planning process and enter a similar partnership with the Department. Funding for land acquisition is from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. Forest and Langlade County both anticipate applying for WDNR Outdoor Motorized Recreation Trail Aids in the future to cover development and operation costs.

Based on information in this document and public comments received, the Department will determine the feasibility of the project and the need for an environmental impact statement.

## **PART ONE: FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE CRANDON LINE**

### **Proposal**

#### ***Project Description***

This feasibility study considers the Department's acquisition of an approximate 5-mile (4.62 mi.) abandoned rail corridor from Milepost 235.84 to Milepost 231.22 on the Pembine Sub in Forest County. The "Crandon Line", abandoned by Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL), starts just north of Highway 8 near the City of Crandon, straddles a corridor with wooded area to the east of the line and Metonga Lake bordering the west side of the line, and ends at the northern terminus of the Wolf River State Trail. The proposed trail extension is located in Forest County, T.35N – R.13E Sections 5, 8, 17, 20, and 21, and T.36N – R.13E Sections 29 and 32. Refer to the locator map in Appendix "A".

The Department proposes acquiring the abandoned rail line to extend the length of the existing Wolf River State Trail into the community of Crandon. If approved, the extended 37-mile trail will connect Crandon in Forest County with Lily and White Lake in Langlade County and terminate at the Langlade/Menominee County line. The resulting Wolf River State Trail represents a portion of "Segment 56: Argonne to Shawano" in the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan (2002)*.

The project area is adjacent to extensive natural areas, including a large deciduous forest and wetlands. Metonga Lake borders much of the western-side of the line. The corridor crosses Swamp Creek, a class II trout stream, and two unnamed tributaries. No wildlife sanctuaries, refuges, or National or State parks are associated with the abandoned line. There is no development on the line, except in Crandon.

#### ***Property Designation***

The State Trail System exists under the authority of Wisconsin State Statute 23.175. The Department will designate the Crandon Line a "State Trail" under the authority of Section NR 51.73, Wis. Adm. Code. The proposed acquisition will become part of the Wolf River State Trail. [NOTE: The trail was previously known as the "Crandon to White Lake State Trail." The Department is in the process of a Natural Resources Board action to officially change the name to the "Wolf River State Trail."] The Crandon Line will extend the current grade from the Langlade/Menominee County line into the City of Crandon, and will be developed in a manner that is consistent with other rail-to-trail projects.

#### ***Goals and Objectives***

The purpose for this acquisition is recreation. Acquiring this segment is necessary to extend the Wolf River State Trail into the City of Crandon. The resulting trail will run from the Langlade/Menominee County line, through White Lake and Lily in Langlade County and end

just north of Crandon in Forest County. The Wolf River State Trail is part of the Department's designated "Segment 56: Argonne to Shawano" in the *State Recreational Trails Network Plan*. When completed, the trail has the potential to connect with a number of trails and communities in the Northern Region network including Crandon, White Lake, Antigo, Rhinelander, Tomahawk and Eagle River.

Goals and objectives of the proposed trail extension and the trail segment in Forest County will be defined in the master planning process, but are expected to be similar to those of Langlade County. Trail uses could include hiking, biking, snowmobiling and ATV riding. Langlade County has completed a master plan for their portion of the Wolf River State Trail with the goals and objectives defined as follows (2005):

*Goals:*

*To provide and preserve the railroad corridor known as the Wolf River Recreational Trail. The Wolf River Recreational Trail will make available, year round use that will provide for safe two-way traffic for hiking, biking and snowmobiling. ATVs may be added as an approved trail use on two sections of the trail at a later date when connecting trails have been approved and developed. ATVs will be allowed on the corridor only when the corridor is open for snowmobile use.*

*Objectives:*

- 1. To provide recreational opportunities that complement present trail opportunities in Langlade County and provide recreational opportunities that presently are underrepresented in Langlade County.*
- 2. To enhance opportunities for tourism in Langlade County.*
- 3. To complement the present economic benefits of trails existing in Langlade County and provide new opportunities for economic development not reflected in current trail usage.*

## ***Management***

Upon acquisition of the Crandon Line, Forest County will begin their master planning process. The Department will enter a partnership with Forest County, similar to that with Langlade County, for the development and management of the rail-to-trail project.

The Department and Langlade County signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Cooperative State Trail Easement indicating Langlade County will be responsible for the development, operation and maintenance of the trail. Under the terms of the MOU, the WDNR will convey an easement to Langlade County for the right to develop, maintain and operate the Wolf River State Trail on lands within Langlade County.

The multi-purpose trail will be operated and managed by Langlade County according to State standards. Trail maintenance will involve sign replacement and trail grooming coordinated by the County. Periodic maintenance will include brush clearing and grading of the trail surface.

There are no trail facilities at this time. However, the County may consider developing a rest area between Lily and Highway 64 based on future trail needs.

## **Need**

### ***Recreational Needs***

The Wolf River State Trail currently extends from the Langlade/Menominee County line north through Langlade County along a stretch of the renowned Wolf River and into Forest County ending approximately five miles south of Crandon. The Department now has the opportunity to acquire the additional 4.62 miles of corridor to extend the trail into Crandon. Not acquiring this segment precludes extending the trail and leaves users in a wetland area just south of the city. Trail users could use road routes into Crandon, but roads in the area are narrow making this a dangerous alternative. Acquiring the proposed Crandon segment and extending the Wolf River State Trail is consistent with the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* and contributes to regional trail opportunities.

### ***Trail Network***

The *Wisconsin State Trails Strategic Plan* (1993) clarifies the Department's role in and mission of providing trails, and discusses strategies for carrying out this mission. With this plan in place, the Department needed a blueprint for implementing the strategies for creating a statewide network of state-owned and state-designated recreational trails. Hence the Department drafted the *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* (approved as an amendment to the *Wisconsin State Trails Strategic Plan*).

The *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* identifies a series of potential trail corridors across Wisconsin that would link existing trails, public lands, natural features, and communities. It describes a vision of a statewide network of interconnected trails into which smaller state, partnership, county, municipal and private trails feed. The plan further states that preserving corridors for future use is a very important consideration when converting a rail line to a recreational and alternative transportation corridor. Converted rail corridors in "rail-to-trail" projects are integral parts of the proposed statewide trail network. Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources is a national leader in the conversion of rail-to-trail projects with over 1,600 miles of trails developed on abandoned rail corridors.

Within the Northern Region, the Department identified "Segment 56: Argonne to Shawano" as a potential 65-mile trail to add to the network. As described in the network plan, Argonne is on the Dresser to Michigan corridor in the north, and Shawano links to the Mountain Bay Trail in the south of the corridor. The "Crandon to Tomahawk" corridor and the "White Lake to Antigo" corridor link to the "Langlade County to Michigan" corridor to form a loop. An old abandoned corridor east of White Lake in the future could link this corridor to the Nicolet State Trail or connect it to road routes. Refer to the *State Trails Network Plan* for a detailed map of the trail opportunities in each region (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/parks/reports/trails/map.html>).

The network plan further defines “Segment 56”, including the currently named Wolf River State Trail and the proposed Crandon Line. The plan describes the corridor as it runs along the east shore of Metonga Lake at Crandon, then runs south through forested lake areas of the Nicolet National Forest. In Langlade County it follows the Wolf River for about seven miles and continues south through the northwest portion of the Menominee Indian Reservation, terminating at Shawano and its connection with the Mountain Bay Trail.

## Context

### *Property Perspective*

#### Physical Environment

The proposed corridor runs through two landtype associations. From Crandon south along Metonga Lake are the Iron River/Argonne Drumlins (landtype association code: 212Xc01) where the characteristic landform pattern is rolling drumlin with inter-drumlin drainage ways. Soils are predominantly moderately well drained silt loam over acid loamy sand till. From the southern end of Metonga Lake to the end of the proposed line are the Argonne Outwash Plains (LTA code: 212Xc02) where the characteristic landform pattern is undulating pitted and unpitted outwash plain with kame terraces, swamps, and bogs common. Soils are predominantly well drained sandy loam over outwash.

Major water features along the 5-mile corridor are Metonga Lake and Swamp Creek. With nearly 8 miles of shoreline, Metonga Lake has an area of approximately 2,100 acres. The majority of the lake is over 20 feet deep with a maximum depth of 79 feet. Swamp Creek is a class II trout stream, which is described as having some natural reproduction but may need stocking to maintain a desirable fishery.

#### Biological Environment

Dominant vegetation along the proposed corridor is broad leaved deciduous forests. The northern end of the corridor starts in Crandon, which is a low intensity urban area. The trail then moves into Section 32 which consists mainly of broad leaved deciduous forests. Metonga Lake borders the western edge of the corridor throughout Section 5. Broad leaved deciduous forest borders the eastern edge of the lake. Similarly, broad leaved deciduous forest is dominant along the corridor in Section 8 with an area of forested wetland in the SW ¼ of the SE ¼. In the NE ¼ of Section 17 the corridor passes through mixed deciduous-coniferous forest and broad leaved deciduous forest, moving into forested wetland with some general agriculture and grassland west of the rail line. The SE ¼ of Section 17 is mainly grassland with some agriculture. The NE ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 20 is mainly grassland with the proposed segment ending in Section 21 in an area of general agriculture in the NW ¼ of the NW ¼ and lowland shrub wetland in the SW ¼ of the NW ¼.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Based on interpretation of WDNR WISCLAND Land Cover Data.  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/maps/gis/data/landcover.html#data>.

