

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Final Grant Accomplishment Report

## Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

101 S Webster St  
PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921

## Reporting Time Period:

January 2011 – December 2012

## Amount of Funds Received:

\$1,966,085.00

## Amount of Funds Obligated

Administration: \$386,642.09

Access: \$ 1,511,127.26

Habitat: \$0

## Amount of Funds Unobligated

\$47,544.79



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Statewide Economic Impact of VPA-HIP

If we conservatively assume 0.5 hunters and 0.5 wildlife watchers each visitor day on all VPA-HIP properties annually, we project:

47,815 hunter use days

47,815 wildlife watching use days

The USFWS 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation in Wisconsin found that resident hunters spent \$26/day and resident wildlife-watchers spent \$19/day in pursuit of these recreational activities.

Hunter use expenditures = \$1,243,190

Wildlife watching expenditures = \$908,485

**Annual User Expenditures = \$2,151,675**



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Statewide Economic Impact of VPA-HIP



Annual investment in the VPA-HIP program through landowner payments is \$305,302. Considering annual user expenditures, the VPA-HIP program in Wisconsin is expected to generate a return of \$7.00 for every dollar invested.

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Promotion & Outreach

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## **Number of Landowners Contacted Regarding Public Access: 49,845 landowners**

People were contacted directly (mailings, phone calls, etc.) and indirectly (presentations, website views, press releases, etc.) regarding the VPA-HIP program. The most success came from a direct mailing to all Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants in Wisconsin totaling just over 12,000 private landowners. As a result, 52 landowners, or 20% of total VPA-HIP participants enrolled into VPA-HIP. A four-page article on the VPA-HIP program was published in the Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine in August 2012 generating additional interest from landowners looking to enroll and hunters looking for a new place to hunt. <http://dnr.wi.gov/wnrmag/2012/08/land.htm>

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Promotion & Outreach

## Additional Public Land Acres Open to Access

As a result of VPA-HIP: 610 acres land, 3 acres open water

- Many of these land-locked properties were enrolled in the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program where landowners receive a tax break if they open their land to public access. VPA-HIP now provides an access point to these lands.

## Acres of Habitat Enhancement thru VPA-HIP

CREP: 0 acres

Non-CREP: 0 acres

- No funds were designated for habitat enhancement in Wisconsin's VPA-HIP grant proposal. However, VPA-HIP field staff provided technical assistance to interested landowners. Approximately 50% of VPA-HIP participants received technical assistance such as general habitat improvement advice and referrals to other local, state, and federal conservation agencies that provide cost share for habitat enhancement practices.
- A total of 3,259 CREP participants were contacted regarding VPA-HIP and 17 enrolled in VPA-HIP.



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Promotion & Outreach



The Wisconsin DNR was instrumental in promoting the VPA-HIP program in the week before the annual gun deer hunt.

- An “access chat” allowed staff to answer questions from hunters looking for new places to hunt.
- VPA-HIP was featured in an “E-Update” from Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker to a subscription of 100,000 people.
- A [VPA-HIP video](#) was produced and featured on the DNR webpage. To date, the video has 2,197 views on YouTube. Viewers were from 40 of the 50 states, 1733 of those views were from Wisconsin, 180 from Illinois, and 78 from Minnesota.

