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Blendon Township State Game Area

Master Plan



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE DIVISION

IC 2039 (Rev. 6-11-2012)

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Ottawa County farmlands in this area were once excellent pheasant habitat (1940-1970), but changing land use and farming techniques caused substantial reductions in local pheasant populations. In response, the state purchased several land parcels for pheasant and other gamebird species management in areas of the state that once supported large pheasant populations. The land parcels of the Blendon Township State Game Area (BTSGA) were purchased between the years of 1973 and 1976 using a combination of 25% Recreation Bond Funds and 75% Pittman-Robertson (PR) dollars. PR funds are generated from taxes generated from the sale of firearms and ammunition. Because of this funding source, the major portion of the game area was purchased for the purpose of wildlife restoration and management. The focus of the BTSGA has not changed, and the long-term direction for habitat management goals remains the same.

The Blendon Township State Game Area plan derives landscape level direction and regional habitat issues for state game areas from goals and objectives identified in the South West Region (SWR) public land plan, and it shares many of the same goals and objectives as the nearby parcels of the Olive Township State Game Area. It supports other Wildlife Division plans and objectives including Guiding Principles and Strategies (GPS) for species (0.1.1) and habitat management (0.2.1), More Bang for the Buck objectives to bring back quality pheasant and cottontail rabbit hunting, goals identified in the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative, and the American Woodcock Conservation Plan. The potential exists to partner with local private land ownerships in the vicinity of the BTSGA land parcels to expand these goals outside of the boundaries of state land ownership.

Plant succession and the conversion of old fields and grasslands to woody vegetation is a significant habitat issue affecting the Blendon Township State Game Area. Non-native species such as autumn olive and honeysuckle were planted decades ago, and have colonized large portions of the state land parcels. It will be a challenge to reclaim these sites. Other features include several artificial and naturally occurring wetland ponds that are providing nesting opportunities for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. Adjacent private properties still include a large amount of agricultural land, but residential development is probably the most significant factor affecting land use in this area. Ottawa County planners have estimated that up to 70 square miles of county open space will be converted to residential and commercial development in the next 20 years. Much of this growth is expected to be in the corridor from Grand Rapids to the Lake Michigan lakeshore, including the area around the BTSGA. Habitat loss or fragmentation through development is expected to be an increasingly contentious issue. At this writing, the Blendon Township SGA has not gone through the IFMAP habitat mapping process. However, the following table will provide an overview of habitat types on the area parcels.

Habitat Type	Acres
Grassland/herbaceous	35
Ponds/wetlands	7
Grassland mixed w/ lowland brush	14
Upland brush	18
Mixed brush w/ lowland hardwoods	19
Lowland hardwoods	42
Aspen	7
Mixed aspen w/ hardwoods	14
Sassafras	2
Scotch and red pine	7
Sedge meadow	13
Cattail	2
Totals	180

What follows is the strategic direction for the Blendon Township State Game Area. This plan describes the **goals** for the area, the **objectives** under each goal, and the **actions** associated with each objective. For the purposes of this master plan, the following definitions will be used:

Goal –A desired future condition of the area.

Objective – A management approach or strategy that the best science suggests can be used to move the area toward the goal. An objective is a quantifiable input to be completed within a timeframe that contributes toward accomplishing the goal.

Action – An operational means to accomplish an objective. An action is a step needed to complete an objective and is described in sufficient detail to inform implementation in operational and annual work plans. It is expected to take approximately ten years to complete all objectives.