An environmental analysis conducted by counsel representing WCL reported that “at present there are no federally-listed threatened or endangered species or critical habitat present within the abandonment area (Barron 2005).” A further check on the Department’s Natural Heritage Inventory on-line database querying T.36N-R.13E and T.35N-R.13E in Forest County returned one or more elements with a location too sensitive to map at a level more detailed than county.

An Endangered Resources Planning and Protection Specialist conducted a more thorough review of the Natural Heritage Inventory data files and reports that, “although the Crandon area has been studied extensively and there are quite a number of records for threatened, endangered and special concern species, few were reported in proximity to the railroad corridor, and none were reported along the railroad corridor (Kitchel 2006).” Endangered resources occurring near the project area include: Northern Ringneck Snake, osprey, bald eagle, two Special Concern butterflies (Laurentian skipper and Bog copper) and the Lincoln Cedar Swamp, which contains a number of rare plants and animals. The report concludes that due to a lack of suitable habitat within the rail corridor for the listed species it is not likely that any of these species would be found to occur on or within the railroad right-of-way. If project activities would impact the land adjacent to or outside of the right-of-way then impacts to these species would be possible. Refer to Appendix "B" for a listing of non-sensitive elements.

### Cultural Environment

The Crandon Line was placed into service over a period of years beginning in 1906 by the Wisconsin and Northern Railroad Company. The line was fully operational by 1917. As described in an environmental report prepared by an attorney for Wisconsin Central Ltd., the original intent of the line was to connect ports on Lake Superior with those on the Gulf of Mexico (Barron 2005). Plans changed due to the cost of track construction and the Wisconsin and Northern decided to connect its line of track to existing trackage located in Wisconsin’s Fox Valley, south of Shawano. In the 1920s, the Soo Line purchased the Wisconsin Northern and in 1986 the Lake States Division was formed from this railroad and other line segments of the Soo Line. The Lake States Division was subsequently purchased from the Soo Line by the Wisconsin Central Ltd. The only shipper to use the line recently is Consolidated Paper. They originated 27 cars on the line in 1998, none in 1999, and none in 2000. Consolidated Paper was made aware of the abandonment with no objections.

A check on the cultural resource data base indicates there are no historic structures recorded along this corridor. However, there is one archaeological site immediately south of Keith Siding Road and immediately west of the rail line (at the junction with the road). Historic material recovered from the site indicates a possible logging-related town was once there. The short occupation of the site and the quantity and quality of artifacts and undisturbed features make this an especially important site relating to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century logging in Wisconsin (Dirst 2005).

### ***Regional Perspective***

#### General Description

Forest County is located in the North Central Forest ecological landscape. Landforms are characterized by end and ground moraines with some pitted outwash and bedrock controlled

areas. Kettle depressions and steep ridges are found in the northern portion. Soils consist of sandy loam, sand and silt. The vegetation is mainly forest, with many wetlands and some agriculture.

The County has a total land area of 649,209 acres; 91% of which is forested. Publicly-owned forest land totals 342,103 (57.7%) versus the 250,425 acres of privately owned forest land (42.3%). Much of the publicly-owned forest land in Forest County is part of the Nicolet National Forest. Based on interpretation of the WISCLAND Landcover maps, broad-leaved deciduous forest is the dominant vegetation of Forest County with areas of forested wetland and coniferous forest throughout. Of the county's total surface area, 24.8% is mapped as wetland.

Forest County has many streams, lakes and rivers totaling 24,094 acres of surface water. There are 155 lakes more than 10 acres in size, which makes up 21,367 acres of the county's surface water. Some of the larger lakes include Metonga Lake, Lake Lucerne, Pickerel Lake, Pine Lake and Bitternut Lake. Streams in the County are estimated at a total length of 719 miles. Many are designated exceptional or outstanding resource waters. The majority of streams are also classified as trout waters. Several prominent rivers include the Pine, Popple and Peshtigo.

#### Socio-economics

Based on 2000 census data, Forest County has a population of 10,024 yielding 9.9 persons per square mile compared to the statewide 98.8 persons per square mile. Trends show the County's population growth (1.7%) to be smaller than either the state's (3.1%) or nation's (3.9%). The largest municipalities include the City of Crandon (1,961), the Town of Laona (1,367) and the Town of Wabeno (1,264).

As reported in Forest County's Workforce Profile, government, amusement, gambling and recreation industry, educational services, and wood product manufacturing are among the top 10 industries (DWD 2004). This is further supported by the "Summary of County Economic Sectors – 2002", which indicates forest products and processing industry contributes 31.4% of the total county industrial output. The public administration industry (including public primary and secondary education) represents 27.9% of the total industrial output with the services industry (including private primary and secondary education, medical care, legal services, accommodation industries, etc.) representing 14.3% (WDNR 2005).

The vast natural resources of Forest County are important to both the forest products industry and the tourism and recreation industry. A recent study by the Department of Tourism described the economic impact of the county's year round recreational opportunities including fishing, boating, swimming, hunting, hiking, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Following are some of the facts reported (Tourism 2004):

- Travelers spent an estimated \$32 million in Forest County in 2004.
- Fourteen percent of all expenditures were made in the winter, which amounted to \$5 million; 18% were made in the spring (\$6 million); 40% in the summer (\$13 million) and 27% in the fall (\$9 million).
- Local revenues (property taxes, sales taxes, lodging taxes, etc) collected as a result of travelers amounted to an estimated \$1.4 million in 2004, an increase of 8.6% from 2003.

- When this study was first initiated in 1993, travelers spent \$10 million in Forest County. In the year 2004, travelers spent \$32 million, representing an increase of 207%.

### Regional Recreation

Forest County is part of the commonly-referred to “Northwoods”, the area of northern Wisconsin known for its extensive natural resources and recreation opportunities. Included among the Northwoods’ public lands are the Nicolet, Chequamegon and Ottawa National Forests, and the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest. Combined they offer hundreds of thousands of acres for year round recreation including hiking, biking, camping, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and ATV riding. With over 1,500 miles of designated trails, these combined forest properties offer additional miles of undesignated trails. In many cases, entire areas of the national forests are open to countless recreation opportunities.

Forest County offers recreation opportunities including Memorial Park Campground on the East Shore Road of Metonga Lake. The developed campground includes 65 camping units (55 trailer/tent units and 10 tent sites), a large sandy beach, picnic areas, and a boat landing. Forest County offers hiking trails in both the Eagle River and Laona Districts, and an 8-mile public all-terrain vehicle trail on old logging roads. Forest County claims to have some of the best snowmobile trails in the state with over 360 miles of groomed, state-funded trails winding through the Nicolet National Forest and lightly populated communities. Trails include the 100-Mile Snow Safari, Lumberjack Memorial Trails, Brule River Trails, Three Lake Trails, Tombstone-Pickerel and Forest County Wolf Pack Trails. Crandon is also known around the country for hosting events like World Championship Off-Road Races, Brush Run 101, Great Northern Snocross Challenge, Figure 8 Barefoot Open and Kentuck Day (Forest County 2006).

The Department’s *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* for the Northern Region describes the 18-county region as the “land of lakes”. The report notes many miles of trail in the region take advantage of the scenic landscape. State-owned rail trails account for about 260 miles of the region’s trails, including the Bearskin, Tuscobia, Wild Rivers, Saunders, and Gandy Dancer State Trails. Another 170 miles are offered as county-owned and operated rail trails. In addition, hundreds of miles of other trails exist on federal, state, and county lands (WDNR 2002).

### **Estimated Costs and timeline**

#### ***Acquisition***

Funding for land acquisition is from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. The Department estimates acquisition costs for the abandoned Crandon Line to be in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000. Actual acquisition costs will be determined pending negotiations. Closing is expected in 2006.

### ***Development and Operation***

The Department anticipates partnering with Forest County for the development, operation and maintenance of the Wolf River State Trail, similar to that entered between the Department and Langlade County. (A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperative State Trail Easement are included in Langlade County's "Wolf River Recreational Trail Master Plan" (2005).) Forest and Langlade County both anticipate applying for WDNR Outdoor Motorized Recreation Trail Aids in the future to cover development and operation costs.

### **Alternatives**

#### ***No Action***

Not acquiring this approximate five mile segment precludes extending the Wolf River State Trail into the City of Crandon. Trail users could use road routes into Crandon; however, roads in the area are narrow making this a dangerous alternative. While this alternative would allow the Department to use the allotted stewardship funds for other projects, the benefits gained by extending the trail into Crandon and the resulting positive economic impact to the local area outweigh those of not acquiring the segment. This is not a preferred alternative.