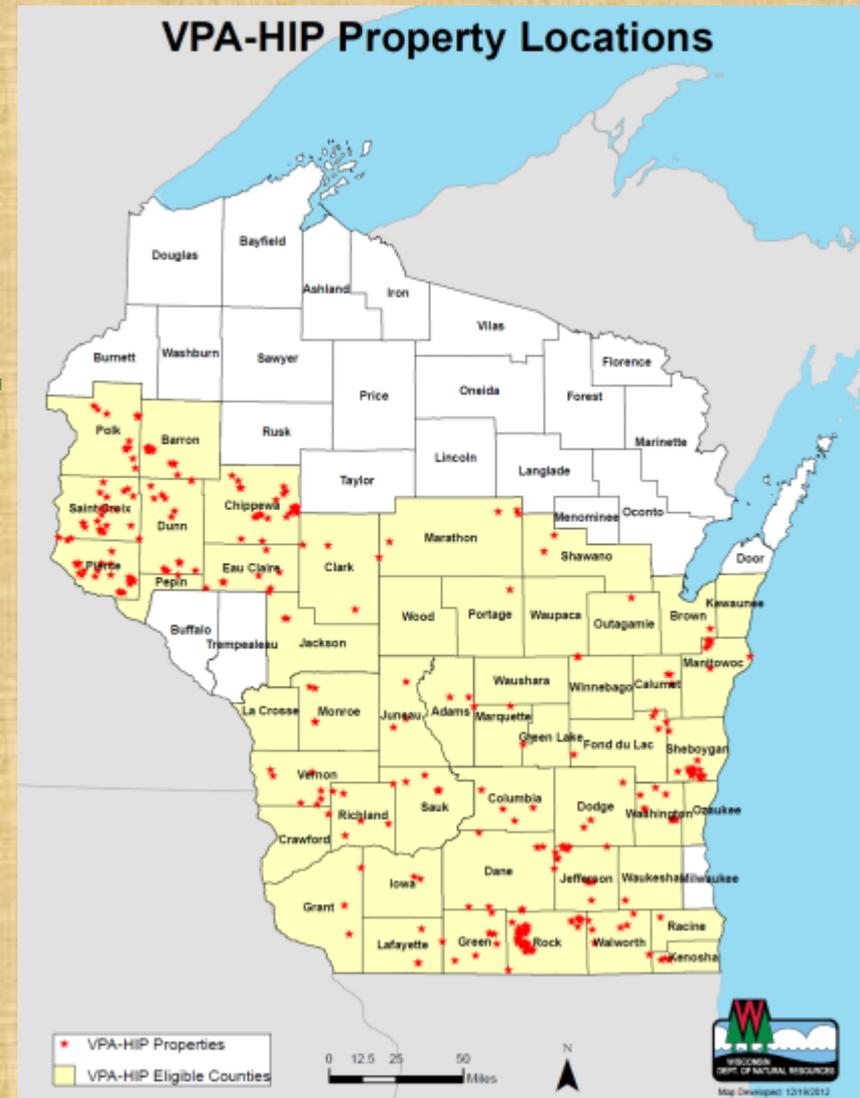
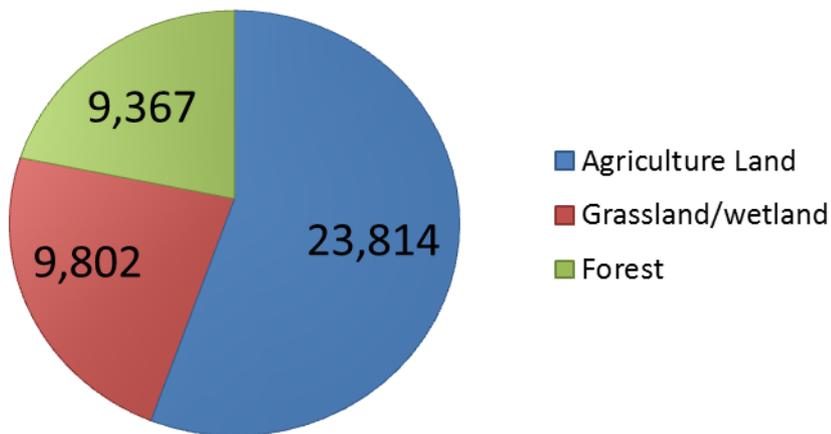
# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Enrollments

Properties Enrolled: 262

Acres Enrolled: 42,985.13 acres

Average size: 185.56 acres

## Acres Breakdown



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Enrollments

## Number of Participating Landowners

Before VPA-HIP: 88 landowners<sup>1</sup>  
After VPA-HIP: 241 landowners



Percent  
Increase  
174%

## Private Land

### Open to Public Access

Before VPA-HIP: 14,231.99 acres<sup>1</sup>  
After VPA-HIP: 42,985.13 acres



Percent  
Increase  
202%

<sup>1</sup>Participating landowners and acres identified above were enrolled in the state-funded Public Hunting Grounds (PHG) program prior to implementation of VPA-HIP in 2011.