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"OTTAWA COUNTY MINIS" BLENDON TOWNSHIP STATE GAME AREA AND OLIVE TOWNSHIP STATE GAME AREA OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN

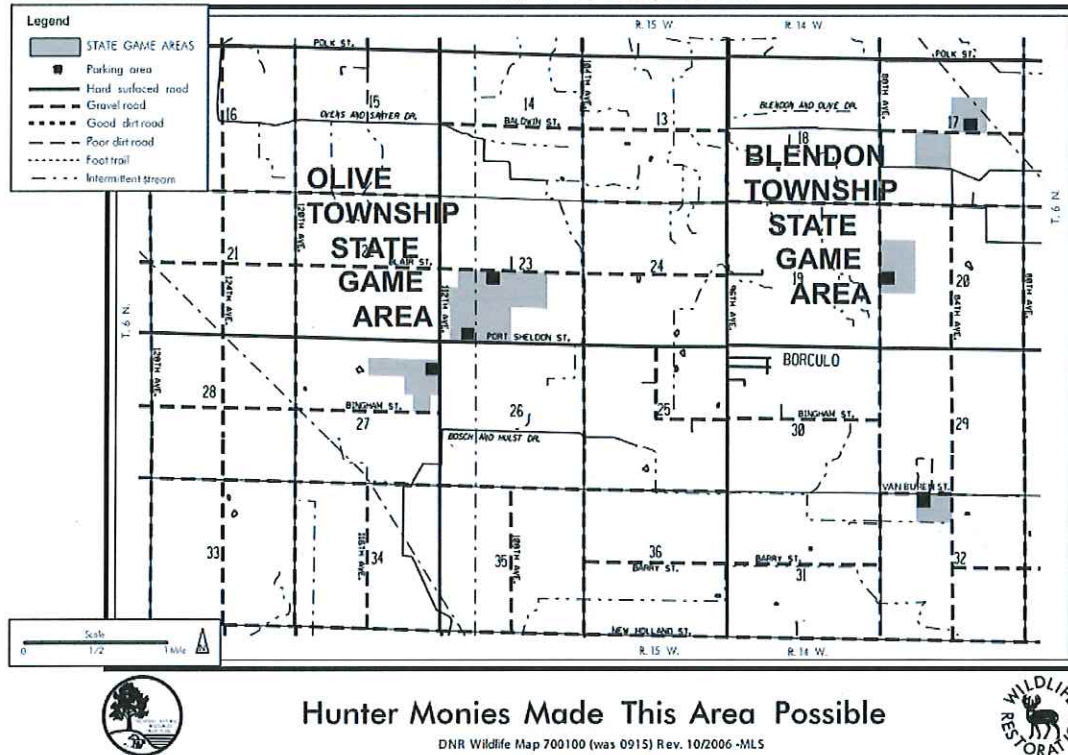


Figure 1. Blendon Township State Game Area Boundaries

Goals/Objectives/Actions (listed as highest priority to lowest)

Goal I is a sustainable population of small game species on the SGA, especially ring-necked pheasants and cottontail rabbits.

Rationale: These parcels of land were purchased for pheasant and small game management, and ring-necked pheasants are listed as a featured species and prized by Michigan hunters. Managing for their habitat benefits numerous other wildlife species.

Metrics: staff observation, surveys, and hunter feedback; assessment of habitat management trends across time within IFMAP.

Objective A: increase current grassland and opening acreage by 25 acres in the next decade.

Action 1. Remove woody vegetation and encroachment of invasive species by mechanical (mowing, bulldozer and blade rake) means and use of approved herbicides – approximately 2 to 3 acres per year.

Action 2. Follow up with hand cutting of woody vegetation in treatment areas, and basal stem herbicide application as needed.

Action 3. Establish 20 acres of new herbaceous plantings on the SGA in the next 5 years using DNR staff and volunteers, by planting 10 acres of warm and cool season grasses for nesting and winter thermal cover and 10 acres of food plots.

Objective B: Provide suitable escape cover for cottontail rabbits.

Action 1. Build 20 new brush piles (at least 5 per SGA parcel) in the next 5 years, using both DNR staff and volunteer organizations.

Goal II: Increase mallard reproduction at the South Baldwin 40 and Van Buren 40 parcels.