#### ***Proposed Action***

The preferred alternative is to purchase the approximate five mile abandoned rail corridor running from milepost 235.84 to milepost 231.22. The proposed segment starts 45 feet north of Highway 8 in Crandon and continues south along Metonga Lake ending near Keith Siding Road at the northern terminus of the Wolf River State Trail. Acquiring this segment allows the Wolf River State Trail to continue into the City of Crandon and creates an approximately 37-mile rail-to-trail project from the Menominee/Langlade County Line through to Crandon. This segment is identified in the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* for the Northern Region. The Department would sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Forest County for the development, maintenance and operation of the trail. Likely intended trail uses would be similar to Langlade County's and would include hiking, biking, snowmobiling and ATV riding.

#### ***State Operation***

In addition to the alternatives described above, there is the alternative of operation as a State trail in lieu of a cooperative agreement with the counties. Any of the use options described above could be implemented as part of this alternative and associated mitigation of impacts would be required.

### ***Additional Motorized Route***

In addition to the preferred alternative, another route is being proposed by local residents, many of whom reside on E. Shore Drive between Lake Metonga and the abandoned railroad corridor. This proposal is only in the early stages of discussion. The proposed alternative route would start on County Forest land at Keith Siding Road and proceed north through Sections 16 and 9, T35N R13E. The trail would then cross private property and a large block of land owned by Plum Creek Timberlands. The proposed trail would utilize existing gravel roads as well as unimproved forest roads. Approximately 1/3-mile of new trail would have to be constructed across private land to complete the trail. No notable natural resources would be impacted. However, one potential environmental concern is the very steep terrain in several locations along the proposed route (Ziolkowski July 2006). If this alternative were selected, the existing railroad right-of-way would remain in public ownership and management, but would likely not be developed as a recreational trail segment.

One resident interested in the alternate route estimates there are 27 homes and cottages located between the railroad corridor and E. Shore Drive. He notes interest among residents and ATV riders to include this additional motorized route to the east of the railroad corridor in exchange for developing the corridor along the lake as nonmotorized. Those interested in the nonmotorized corridor note the potential for connecting a trail from Crandon's City Beach on Lakeview Street (north shore of L. Metonga) along E. Shore Drive to the County campground, Vet's Memorial Park (south shore of L. Metonga).

Several residents met with private landowners and representatives of Plum Creek Timberlands, whose land the proposed alternative route would cross. Plum Creek Timberlands representatives stated they are interested in working with the locals to further discuss trail options. The affected private property owners, many of whom are ATV owners/riders, are open to exploring the idea assuming the trail location and development respects their property and privacy (Mueller 2006).

## **PART TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS OF THE WOLF RIVER STATE TRAIL**

### **Project Summary**

The Wolf River State Trail, previously known as the “Crandon to White Lake State Trail”, was acquired in segments over the past several years. The first segment is from north of White Lake in Langlade County to five miles south of Crandon. The second is from north of White Lake south to the Langlade/Menominee County line. The third is the proposed Crandon Line in Forest County. Acquisition of abandoned rail corridors by the Department guarantees these original transportation corridors are preserved rather than fragmented by private ownership. State ownership of the land assures natural resource protection, the protection of unique plant and wildlife communities and the opportunity for the public to participate in a variety of outdoor recreational activities.

In 2002, the Department completed an Environmental Assessment for acquisition of the Crandon to White Lake segment. Based on the results, the Department determined that acquisition of this segment would not result in significant adverse environmental effects. The Department made a determination that an environmental impact statement would not be required. Since 2002, additional segments have been acquired to extend the trail. This comprehensive environmental analysis considers the 2002 results and includes updated information on trail development, management and uses and impacts to ensure WEPA compliance for all aspects of the entire project from Crandon to the Menominee/Langlade County line.

DNR actions include the following:

- Acquisition of an approximate five mile abandoned rail corridor to extend the Wolf River State Trail into the City of Crandon. Funding for corridor acquisition would be from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. The Department estimates acquisition costs for the abandoned Crandon Line to be in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000. Actual acquisition costs will be determined pending negotiations. Closing is expected in 2006.
- Upon acquisition of the Crandon Line, Forest County will initiate a master planning process for trail development, operation and maintenance, which the Department will review and approve.
- The Department anticipates entering into a memorandum of understanding and cooperative state trail easement with Forest County. Under this agreement Forest County will develop, maintain and operate the approximate 15-mile Forest County portion of the Wolf River State Trail.
- Enter into a memorandum of understanding and cooperative state trail easement with Langlade County under which the county will develop, maintain and operate 24 miles of the Wolf River State Trail.
- Review and approve Langlade County’s master plan for trail development, operation and maintenance.
- Provide grants to Forest and Langlade County for development and operation of the trail.

## **Affected Environment**

The project area is an abandoned rail corridor in Forest and Langlade Counties with an environment characteristic of two Ecological Landscapes. The trail segment in Forest County and the northern two-thirds of Langlade County is in the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape; the segment in the southern one-third of Langlade is in the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape. Soils of the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape consist of sandy loam, sand and silt. Those of the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape are diverse, ranging from sandy loam to loam or shallow silt loam, and from poorly drained to well-drained. Many small drainages and lakes are found in the project area. Several larger lakes include Lake Metonga, Pickerel Lake and White Lake. The Wolf River is the most prominent river in the project area with many smaller streams including Swamp Creek, Nine Mile Creek, White Lake Creek and the Evergreen River.

Vegetation in the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape is dominated by northern hardwood forest made up of sugar maple, basswood, and red maple, and also includes some scattered hemlock and white pine pockets within stands. The aspen-birch forest type group is also relatively abundant, followed by spruce-fir. A variety of wetland community types also are present, both forested and non-forested. The corridor runs through the eastern edge of the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape in Langlade County, which remains primarily forested and consists of northern hardwoods and aspen with smaller amounts of oak and lowland hardwoods.

Forest County (population 10,024) and Langlade County (population 20,957) are less densely populated than the statewide 98.9 persons per square mile with values of 9.9 and 23.8 persons per square mile, respectively (based on 2000 census). Among the populated areas along the corridor are the City of Crandon (population 1,961) in Forest County and the Village of White Lake (population 329) in Langlade County. Much of Forest County is in public ownership (59%) with the Nicolet National Forest playing a major role. Department properties along the corridor include the Bog Brook Wildlife Area in Forest County, and the Lambert Springs Fishery Area, the Upper Wolf River Fishery Area, Langlade Rearing Station, Evergreen Fishery Area, Clubhouse Lake-Sunshine Springs Fishery Area and the Woods Flowage Fishery Area in Langlade County.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### ***Physical***

As an existing rail corridor, little physical change would result from the proposed trail acquisition, development, use or management activities in Forest and Langlade Counties. Installing decking and bridge railing, installing culverts where needed, brushing the trail bed, providing a system of signs to regulate traffic and control user speeds, and barricading access points to prevent vehicle use are the general development needs estimated for Langlade County that could affect the physical environment. Forest County has not yet completed its trail master plan, but anticipates similar activities to Langlade County. None of the described activities is expected to have a significant impact on the physical environment or the visual character.

The Department does not anticipate significant adverse impacts associated with decking and railing activities. If installing culverts is necessary, the County would need to refer to permit requirements outlined in Chapter 30.123. Adverse impacts could include soil compaction, sedimentation and erosion. There is a potential for short-term, localized erosion or sedimentation caused by maintenance vehicles during the brushing activities, installing signs and barricading access points. Impacts would be minimized by following WDNR erosion control standards. Development-related impacts to air quality caused by dust would be short-term, localized, and minimal.

Trail use would impact the physical environment by generating dust and causing erosion on the trail surface. The use of dust suppressants may be needed. The degree to which trail users comply with rules for trail use would determine the extent and degree of impacts. No trail use history exists for the Wolf River State Trail as it is currently signed “closed” and not officially open for use. However, experience elsewhere shows that trail users will stray from the trail in some locations, causing erosion on the adjacent landscape and destruction of vegetation. This damage can create stormwater run-off problems and result in sediment damage to wetlands and streams along the trail. Low level impacts are associated with winter trail use. Motorized trail use by snowmobiles and ATVs may have an adverse impact on noise levels and air quality that could affect other users, neighbors, or wildlife. Dust may be created by ATV use during the non-winter months, which may adversely impact localized air quality.

Wetland and shoreline habitats are highly sensitive to environmental damage, especially that caused by illegal off-trail ATV use. Potential impacts include soil compaction, rutting, and damage to vegetation, which lead to possible long-term changes to the hydrology by reducing or altering water flow and changing the infiltration capacity of the soil. However, minimal adverse impacts are expected if conditions and restrictions agreed to in the MOUs and Cooperative State Trail Easements are followed.

The Department anticipates continuing beaver trapping activities through a contractor for trout stream management, which necessarily involves ATV access for trapping activities at remote locations. There is potential for short-term, localized impacts that could include soil compaction or increased soil erosion. Impacts will be minimized by following best management practices for erosion control. However, this activity also contributes positive environmental effects by removing the debris obstructing water flow and maintaining trout stream habitat.