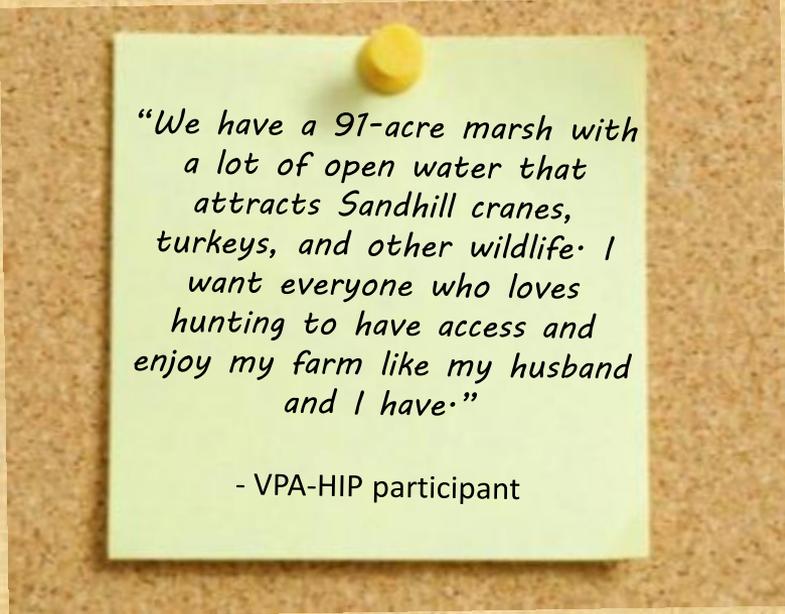
# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Landowner Satisfaction

A survey was provided to each landowner of every property enrolled in VPA-HIP.

Of the 262 properties enrolled, we received 241 responses (92%)

- Most landowners would not continue to keep their land open without the VPA-HIP program (53%).
- In August 2012 all existing VPA-HIP participants were offered three-year extensions and new enrollees were offered longer (5-6 years) lease agreements. A total of 216 lessors (82%) extended their existing lease agreements or entered into longer lease agreements. The new end date for these lease agreements is August 31, 2017.
- Most feedback from landowners has been positive. Some of the reasons landowners enrolled were:
  - Excitement of seeing visitors enjoy their land.
  - Interest in keeping hunting traditions alive in Wisconsin
  - Currently do not hunt their own property
  - Increased wildlife damage control
  - Financial incentives that help offset taxes
  - Previously enrolled in the Public Hunting Grounds (PHG) program
  - Liability protection



*"We have a 91-acre marsh with a lot of open water that attracts Sandhill cranes, turkeys, and other wildlife. I want everyone who loves hunting to have access and enjoy my farm like my husband and I have."*

- VPA-HIP participant

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Recreational Users of Private Access



Although it is unknown how many hunters accessed lands enrolled in the Public Hunting Grounds (PHG) program prior to VPA-HIP, a conservative estimate would be that each of the 88 previously enrolled PHG properties were visited each day by 0.5 hunters<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, PHG properties would see 16,060 hunters annually.

$$88 \text{ properties} * 0.5 \text{ hunter} * 365 \text{ days} = 16,060 \text{ hunters}$$

<sup>2</sup>Hunting was the only activity allowed on lands enrolled in the PHG program.

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Recreational Users of Private Access

### Number of Recreational Users

Before VPA-HIP: 16,060 users

After VPA-HIP: 95,630 users



Percent  
Increase  
495%

To date, many responses have been received from the online survey (43) as well as post card surveys (575) evaluating visitor satisfaction with their visits to VPA-HIP properties. However, anecdotal observations of visitor use suggest this represents a small fraction of the actual visitors to these properties. Additionally, the [VPA-HIP webpage](#) had an impressive number of page views recorded (87,629 views from 10/1/2011 - 12/12/2012), along with many emails and phone calls requesting maps and program information. This suggests there is great interest in the VPA-HIP program in Wisconsin.

If we assume 0.5 wildlife viewers and 0.5 hunters visit each of the 262 VPA-HIP properties daily, we can expect to see 95,630 recreational users accessing VPA-HIP lands annually.

