

Mississippi Valley Conservancy applauds the DNR efforts for the regional master planning in the Western Coulees and Ridges Ecological Landscape. All 9 counties in the Conservancy's service area are encompassed within the Western Coulee and Ridges Ecological Landscape.

A number of DNR-managed properties are directly adjacent to Conservancy nature preserves and Conservancy-held conservation easements. Allowed activities and management efforts **directly** impact Conservancy protected lands. Ecologically based habitat restoration and management of DNR lands **directly** impacts the health of rare species, the functionality of natural communities, water quality, and the potential for our area to be resilient to a changing climate, all of which are priorities for the mission of Mississippi Valley Conservancy.

We encourage Conservancy members and volunteers to participate in the public comment period for this plan, in support of our mission for conservation and in support of the incredible natural resources southwest Wisconsin has to offer. **For your convenience, we have provided comment suggestions that reflect the conservation goals of the Conservancy in this pdf document.** Feel free to copy and paste the prepared comments into the corresponding fields on DNR's Online Input Form. Or you can print this page and reference it when filling out the DNR's Hard Copy Input Form.

Comments may be made online or by mail and are **due to DNR by December 23rd** at this website:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fl/PropertyPlanning/WesternCouleesAndRidges>

We appreciate your time in this effort and your commitment to conservation!

1. **Please share any thoughts you may have on the management of habitats, species and other natural resources generally on DNR properties in the Western Coulees and Ridges region. Useful information for the planning team includes issues to address or suggestions for future management of the properties. You'll have an opportunity to provide property-specific input later on in this form. 10,000 characters.**

- This master planning process is specific to lands owned and managed by the DNR. Conservation organizations such as Mississippi Valley Conservancy own land and hold conservation easements on private lands adjacent to DNR lands. We strongly recommend that this master plan incorporate habitat connectivity and opportunities for conservation linkages to support wildlife movement across the landscape.
- State parks should be evaluated on a site by site basis to determine what areas have the highest native biodiversity. These areas offer the greatest opportunity for ecological benefit and resilience to a changing climate and should be managed for that purpose. We commend the DNR for their climate-forward approach to management at Rush Creek State Natural Area.

- The greatest proportion of rare and state-listed species can be found in prairies, oak opening, and oak woodland; as such, these natural communities should be prioritized for habitat management.
- Habitat management activities that are occurring on DNR State Natural Areas should continue to be a priority for staffing and funding. State natural areas are a model for habitat management that should be implemented in state parks, fishery areas, and other DNR lands. We commend the SNA crews for their professionalism and dedication to ensuring these lands continue to be resilient to a changing climate.
- Western Coulees & Ridges is a fire-dependent landscape; the plan should acknowledge the significance of fire in the region. The DNR should increase their capacity to implement prescribed fire on a broader scale to include fisheries areas and other DNR sites.
- The expertise and methods provided by the SNA prescribed burn program should be incorporated into the management of forestry, parks, wildlife, and other DNR lands.
- Planning efforts for timber harvesting on state parks and other lands should be strategically implemented to sustain mature oak, expand oak communities, and benefit forest-interior nesting birds.
- Future management on sites with water resources and riparian areas should prioritize opportunities to restore hydrologic function to floodplains and increase the native biodiversity.

2. Please share any thoughts you may have on the management of recreation and public use generally on DNR properties in the Western Coulees and Ridges region. Useful information for the planning team includes issues to address or suggestions for future management of the properties. You'll have an opportunity to provide property-specific input later on in this form.

- Southwest Wisconsin has a reputation as an outstanding scenic resource. We appreciate that DNR-managed lands prioritize providing opportunities for visitors to experience wild, natural, undeveloped, and unfragmented habitats.
- Continue to prioritize low-impact, nature based recreational opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, nature photography, hunting, and fishing.
- Prioritize the maintenance of existing infrastructure prior to planning new construction. Strive for sustainable funding and/or a well-established and committed volunteer force to maintain existing infrastructure.
- Some recreational uses facilitate the transport and spread of invasive species. All areas with recreational infrastructure (trails, parking lots, campgrounds) should

incorporate additional financial and staffing resources for sustainable invasive species control.

3. Please provide your input on any additional or new recreation opportunities you would like to see at DNR properties in the region. If there is a specific property you would like to see the activity at, please be sure to list it.

- Limery Ridge Savanna State Natural Area, Perrot State Park, and Cassville Bluffs State Natural Area are three sites that offer opportunities to expand acquisition boundaries to incorporate high quality adjacent habitat and provide for additional public recreation opportunities.
- The Mississippi River Corridor is ranked higher than the state average for its proportion of trails used for motorized recreation. Ensure that motorized vehicle use is not expanded so that public recreational opportunities for “quiet” activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, nature photography, hunting, and fishing are not compromised.
- Prioritize recreational opportunities that provide a natural experience and quiet, low-impact, nature-based recreation such as hiking, wildlife viewing, nature photography, hunting, and fishing.
- Avoid fragmentation created by the construction of new infrastructure to better support the ecology and resiliency within our diverse natural communities. Infrastructure planning should incorporate in-depth ecological evaluation and species surveys to prevent habitat degradation or wildlife disruption caused by expanded public access.
- To reduce the spread of invasive species and preserve intact habitats, concentrate the development of recreational infrastructure to locations that are already impacted by degradation. Any new infrastructure should incorporate sustainable funding for long-term management of invasive species.

4. Please share any additional comments you have on the current and future use and management of DNR properties in the Western Coulees and Ridges region

- Several DNR-managed sites are adjacent to areas with significant existing habitat and/or restoration potential. Ecological assessment of the habitat adjacent to state lands should be conducted and acquisition boundaries evaluated for opportunities to allow for strategic expansion of public lands as sites become available. Limery Ridge Savanna State Natural Area, Perrot State Park, and Cassville Bluffs State Natural Area are three sites that offer opportunities.
- The Western Coulee and Ridges region is large and involves a wider variety of natural communities than any other ecoregion in the State of Wisconsin. Consider dividing the master planning process into separate master plans for the Mississippi River

Corridor, the Southern Gateways, and the Western Sands to better address needs and priorities.

- State parks should incorporate opportunities for dark skies and limit light pollution.

In addition to the general topics above, you may wish to comment on management of the specific properties listed below (optional). You may choose to reference or repeat some of the ideas already expressed above.

DNR will develop management plans that are compliant with Chapter NR 44 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code for each property in the Western Coulees and Ridges Regional Master Plan that does not have an NR 44-compliant plan. To give input on the future management of a specific property, please use the drop down list to select the specific properties you would like to give input on.

MESSAGE to members – below is a list of sites within the Conservancy service area that are included in the planning process. Several of these sites are adjacent to Conservancy lands and would benefit from your input on the future management and use of these sites.

Cassville Bluffs State Natural Area

Kickapoo Wildlife Area (adjacent to Plum Creek)

Limery Ridge Savanna State Natural Area

Perrot State Park

Rush Creek State Natural Area

Trempealeau Lakes Fishery Area