The proposed trail developments contribute to additional beneficial impacts. Providing a system of signs would help regulate traffic and control user speeds. Developing the recreation trail on the existing corridor would provide a lower impact on soils than alternative trail locations. Maintaining the corridor provides a safe trail surface for hiking, biking, and future ATV use. If used, gravel for any surfacing projects must be from a clean source void of invasive species seeds to prevent adverse impacts to native vegetation.

## ***Biological***

As with past rail-to-trail projects, the Department does not anticipate significant negative environmental impacts associated with the trail development of this abandoned rail corridor. The proposed development activities are limited to the existing corridor and should have limited adverse impact. Some management would be practiced to promote aesthetics, enhance wildlife, and protect trail users and facilities. No significant changes to the vegetative management are proposed.

There is potential for short-term, localized impacts, such as sedimentation, erosion, or compaction, to vegetation adjacent the corridor during the brushing and maintenance activities. If used, herbicides could result in impacts to the biological environment if application were to result in herbicides being applied directly to wetlands or surface waters. Some herbicides applied to aquatic environments have been shown to reduce species richness, diversity, and biomass. Impact on amphibians has been shown to be a problem if some herbicides are incorrectly applied and end up in the aquatic environment. These problems can be avoided by selection of the proper herbicide based on needs of the site, and proper application. Herbicide use would be beneficial where it discourages growth of invasive exotic plant species. Herbicide application is part of the approach to reducing the impact of invasive plants. Additional information on the environmental effects of herbicides can be found in, “The impact of insecticides and herbicides on the biodiversity and productivity of aquatic communities (Relyea 2005).”

Materials applied to the trail surface for dust control could also result in biological impacts if over applied, applied to surface waters or wetlands, or if long-term application results in materials leaching into groundwater or entering surface waters with stormwater. Potential impacts include increased surface run-off rates, water pollution impacts due to dissolved oxygen depletion, acidity or corrosivity, ammonia, phenols, dissolved salts, and heavy metals. Some dust control materials can harm vegetation and reduces seedling growth. Some can cause discoloration or foaming if they get into surface waters. Information on dust control materials can be found in the U. S. Forest Service, Dust Palliative Selection and Application Guide (NM Environment Department 2006).

Research suggests that long term exposure to noise can cause stress that is harmful to the health of wildlife species and their reproductive fitness. Responses have the potential to cause injury, energy loss, decrease in food intake, habitat avoidance or abandonment, and reproductive losses. Losses due to predation can be increased if birds are frightened off their nest by noise. Any potential for adverse noise effects on wildlife from snowmobiles and ATVs would only occur near the right-of-way.

There is also potential for environmental damage caused by illegal, off-trail ATV use. Adverse impacts could include disturbance of vegetation, soil compaction, rutting, and increased soil erosion rates.

## **Cultural**

### Land Use

The proposed trail development activities for the Langlade County segment of the Wolf River State Trail are consistent with the property master plan and with the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* (2001), and should not cause significant adverse impacts. Recreation trail development has the potential to enhance tourism development opportunities and to provide for multi-county links to trails. Acquiring the Crandon Line and extending the Wolf River State Trail contributes to the larger benefits inherent in a regional and statewide trail network.

### Social/Economic

The proposed development, use and management activities are consistent with Langlade County's master plan. Potential social impacts could include noise impacts on adjacent landowners, other trail users and wildlife, safety issues, and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. Adverse impacts to neighboring land owners are especially likely in more residential areas such as White Lake and Lily in Langlade County and Crandon in Forest County. Further, a report discussing the environmental and social effects of ATVs and Off-road Vehicles identified the following potential effects: air quality, soils, erosion and vegetation impacts, impacts on wildlife, forest-related research impacts, and recreation impacts on participants and user experiences (Stokowski et al. 2000).

The proposed project would also have the positive effect of providing a recreational trail for residents of Forest and Langlade County as well as the state and region. This benefit would be enhanced by the proposed trail being connected to a larger network of public trails. The extent of benefits and impacts of trail use would depend on the number of trail visitors. It is difficult to accurately estimate trail use levels by type of activity, as extensive use monitoring has not been done in Wisconsin and conditions vary for different trail locations. Assuming that use levels would be similar to the Tuscobia State Trail, the Department might anticipate in the neighborhood of 35,000 to 45,000 visitors per year initially (WDNR State Park 2005). As infrastructure improvements are made over time (particularly parking) further trail connections are made and marketing efforts undertaken, we might anticipate use levels closer to 80,000 to 100,000 per year. Based on input from the Department trail manager, the Tuscobia Trail has an estimated 45,000 ATV and 30,000 snowmobile visits per year. A similar estimate for the Wild Rivers Trail suggests winter use at about 500 snowmobiles and ATVs per day on week-ends and 20 to 50 per day during the week. Summer use is estimated at about 100 ATVs per day on the week-end and 20 to 50 on a weekday. These are estimates only, based on managers' experience. While there is some use of these trails by hikers, cyclists, and equestrians, use estimates are not available.

Members of the public cite concerns about noise from recreational vehicles. Summer ATV use may especially be a concern for some, as neighbors to the trail may be spending more time outdoors and have windows open. Some may be concerned about impacts on other forms of recreation. Others may simply value the peace and quiet they find in this rural area. As the impact of noise is reduced with distance from the source, most of the impacts noted here are likely to affect only neighboring properties closest to the trail. Hearing loss may be a risk for

recreational vehicle operators who have long term continuous exposure to higher noise levels, but would not be an expected impact on neighboring landowners. For neighbors within about a mile of the trail but not directly adjacent, noise may be considered a nuisance as opposed to a health issue.

Concerns have been expressed about the safety of non-motorized users sharing the trail with ATVs. High speeds and size of machines are cited as concerns, along with lack of experience of some operators, as well as operators who don't comply with regulations. Snowmobile and ATV riders who go off the authorized trail pose hazards for neighbors. Dust and rocks kicked up by ATVs are a concern for people who would share the trail. Observance of speed limits should reduce concerns for safety. Chapter NR 64.07(2) Wis. Adm. Code requires that an ATV operator must yield the right-of-way and slow to 10 mph when within 100 feet of a person not on an ATV, snowmobile or motorcycle. Trail use courtesy is considered to be essential, and law enforcement presence important for a multiple use trail to be successful.

Some members of the public suggest that motorized and non-motorized trail recreation may be incompatible due to noise, dust, speed, trail damage, and safety concerns. Some believe that ATV use precludes other uses of a trail and question whether multiple use is practical. Experience on other trails shows that ATV traffic does appear to reduce non-motorized trail use. Some trail managers share concerns about compatibility of motorized and non-motorized uses.

A number of health professionals and others comment that trail recreation, especially walking, running and cycling, can provide significant health benefits.

Within the Amery to Dresser State Trail Environmental Analysis (2006), the Department notes it has been suggested that trail development and use could create health risks. If soils contaminated by historic spills or pesticide use along the rail corridor are disturbed by trail construction or trail use, human exposure might occur. Robert Thiboldeaux, Ph.D. Toxicologist with the Health Hazard Evaluation Unit, Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, concluded that dust created by ATV use on the trail may subject users to respirable particle exposure in excess of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard. Dust-related concerns can be minimized through regular maintenance and use of dust suppressants to avoid the dispersion of subsurface soils.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has adopted new emission standards for recreation vehicles and some other off-road engines. Frequently Asked Questions information available on the EPA website succinctly concerns with recreation vehicles (US EPA 2002). Individually, these vehicles can have a very high emission rate. The EPA information compares emissions from unregulated recreational vehicles with those of an automobile meeting current National Low Emission Vehicle (NLEV) emission standards. An unregulated two-stroke off-highway motorcycle can emit as much pollution in one hour as over 20 automobiles operating for one hour. Similarly, an un-regulated two-stroke snowmobile can emit as much as nearly 100 automobiles.

EPA notes that engines covered by the new standards contribute to ozone formation, ambient particulate matter, and carbon monoxide (CO) levels and emit mobile source air toxics. There

are health concerns associated with these emissions. Increased ozone concentrations have been associated with increased hospitalizations for people with asthma, and chronic exposure can cause permanent lung damage. Children and people with compromised respiratory systems are particularly at risk. Carbon monoxide enters the bloodstream and reduces delivery of oxygen to the body's organs and tissues. Health threats are most serious for people who suffer from cardiovascular disease, with healthy people affected only by higher levels. Exposure to elevated CO is associated with impairment of visual perception, work capacity, manual dexterity, learning ability, and performance of complex tasks. High CO concentrations generally occur in areas with elevated mobile-source emissions. Peak concentrations typically occur in the colder months when mobile-source CO emissions are greater and nighttime temperature inversions occur more frequently. Mobile source air toxics include benzene, toluene, 1,3-butadiene, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, and acrolein, which cause a variety of health-related problems. EPA's information states, "Users of these engines and vehicles may experience high levels of personal exposure to these substances. For example, snowmobile riders and those directly exposed to snowmobile exhaust emissions can be exposed to benzene levels two to three orders of magnitude greater than the 1996 national average benzene concentrations. These elevated levels are also known as toxic 'hot spots,' which are of particular concern to EPA."