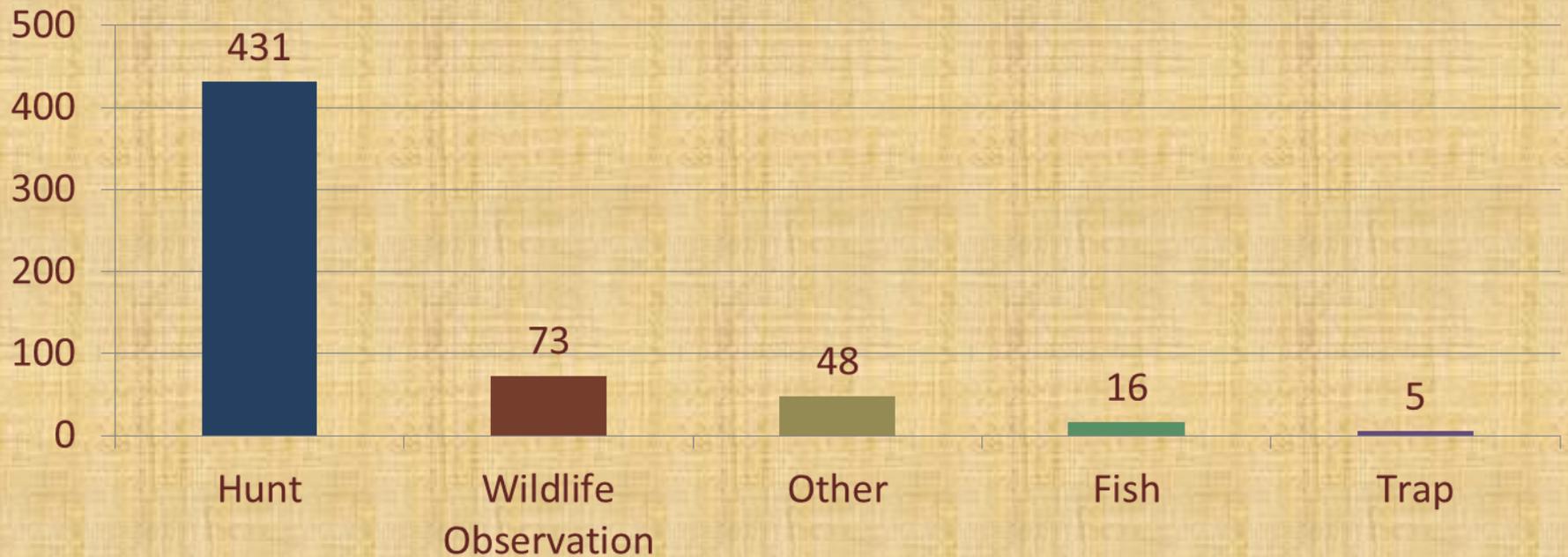
$262 \text{ properties} * (0.5 \text{ hunter} + 0.5 \text{ viewer}) * 365 \text{ days} = 95,630 \text{ recreational users}$

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Recreational Users of Private Access

Survey cards were available at all VPA-HIP properties and a similar survey is available on the Wisconsin VPA-HIP webpage. To date, user survey results are as follows:

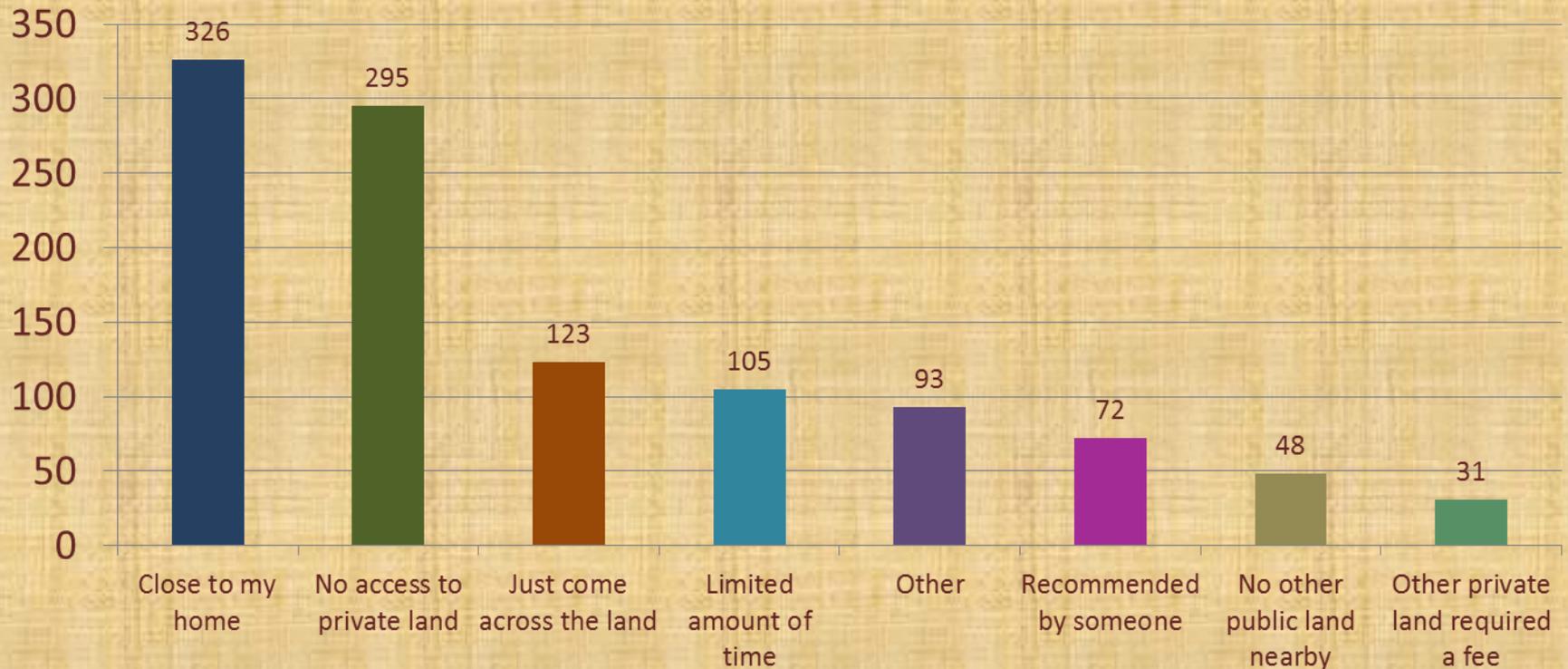
**What activity did you participate in on VPA-HIP lands today?**



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Visitor satisfaction

### Why did you choose to use this VPA-HIP Property today?



# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Visitor satisfaction

- The most popular activity conducted on VPA-HIP lands in Wisconsin was hunting. However, many visitors participated in multiple activities during their visit such as hunting & wildlife observation, hunting & trapping, etc.
- #1 reason for choosing VPA-HIP property
  - “Close to my home” (57%)
    - Average distance travelled one way = 19.8 miles
- #2 reason for choosing VPA-HIP property
  - “No access to private land” (51%)
    - Land typically visited for recreation = public land (87%)
- Of the 573 surveys cards collected:
  - 144 harvested fish or game
    - 25% success rate
- The majority of people would visit the same VPA-HIP property (92%) and/or another property (75%) again in the future



Photo Credit: Melissa Keenan

# Wisconsin Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## Visitor satisfaction



One VPA-HIP property that was recently restored through the USDA's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) became a hotspot for bird watching. Over 125 different bird species have been sighted on this property including many Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) such as the Federally listed Whooping Crane. A visitor captured one of her many visits here in a [YouTube Video](#).

- A total of 11 properties enrolled in VPA-HIP are also enrolled in WRP

Many people were successful hunting on VPA-HIP properties, especially during the 2012 Spring Turkey Season



Photo Credit: Missy Sparrow-Lien



Photo Credit: Ryan Brathal



Photo Credit: Michael Versland

"This program makes my many, years worth of Patrons license purchases all that much more valuable. I find incredible value in this program."

-Visitor to V1 in Richland County

"I really appreciate having the additional opportunity for hunting land and think it's a great program. I harvested a doe from a VPA property on Monday."

-Regular Visitor of VPA Lands

"Having [been] a conservation patron for [a] few years this program has come right at the moment when I was considering that the lack of the public access is going to negatively impact my decision to continue with hunting sport."

-Visitor to V167 in Walworth County