

Badger Oversight Management Commission Recommendation on Sauk Prairie Recreation Area Draft Conceptual Land Use Alternatives

The 2001 Badger Reuse Plan was an agreement entered into by 21 representatives of local, state, federal and tribal units of government as well as neighboring landowners, businesses, school districts and nonprofits. The plan emphasizes conservation and low-impact recreational activities and it is still in effect. The National Park Service agreement with DNR also emphasizes conservation and low-impact recreational activities. Alternative 4 below continues this emphasis on conservation and low-impact recreation uses.

Alternative 4: Conservation/Low Impact Recreation Emphasis

Under this management alternative, emphasis is placed on land uses and management objectives that complement each other and those of the surrounding land owners, enhancing the health, culture, and economy of the Badger lands and the surrounding community. This alternative views current planning and implementation efforts as the most recent expression of a long history of human activity on the Sauk Prairie, and as an opportunity to honor the sacrifices and contributions of our ancestors. It acknowledges the legacy of conflict that has marked previous chapters of human experience on the Sauk Prairie, and advances the process of reconciling these conflicts.

Healing the land is an essential step in that process, and at Badger, healing the land is a “re-creational” activity of the first order. Ecological restoration projects, aided by collaborative agricultural, educational, and scientific research programs, will support enhanced understanding and appreciation of Badger’s wildlife and its natural and cultural history, and demonstrate new ways to secure healthy, thriving human and natural communities. The history of all the people who have made the Sauk Prairie home over thousands of years will be shared. That history will include the story of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant and will continue through the current efforts to develop and implement the consensus vision for the future of this long contested site.

Opportunities for outdoor recreation will include traditional activities (such as hunting and fishing) that have long been among the varied uses of the Badger property, and that contribute importantly to greater awareness of Badger’s full conservation value. Of particular value are the property’s important populations of grassland birds. The presence of these birds and other wildlife will attract thousands of visitors, as wildlife viewing continues to expand in popularity in the coming decades. Because the benefits of peace and quiet are among the most rapidly diminishing natural resource values in our contemporary environment, and consequently are among the frequently most sought after, a wide variety of low-impact recreational activities will be accommodated. The opportunity to explore the Badger property, especially given the promise of a regional recreational trail linking the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area to nearby major regional trails, will draw thousands more to the area. Their experience of the area will be enhanced by interpretive trail signage and guided tours. Eventually, the creation of a Visitor Center will serve as a focal point for orienting visitors and as a destination for students of all ages interested in exploring Sauk Prairie’s unique geological, ecological, and human history. Visitors will be encouraged to participate in on-site restoration and citizen science projects.

Because agriculture is such a fundamental component of the Wisconsin economy and landscape, and will remain an essential tool for economic development and land stewardship in the future, creative opportunities will be provided for local family farm operators to participate in collaborative conservation agriculture research projects. Badger’s landscape includes not only the SPRA but lands now held by the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center and potentially the Ho-Chunk Nation, offering a unique and remarkable opportunity to study new ways to combine agricultural production with the conservation and restoration of soils, water, wildlife, forests, grasslands and wetlands. Research and demonstration of innovative conservation agriculture practices such as managed, rotational livestock grazing to help control invasive plants and woody vegetation will benefit the land, our farming neighbors, Badger’s recreational users, and the people of Wisconsin. Private landowners, volunteers, students, and community organizations will come to Badger and play an active role in these land restoration and stewardship activities. As Badger’s landowners work together with visitors,

neighbors, and partners, a changing landscape of row crop, pasture, restored prairies and savannas, and woodlands will provide a valuable model, showing how Wisconsin's land can support an agricultural economy that enhances farm families, local economies and farm communities, and healthy populations of native birds and other wildlife, in a public setting that can be enjoyed and appreciated by generations to come.

The following specific activities and uses are consistent with conservation and low-impact recreation:

- Implement plan elements specified in the Badger Reuse Plan;
- Restore large, unfragmented tracts of grassland, wetland and shrubland (Habitat Management Zone)* to support native and migratory birds and wildlife;
- Restore remnants of native natural communities and the species they support (Native Community Management Zone)*; limit access to pedestrian use;
- Provide low-impact porous non-paved recreation trails that complement the topography and resource management;
- Preserve and enhance key vistas through vegetation management;
- Selectively site and construct (through community partnerships) a new visitor center with interpretation and educational opportunities;
- Provide interpretation and education opportunities about this property's history and geographic location, acknowledge Ho-Chunk Nation history and Euro-American histories and displacements, and the design, operation and decommissioning of the Badger Army Ammunitions Plant;
- Provide facilities such as a classroom, parking area, staging area, wash station and bathrooms near the Visitor's Center in the Habitat Restoration Zone;
- Identify and improve primary auto access roads through the property and deconstruct roads no longer needed. Limit vehicle access;
- Provide interpretation and education opportunities for schools and universities;
- Use volunteers to promote community participation in education and to help restore natural communities;
- Provide outdoor research opportunities for ecologists, scientists and students;
- Develop parking, picnic areas and viewing areas in the Expanded Recreational Zone* and to a lesser degree in the Habitat Restoration Zone*;
- Develop a fishing pier, canoe/carry-in boat access, and picnic area at the Lake Wisconsin parcel;
- Provide a multiple use trail connecting the Sauk Prairie area, Merrimac area, and Devil's Lake State Park via Burma road consisting of hiking and biking and a seasonal snowmobile trail on an agreed upon route;
- Designate parcel "M" and "M1" as a Habitat Restoration Zone*;
- Remove any unwanted infrastructure, buildings or debris that remains on the property, with the exception of infrastructure that may provide bat habitat and support bat research.

Note (*): The use of the term "Zone(s)" above is to maintain compatibility with language in other DNR proposed alternatives; BOMC members feel this term in most cases is too restrictive and exclusive for Badger lands which often have characteristics of one or more zone types in one area. Exclusive use zones may conflict with the first Value of the Badger Reuse Plan: to manage Badger as a whole.