With full implementation of new emission standards for recreational vehicles, recreational marine diesel engines and industrial spark-ignition engines, EPA expects an overall 71-percent reduction in hydrocarbon emissions from these engines, 80-percent reduction in nitrogen oxides and 57-percent reduction in carbon monoxide by 2020. EPA information states, "These controls will help reduce ambient concentrations of ozone, CO, and fine particulate matter. In addition, they will reduce personal exposure for people who operate, work with or are otherwise close to these engines and vehicles."

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has conducted some monitoring to address potential concerns with snowmobile operation. In January, 2000, monitoring was conducted at Northland Pines School District buildings in Eagle River and in very close proximity to the Eagle River Snowmobile Derby track (WDNR 2000). Monitoring showed carbon monoxide levels to be well below national ambient air quality standards. Concentrations of constituents for which no ambient standards existed were compared to concentrations at other monitoring locations. Most volatile organic compounds were not detected. Most detected were within the range of concentrations measured in other Wisconsin urban locations (Green Bay, Milwaukee and Wisconsin Rapids). However, 1, 1, 1 Trichloroethane and toluene were at higher concentrations. Acetone, acetaldehyde, and formaldehyde were detected with concentrations within the range measured at other urban locations.

Adjacent landowners are often concerned that trail use will negatively impact enjoyment of their property. They are concerned about dust and noise, odors and air emissions, safety concerns especially for children living near the trail, trespass, and property damage. Some would like to be able to walk, bike, rollerblade, or push children in strollers along the trail but feel that motorized use would prevent these activities. There is concern that there are not places in the rural environment for safe recreation. Timing of trail use is an important issue for many who feel motors are a nuisance on quiet evenings and beyond a nuisance when they interrupt normal sleep patterns. There is less concern about snowmobiles as they operate during times when

homes are closed up and people spend less time outside. Summer ATV use is more frequently cited as a concern.

Property values may also be a concern to neighboring property owners. Some may cite increased real estate values as a benefit of a public trail. However, some may be concerned that a trail may cause a reduction in value and possibly reduce their ability to sell a home. Many studies have been done which show a positive impact of recreational trails on real estate values. However, most currently available studies considered green space, walking and bicycling trails. To gain some insight into potential property values of a motorized trail, property values near the Cattail Trail in Barron County were examined. This trail runs through the Towns of Lincoln, Clayton, Almena and Turtle Lake, and Village of Turtle Lake. Wisconsin Department of Revenue data on equalized values shows that residential property values in each of these units increased between 2004 and 2005. The Town of Clayton would be expected to have the greatest potential for impact, as the trail runs through the middle of the entire township from northeast to southwest. Residential property values in the Town of Clayton increased each year from 1999 through 2005. While this simple analysis can't predict specific impact on an individual property, it does suggest that the strong real estate market in the area is, overall, overshadowing any potential negative impact a trail may have. Some prospective buyers may be dissuaded by the presence of a motorized trail, while others may be especially attracted by such a trail adjacent to the property they are considering for purchase (WDNR Environmental Assessment 2006).

#### Archaeological/Historical

Generally, rail-to-trail projects do not result in new impacts to archaeological sites and historic properties considering the previous development and use as a rail corridor. A search of the Wisconsin Historical Society's Archaeological Site Inventory and Architecture and History Inventory identified no historic structures along the Crandon Line in Forest County, and one archaeological site immediately south of Keith Siding Road and immediately west of the rail line (at the junction with the road) (Dirst 2005). No historic structures or archaeological sites were noted in the previous environmental assessment (2002) for the remaining segments of the Wolf River State Trail. The anticipated activities for Forest County should not adversely impact the site.

#### ***Summary of Adverse Impacts That Cannot Be Avoided***

Most adverse impacts of the proposed trail development and use, including soil erosion, sedimentation, compaction, and damage to vegetation, can be mitigated. Impacts that can be mitigated to a degree, but not eliminated, include noise, air emissions, odors, dust, social concerns regarding safety and user conflicts, environmental damage caused by illegal off-trail ATV use, and reduced wildlife habitat.

Noise from motorized recreational vehicles is often cited as a concern by neighboring landowners. While many newer machines are quieter, we must anticipate that there will always be some impact, especially for people living adjacent to the trail and wildlife now occupying habitat adjacent to the trail. Noise could also be reduced by instituting speed limits. The degree

to which this would be effective would depend on cooperation and compliance by people using the trail.

Air emissions will always be an issue as long as recreational vehicles on the trail are powered by internal combustion engines. Impacts will be greater initially, as many machines currently in use do not meet new EPA emission standards. As machines age and are replaced, concerns with air emissions and associated odor complaints will diminish. EPA literature suggests it will take about fifteen years for this transition.

Loss of wildlife habitat that would occur with removal of brush that has grown onto the trail is considered a minor impact. It would be more than offset by the positive impact of invasive species control, if effective measures are undertaken.

Since many of the concerns with trail use are social issues, the degree to which they can be mitigated would depend on the cooperation and good will of people in the community as well as their ability to influence behavior of visitors.

## **Evaluation of project significance**

### ***Environmental Effects and Their Significance***

#### **Forest County**

The Department does not anticipate negative environmental effects associated with acquisition of the abandoned Crandon Line rail corridor. Any significant impacts occurred during construction of the line, which began in 1906. The corridor has not been in use for several years. There is no development on the Crandon Line, except in Crandon. The project area is adjacent to extensive natural areas, including deciduous forest and wetlands, and Metonga Lake on much of the western-side of the line. No threatened, endangered or special concern species are reported within the railroad right-of-way nor are there any historic structures recorded along this corridor.

Details of trail development, management and use will be defined during the property master planning process. The Department and Forest County anticipate entering a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the development, maintenance and operation of the trail. In general, the terms of the MOU state the County agrees the trail will meet or exceed WDNR trail standards as outlined in Chapter 30 of the Department Design Standards Handbook, Handbook #8605.1, WDNR Bureau of Parks and Recreation. Basic trail standards include a 10-12 foot wide trail with a mowed 2 foot shoulder. Normally bridges designed for snowmobiling and ATV purposes vary from 8 to 12 feet in width depending on the equipment used, the span of the bridge, and whether the bridge is in conjunction with an abandoned railroad grade. However, due to the varying nature of bridge designs, retrofits, soil conditions, varying degrees of degradation and changes in loading situations, the Department's water regulatory program requires submittal and review of construction plans for all bridges as required by Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 30.123 (WDNR Bridge Guidelines 2003).

As an existing corridor and based on results from previous rail-to-trail projects, impacts associated with development of the trail within the immediate right-of-way would be short-term and minimal. Forest County anticipates needing to grade and level the existing ballast and surface the trail with gravel; one trestle over Swamp Creek would be converted to a bridge. There is potential for short-term, localized erosion or sedimentation caused by maintenance vehicles during the grading and surfacing activities. Impacts would be minimized by following Department best management practices. Surfacing of the trail involves spreading a small quantity of crushed stone at slow speeds, which may create dust. Development-related impacts to air quality caused by dust would be short-term, localized and minimal. Gravel for the surfacing projects should be from a clean source void of invasive species seeds to prevent adverse impacts to native vegetation.

Converting the Swamp Creek trestle to a bridge has potential adverse impacts such as soil compaction, sedimentation and erosion, which would be minimized by following Department best management practices. Any development activities associated with the Swamp Creek trestle would require a permit per Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 30.123.

Forest County anticipates trail use activities similar to those on the Langlade County segment, such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling and ATV riding. The Department anticipates low level environmental impact associated with motorized use along the Crandon Line and the remaining Forest County segment. The Department anticipates a negligible impact on the water quality of Metonga Lake considering the corridor and lake are separated by a frontage road with the corridor running along a ridge for much of the length of the lake. The slope of the ridge also prevents motorized users from leaving the designated trail corridor.

Trail management for the Forest County segment is yet to be determined. However, assuming trail management is similar to that of Langlade County's, the Department anticipates the trail management activities would not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Refer to Langlade County section for a discussion of possible environmental effects and their significance.

### Langlade County

The Department acquired the right-of-way from the Canadian National for the Langlade County portion of the Wolf River State Trail. No negative environmental effects were associated with the acquisition. Under the terms of the MOU, the Department conveyed an easement to Langlade County for the right to develop, maintain and operate the Wolf River State Trail on lands within Langlade County.

As with past rail-to-trail projects, the Department does not anticipate significant negative environmental impacts associated with the trail development of this abandoned rail corridor. The proposed trail development activities are limited to the existing corridor and should not cause significant adverse impacts. Langlade County's *Wolf River Recreational Trail Master Plan* (November 2005) identifies the following as development needs of the trail: deck and rail bridges and fence slopes, install culverts where needed, brush trail bed to a maximum of 16 feet wide, provide a system of signs to regulate traffic and control user speeds, continue to deter

illegal motorized traffic from traveling on the corridor, and barricade access points to trail to prevent vehicle use on the trail.