Rationale: Mallards are listed as a featured species for the Blendon Township SGA. Wetland ponds already exist at these sites, so extensive habitat alteration is not necessary. Waterfowl hunters, trappers, and other area users will benefit from improved wildlife habitat and wetland wildlife use.

Metrics: Hunter feedback and staff inspection of nesting structures and wetland habitat.

Objective A: Remove encroaching woody vegetation around pond perimeters.

Action 1. Mow 5 acres of brush along pond shorelines in late summer. Complete mowing work around 5 ponds by 2016.

Action 2. Hand cut with chainsaw and remove large cottonwoods around the ponds. Use material for brush pile construction at other SGA locations.

Objective B: Install new waterfowl nesting structures at the ponds.

Action 1. Place 3 new mallard nest structures at the ponds by 2015.

Action 2. Place 3 new wood duck nesting boxes at the ponds by 2015. Install boxes with predator guards, south facing aspect for early warm-up, and without direct sight lines to other boxes to limit dump nesting.

Goal III: Encourage wildlife management partnerships with township officials, private landowners, and conservation organizations.

Rationale: Blendon Township SGA is only 140 acres in size, and by itself can provide only limited management areas and opportunities. It would require a larger land base to significantly benefit local wildlife populations. Partnerships with other landowners and organizations provide the best opportunity to influence a larger geographic area.

Metrics: Workshops, volunteer numbers, and acres of land affected.

Objective A: Bring together state, township, conservation organization representatives, and private landowners to gauge interest in a program.

Action 1. Hold small game management workshop in Blendon Township by 2015.

Objective B: Encourage use of private land grants for habitat work.

Action 1. Work with DNR Wildlife Private Lands program to enroll local landowners.

Recreational and Commercial Uses

Recreational and commercial uses on the area that are not incidental to our management for the purposes described above are generally not allowed. These uses can be allowed, however, under the following circumstances:

1. The uses must not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. The DNR has no obligations to determine if requested uses would conflict or interfere; the burden of determining must remain with those requesting the uses.
3. The requested uses cannot be exclusive of other allowable uses and must not result in the DNR losing management control of any portion of the area.
4. A lack of a specific prohibition in rules and regulations for the area does not constitute approval of the activity.
5. The DNR always reserves the ability to disallow activities previously allowed as wildlife conservation needs dictate.

Additionally, the DNR will continue to monitor any existing commercial and recreational uses for interference with the intended purposes of the area as described in this plan.

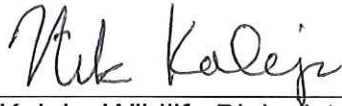
Acquisition and Disposal of Land

The current project boundaries of the BTSGA do not allow for expansion, and these dedicated boundaries would have to be changed for any expansion to be considered. There are no private land inholdings within the small parcels of the BTSGA, and there is also no plan or intent to reduce the size of the BTSGA areas.

Review and Approval

This plan was available for public review and comment on the DNR website between May 1, 2015 and May 31, 2015. During this comment period, three comments were received and considered before finalizing this plan. In addition, on April 2, 2015, a small game management meeting was held at the Olive Township Hall to discuss pheasant cooperative habitat management potential with adjacent private landowners, at both the Blendon and Olive Township SGAs. Approximately 10 landowners attended the meeting. While there were no specific habitat projects added to the BTSGA plan, it was agreed to continue the dialogue with other potential partners for both private and public land wildlife habitat management. The final plan was approved on June 25, 2015 and will be reviewed within 10 years of the final approval date."

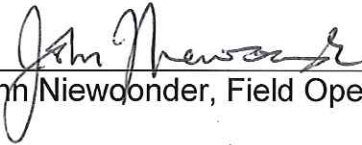
Approvals



Nik Kalejs, Wildlife Biologist (Author)

06/25/15

Date



John Niewoonder, Field Operations Manager

6/25/15

Date



Steve Chadwick, Regional Supervisor

6-25-15

Date