Among the development activities is work on the bridges. In November 2005 a certified engineer conducted an inspection of all Langlade County bridges and trestles impacted by this trail. The findings indicate 4 bridges associated with the Evergreen River (wood beam), Wolf River (steel beam), Nine Mile Creek (wood beam) and the East Branch of Lily River (wood beam). Each is estimated to have been built in the early 1900s and consists of ties only. Each needs decking and railing. Permitting and development of the bridges is in accordance with Chapter 30.123 Wisconsin Statutes. Development includes adding only decking and railing to existing structures; no new substructures are required. Impacts could include short-term localized erosion or soil compaction caused by vehicles during the activity, but would be minimized by following Department bridge guidelines and erosion control standards.

Similarly, Chapter 30.123 outlines the permit requirements for culvert installation. While the master plan includes “installing culverts where needed”, at this time Langlade County does not see the need. Installation may be required in the future depending on water drainage, and if so, the County would apply for the required permits (Jackson 2006). Adverse impacts associated with construction, such as soil compaction, sedimentation and erosion, would be minimized by following Department best management practices.

As stated in the terms of the MOU, the County agrees the trail will meet or exceed WDNR trail standards as outlined in Chapter 30 of the Department Design Standards Handbook, Handbook #8605.1, DNR Bureau of Parks and Recreation. Brushing the trail bed and providing a system of signs would not have a significant impact on the physical environment nor the visual character.

The master planning process resulted in Langlade County designating different trail uses for various trail segments. The master plan states the “trail will be developed to provide opportunities for hiking, biking, horseback riding in the summer and snowmobile riding in the winter. Opportunities will also be available in the future for summer ATV use provided connecting trails are developed and approved (2005).” The portion from the Forest County line south to Lily is designated “motorized – contingent upon connecting trails being developed.” Lily south along the Wolf River to Highway 64 is nonmotorized. From Highway 64 south to White Lake is “nonmotorized – unless motorized connecting trails are developed.” The segment from White Lake south to the Menominee County line is nonmotorized.

The segment from Lily to Highway 64 is an ecologically sensitive area. As described in the master plan, “the Wolf River has historically been known for great trout fishing, and is well known by rafters, kayakers and canoeists who have engaged the countless stretches of whitewater rapids.” Designating this stretch as nonmotorized is a valuable precaution in maintaining the integrity of the Wolf River.

Illegal motorized use, especially by ATVs, could potentially cause long-term impacts to sensitive shoreline habitats due to increased soil erosion rates. To prevent this, Langlade County and the Department agreed to a number of additional conditions and restrictions when drafting the Cooperative State Trail Easement (Refer to *Wolf River Recreational Trail Master Plan* to review

complete details). Included are restrictions on trail path development and use within the recreational trail corridor along the Wolf River, as defined in Section NR 302.02(4), Wisconsin Administrative Code.

The trail path is designated as that area within the trail corridor that was previously improved with plank and rails to facilitate rail transportation. Trail surfacing shall consist only of natural materials such as crushed rock, and bridges will be maintained with wood or steel rails and wood decking. Langlade County agrees to construct and maintain barriers extending back from the bridges over the Wolf River to prevent motorized recreational vehicles from leaving the trail path and accessing the shoreline of the river. Gates and rocks would be the first option in deterring illegal use of the trail. Langlade County also agrees to establish, post, and enforce speed limits for motorized vehicles using the recreational trail corridor lying within the Wild Rivers Protection Zone. Installing barricades and posting speed limits would not have an adverse impact on the environment. Instead, they may have a positive impact by restricting access to sensitive areas and slowing motorized traffic.

Trail management, including maintenance such as sign replacement or trail grooming, would not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. There is potential for short-term, localized impacts such as erosion or sedimentation caused by maintenance vehicles during the brushing or grading activities. Impacts would be minimized by following best management practices for erosion control.

### ***Significance of Cumulative Effects***

Cumulative effects on the environment caused by acquisition or development of the trail are not expected to be significant. Acquiring the corridor would protect an important natural resource corridor along the Upper Wolf River Fishery Area in Langlade County. Development would not substantially change the quality of the environment as the trail exists on an abandoned rail corridor. Cumulative effects on the environment caused by trail development are not expected to be significant.

Cumulative effects on the environment caused by trail use on the designated corridor are not expected to be significant. However, the extent of the effect is dependent on final trail uses determined during the master planning process. Langlade County has a mix of both motorized and nonmotorized trail segments; Forest County is considering motorized trail use, but has not yet completed the master planning process. An increase in the miles of motorized trail could result in additional impacts from noise, dust and air emissions.

Expanding the trail network in the Northern Region could also have a positive cumulative economic effect by increasing awareness of the areas natural resources and increasing tourism. State-owned rail trails account for about 260 miles of the region's trails, including the Bearskin, Tuscobia, Wild Rivers, Saunders, and Gandy Dancer State Trails. County-owned and operated rail trails add another 170 miles. In addition, hundreds of miles of other trails exist on federal, state, and county lands. The connection to other significant local, state and regional recreational facilities contributes to the well-established Wisconsin State Park and State Trail System.

### ***Significance of Risk***

Purchasing the abandoned Crandon Line does not pose a risk to the quality of the environment. Developing the Crandon Line and the larger Wolf River State Trail has a low overall potential risk to the environment since this is an existing graded railroad corridor. Most environmental impacts occurred during the original corridor construction. Langlade County has completed their master plan; Forest County will start their process upon acquisition of the Crandon Line. Langlade County's plan states the trail will be developed to provide opportunities for hiking, biking, horseback riding in the summer, and snowmobiling in the winter. Opportunities will also be available in the future for summer ATV use provided connecting trails are developed and approved. The impacts on trail use, user numbers and experience may also depend on future connections with other trails in the Northern Region. Monitoring trail use would help identify user patterns and potential conflicts.

The unknown of final trail development and management for Forest County creates an uncertainty in predicting environmental impacts. However, in general designated trail use within the existing rail corridor poses little threat to the quality of the environment. The risk of introduction of invasive species may increase during the construction of the trail by materials or equipment or during its use upon completion of the trail. Maintenance including regularly checking the right-of-way for invasive species will reduce the risk.

The degree to which trail users comply with rules for trail use determines the extent and degree of impact. Motorized use, especially off-trail and on non-frozen ground, could negatively impact areas adjacent to the trail corridor. Experience elsewhere shows that trail users stray from the trail in some locations, causing erosion on the adjacent landscape and destruction of vegetation. This damage can create storm water run-off problems and result in sediment damage to wetlands and streams along the trail. The Department is in the process of researching the environmental impacts of ATV use. Information from this report would be useful in developing motorized use recreation trails, educating trail users, and protecting the natural resources.

The combination of motorized-nonmotorized trail uses creates a degree of risk and uncertainty in predicting user safety. Accidents involving motorized and nonmotorized trail users, such as collisions or people being struck by stones or debris kicked up by a recreational vehicle are a concern. The significance of risk among motorized uses in the winter months is low considering few ATVs use the trail in the winter months. The significance of risk among motorized and non-motorized uses in the non-winter months is more uncertain considering the limited history of trail use. Spills of fuel could occur as a result of accidents involving recreational vehicles or as machines are refueled. Such spills are likely to be minor due to small capacity of fuel tanks.

### ***Significance of Precedent***

Acquiring an abandoned rail corridor and developing it as a recreation trail is not precedent setting. Developing the Crandon Line is consistent with the Department's *State Recreational Trails Network Plan* for the Northern Region and with Forest and Langlade Counties' intent for extending the Wolf River State Trail.

### ***Significance of Controversy***

Langlade County completed its public involvement process and received between 60 and 70 comments, mainly from silent-sport groups. Most concerns were addressed by designating both nonmotorized and motorized trail segments. The Forest County Forest Administrator reports feedback from the Forest County Snowmobile Council, the Forest County ATV Association and Forest County Silent Sport groups that they are in support of acquiring and developing the Crandon Line and the Forest County segment of the trail (Ziolkowski January 2006). Details for trail development and use will be determined during the master planning process; any controversy will be addressed at that time.

Trail development statewide generally leads to controversy regarding designated uses, especially between motorized and nonmotorized uses, and the impacts those uses will have on adjacent landowners and resources. Concerns have been expressed about the safety of non-motorized users sharing the trail with ATVs. High speeds and size of machines are cited as concerns, along with lack of experience of some operators, as well as operators who don't comply with regulations. Snowmobile and ATV riders who go off the authorized trail pose hazards for neighbors. Dust and rocks kicked up by ATVs are a concern for people who would share the trail. Observance of speed limits should reduce concerns for safety. Chapter NR 64.07(2) Wis. Adm. Code requires that an ATV operator must yield the right-of-way and slow to 10 mph when within 100 feet of a person not on an ATV, snowmobile or motorcycle. Trail use courtesy is considered to be essential, and law enforcement presence important for a multiple use trail to be successful.

### **Alternatives**

(Refer also to the Feasibility Study's Alternative section on pages 10 and 11 for additional discussion of alternatives related to the proposed acquisition of the Crandon Line.)

### ***No Action***

A no action alternative would involve not acquiring the approximate five mile corridor to extend the Wolf River State Trail into the City of Crandon. Trail users could use road routes into Crandon; however, roads in the area are narrow making this a dangerous alternative. Further, a no action alternative would eliminate the Department's role in providing money to Forest and Langlade counties for trail development and maintenance, as well as management by the counties. This is not a preferred alternative.

If the trail is not developed and operated, problems with invasive plant species could occur. Problems with illegal disposal of wastes on the corridor could also occur. Informal use of the corridor would likely continue, providing some recreational opportunities, but also sometimes creating a nuisance for neighboring landowners. Enforcement would likely be required to control unauthorized use by motorized vehicles. Trespass on adjacent private lands could also be

a problem. The corridor would continue to be available for future transportation use, since it is publicly owned.

### ***Proposed Action with Mitigation of Impacts***

This alternative is similar to the proposed action (as stated in the Feasibility Study's Alternatives section, page 10), but also considers the following mitigation efforts to reduce negative impacts:

- Protection of wetlands and other sensitive areas – Large boulders could be placed along the grade in sensitive habitat locations in order to keep trail riders on the trail. Specific locations of these boulders should be determined on-site in order to use as few as necessary.
- Spread of non-native invasive plants – Brushing operations for trail development may include treating some of the grade with an herbicide. This will help, but will not eliminate all invasive plants. Any use of the grade, whether by motorized or non-motorized recreational vehicles or simply walking, can spread the plants along the entire grade and beyond. An invasive plant management plan could be prepared for the grade that includes an outreach component to inform adjacent landowners and all user groups about invasive plants and recruit their help in eradication efforts. All three available methods (mechanical, chemical and fire) should be considered for control of invasive plants.
- Noise – Noise is considered a nuisance problem during daytime hours, especially during months when houses are open to the outdoors. It can be a more serious problem for people living near the trail at night if sleep is disrupted. Noise can also impact wildlife and farm animals. Noise could be reduced by imposing speed limits for motorized recreation. If speed limits do not adequately address the problem with sleep disruption, hours of operation could be set to eliminate night-time use.
- Safety and non-compatible uses - Safety of non-motorized users and neighbors due to speed and size of motorized machines might be addressed to some degree by speed limits. Alternatively, trail paving could be considered to reduce dust and flying gravel.
- Dust – Managers of other trails have gained valuable experience in dust suppression. Quality of the material used for trail surfacing is the first opportunity to deal with dust. Material selected should have enough fines to allow good compaction, but not so much as to generate excessive amounts of dust. Application of dust suppression materials could be done routinely and in response to complaints. Dust would be expected to be less of a problem if speed limits are established. It may be appropriate to set lower speed limits in areas near homes and where non-motorized recreation is more popular. Alternative trail surfacing materials that might be considered include traprock and rotten granite. The blocky physical characteristics of traprock cause it to compact well. However, experienced trail managers find that limestone with a specific amount of fine grained material provides a superior surface for walking and bicycling. Asphalt paving could nearly eliminate concerns with dust, but at greater cost both initially and for long term maintenance.
- Health impacts – Sampling of the trail corridor is recommended to determine if there is a risk of previous soil contamination. If contaminants are found to be present, then trail surfacing and dust control during trail construction and future trail use will minimize exposure risks.
- Nuisance odors – New EPA rules will help reduce odor problems over time. Education efforts by government agencies and recreational vehicle clubs which encourage proper maintenance can help to somewhat reduce the problem. Trail access points should be

designed so that machines are not idled near homes. Signing and local education efforts should emphasize the importance of not idling near a home.

- Trespass and property damage – Fencing or placement of rocks along the corridor may be appropriate, especially in residential areas and where high quality natural plant communities occur. Fencing could include maintenance of existing fenced right-of-way. The County could consider offering to fence the right-of-way adjacent to residential areas with a style of fence as chosen by the neighboring property owner (e.g. split rail or traditional white). Education and enforcement, including active involvement of courtesy patrols should help to reduce problems.

### **Summary of issue identification activities**

Langlade County held one public input hearing September 14, 2005 in White Lake. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting. The major issue was whether ATVs would be allowed on the section between Highway 64 and Lily. The Forestry Administrator reports receiving between 60-70 comments; ninety percent of the comments received following the meeting opposed ATV use on that particular section. The issue was decided based on the State's ATV policy on their properties making the section between Highway 64 and Lily not available for ATV use. Neither the motorized nor nonmotorized groups opposed snowmobiles using the entire grade.

Forest County has not yet started their public involvement and master planning process. The County is waiting for acquisition of the Crandon Line. Once acquired, the County will proceed with the planning process for the entire Forest County portion of the Wolf River State Trail, which will include the existing segment plus the Crandon Line segment.

### **FEASIBILITY DETERMINATION**

To be determined based on review and input from the public.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS DECISION

Project Name: Wolf River State Trail

County: Langlade/Forest

DECISION (This decision is not final until certified by the appropriate authority)

In accordance with s. 1.11, Stats., and Ch. NR 150, Adm. Code, the Department is authorized and required to determine whether it has complied with s.1.11, Stats., and Ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code.

Complete either A or B below:

A. EIS Process Not Required



The attached analysis of the expected impacts of this proposal is of sufficient scope and detail to conclude that this is not a major action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. In my opinion, therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required prior to final action by the Department.

B. Major Action Requiring the Full EIS Process

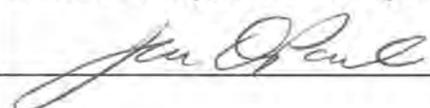


The proposal is of such magnitude and complexity with such considerable and important impacts on the quality of the human environment that it constitutes a major action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

Signature of Evaluator 	Date Signed 09/08/06
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Number of responses to news release or other notice:

22

Certified to be in compliance with WEPA Environmental Analysis and Liaison Program Staff 	Date Signed 10/13/06
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------

### NOTICE OF APPEAL RIGHTS

If you believe you have a right to challenge this decision made by the Department, you should know that Wisconsin statutes, administrative codes and case law establish time periods and requirements for reviewing Department decisions.

To seek judicial review of the Department's decision, ss. 227.52 and 227.53, Stats., establish criteria for filing a petition for judicial review. Such a petition shall be filed with the appropriate circuit court and shall be served on the Department. The petition shall name the Department of Natural Resources as the respondent.

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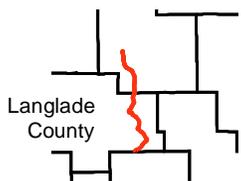
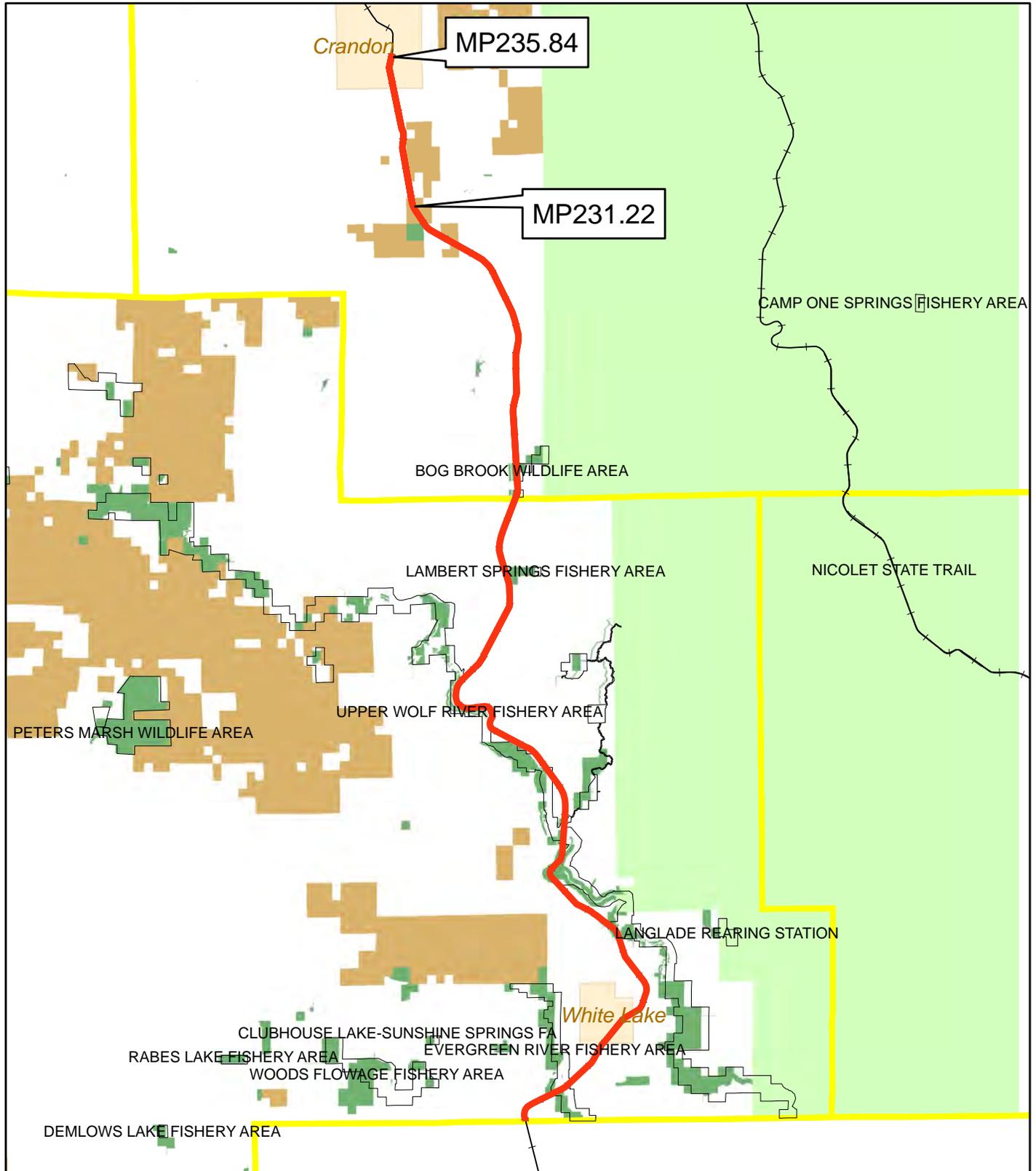
## **LIST OF APPENDIX ITEMS**

- Appendix A: Locator map
- Appendix B: Natural Heritage Inventory On-Line Database of T.35N–R.13E and T.36N–R.13E

<b>Natural Heritage Inventory On-Line Database – Forest County, T36R13E and T35R13E</b>			
Group Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Last Observation Date
Bird	PICOIDES ARCTICUS	BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER	1994
Bird	PANDION HALIAETUS	OSPREY	1992
Community	NORTHERN MESIC FOREST	NORTHERN MESIC FOREST	1981
Community	HARDWOOD SWAMP	HARDWOOD SWAMP	1996
Community	NORTHERN WET FOREST	NORTHERN WET FOREST	1981
Community	NORTHERN WET-MESIC FOREST	NORTHERN WET- MESIC FOREST	1982
Community	SPRING POND	SPRING POND	1989
Community	STREAM--SLOW; HARD; COLD	STREAM--SLOW; HARD; COLD	1981
Fish	OPSOPOEODUS EMILIAE	PUGNOSE MINNOW	1979
Herptile	DIADOPHIS PUNCTATUS EDWARDSII	NORTHERN RINGNECK SNAKE	1995
Herptile	HEMIDACTYLIUM SCUTATUM	FOUR-TOED SALAMANDER	2000
Invertebrate	HESPERIA COMMA	LAURENTIAN SKIPPER	1995
Invertebrate	OENEIS JUTTA	JUTTA ARCTIC	1995
Invertebrate	PHYCIODES BATESII	TAWNY CRESCENT SPOT	1994
Invertebrate	SATYRODES EURYDICE FUMOSA	SMOKEY EYED BROWN	1994
Invertebrate	BOLORIA EUNOMIA	BOG FRITILLARY	1995
Invertebrate	LYCAENA DORCAS	DORCAS COPPER	1995
Invertebrate	LYCAENA EPIXANTHE	BOG COPPER	1995
Invertebrate	PIERIS VIRGINIENSIS	WEST VIRGINIA WHITE	1995
Invertebrate	STYLOGOMPHUS ALBISTYLUS	LEAST CLUBTAIL	1994
Mammal	NAPAEZAPUS INSIGNIS	WOODLAND JUMPING MOUSE	1995
Mammal	SOREX ARCTICUS	ARCTIC SHREW	1995
Mammal	SOREX HOYI	PIGMY SHREW	1995
Mammal	SOREX PALUSTRIS	WATER SHREW	1995
Plant	BOTRYCHIUM MORMO	LITTLE GOBLIN MOONWORT	1995
Plant	BOTRYCHIUM ONEIDENSE	BLUNT-LOBE GRAPE-FERN	1994
Plant	RIBES HUDSONIANUM	NORTHERN BLACK CURRANT	1994
Plant	SCIRPUS TORREYI	TORREY'S BULRUSH	1994
Plant	ARETHUSA BULBOSA	SWAMP-PINK	1995
Plant	CALYPSO BULBOSA	FAIRY SLIPPER	1994
Plant	CAREX ASSINIBOINENSIS	ASSINIBOINE SEDGE	1994
Plant	CAREX GYNOCRATES	NORTHERN BOG SEEDGE	1994
Plant	CAREX VAGINATA	SHEATHED SEDGE	1994
Plant	EQUISETUM PALUSTRE	MARSH HORSETAIL	1994

Group Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Last Observation Date
Plant	EQUISETUM VARIEGATUM	VARIEGATED HORSETAIL	1994
Plant	POTAMOGETON CONFERVOIDES	ALGAE-LIKE PONDWEED	1994
Plant	UTRICULARIA RESUPINATA	NORTHEASTERN BLADDERWORT	1994
Bird	HALIAEETUS LEUCOCEPHALUS	BALD EAGLE	1992
Bird	PANDION HALIAETUS	OSPREY	1992
Community	NORTHERN SEDGE MEADOW	NORTHERN SEDGE MEADOW	1981
Community	NORTHERN WET FOREST	NORTHERN WET FOREST	1981
Community	SPRING POND	SPRING POND	1981
Community	STREAM--FAST; HARD; COLD	STREAM--FAST; HARD; COLD	1981
Plant	ARETHUSA BULBOSA	SWAMP-PINK	2002
Plant	CYPRIPEDIUM PARVIFLORUM	SMALL YELLOW LADY'S-SLIPPER	2002
Plant	PETASITES SAGITTATUS	ARROW-LEAVED SWEET-COLTSFOOT	1995
SOURCE: <a href="http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/nhi/nhi_ims/onlinedb.htm">http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/nhi/nhi_ims/onlinedb.htm</a>			

**Appendix "A"**  
**Wisconsin Central LTD. - N.I.T.U. Proposal**  
**Crandon to White Lake**



- Wisconsin Central RR
- Cities and Villages
- DNR Managed Land
- County Forest
- Project Boundary
- Federal Lands





## NEWS RELEASE

### Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Northern Region

810 W Maple St., Spooner, WI 54801  
Phone: (715) 635-2101 TDD: (715) 635-4001  
107 Sutliff Avenue, Rhinelander, WI 54501  
Phone: (715) 365-8900 TDD: (715) 365-8957  
dnr.wi.gov www.wisconsin.gov

RECEIVED

SEP 12 2006

OFFICE OF ENERGY

**DATE:** September 8, 2006

**CONTACT:** Terry Jordan

**SUBJECT:** Wolf River State Recreational Trail Proposal Being Reviewed

Spooner, WI – The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is proposing to acquire, develop, and manage a former railroad grade as a new state recreational trail running through Langlade County northward into Forest County. The purpose of this project is to address recreational needs in the local area as well as regional recreational demand from Wisconsin residents and visitors.

Over the past several years, the Department has acquired segments of an abandoned railroad grade running from the Langlade/Menominee County line near White Lake northward to a point just south of Crandon in Forest County. The Department now proposes to acquire another 4.62 miles that would extend the proposed trail into Crandon. Funding for this acquisition would come from the Knowles – Nelson Stewardship Fund. The Department also proposes to subsequently develop and manage the entire trail through cooperative arrangements with both counties.

The new trail would be about 40 miles long and renamed the Wolf River State Trail. The Department would enter into a memorandum of understanding and cooperative state trail easement with both Langlade and Forest Counties to develop, operate, and maintain the trail. Each county would be required to develop a master plan for their portion of the trail which would be approved by the Department.

Before a decision can be made on plans for the proposed trail acquisition and management, an Environmental Assessment (EA) must be completed. This notification ensures the chance for public input on that analysis.

Once the EA process is completed, the Department will complete a final review and decision on the trail proposal.

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The following counties are in the Northern Region: Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, Vilas, Washburn.  
The Public Affairs Manager for DNR Northern Region is Jim Bishop, (715) 635-4242.

This project is not anticipated to result in significant adverse environmental effects. The Department has prepared an EA on this action and made a preliminary decision that an environmental impact statement will not be required. This recommendation does not represent approval from other DNR sections which may also require review of the project. Copies of the draft EA can be obtained from Terry Jordan, Parks & Recreation Specialist, WDNR, 810 W. Maple Street, Spooner, WI 54801, 715/635-4121, or by e-mail at [terry.jordan@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:terry.jordan@dnr.state.wi.us).

Comments on the proposed project and preliminary assessment are welcome and should be received by Mr. Jordan no later than 4:30 p.m., Friday, September 22, 2006. Comments may be submitted verbally, electronically, or in hard copy written form.

-30-