

## WWA-DNR Public Wetland Restoration Program Description

For the WWA Board: WWA is faced with an opportunity to grow our habitat program, with most of the staff costs to be reimbursed under the Pittman Robertson funding the state receives. The program description below is intended to be a living outline to help align expectations between the ED, the Board and the DNR. As negotiations and discussions continue between these parties, this outline will be turned into an agreement between the DNR and WWA that will carry the weight of a contract. There are benefits and costs to such an arrangement the Board must consider.

If we can successfully conclude the agreement with the DNR, WWA stands to benefit from:

- **doubled ecologist capacity for habitat work for only 25% additional cost**
- **increased focus on public wetlands that brings the benefit of**
  - **increased number of grants/dollars, and larger number of impacted acres that WWA will restore**
  - **greater public awareness of WWA and its impact**
  - **increased ability to leverage grant dollars (more grant match)**
  - **increased member satisfaction through our work that they can actually hunt on**
  - **improved standing in the practitioner community**
  - **potential to attract greater sponsor support**

To undertake and sustain this additional effort will require:

- **WWA commitment of required funding for its share of salary (25% of ecologist position).**
  - **Identify new sources of revenue to supplement WWA funds (EXPO, private donors, corporate sponsors).**
- **Board acknowledgement and sanction of increased management burden on Executive and Administrative Directors**
  - **Risk mitigation approach to possible overstretch?**

**At this board meeting, I am looking to provide information on current outline of the program, discussion of issues, and guidance towards my negotiation with the DNR.**

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*Blue italicized comments are possibilities not yet envisioned during initial discussions with DNR and would be subject to discussion/agreement with DNR.*

**Program overview:** WWA will hire a wetland ecologist to work with DNR property managers to identify, design, cost estimate, and help prioritize wetland restoration opportunities on state-owned properties.

The ecologist will develop a written plan for each prioritized restoration opportunity such that it will be ready to submit for funding opportunities (Duck Stamp, NAWCA, others), and subsequent bidding.

*Discussion points:*

1. *(Yes/No) In concert with the DNR property manager, the WWA ecologist will develop the grant submission and monitor the progress of the project through funding, permitting, engineering and construction.*
2. *(Yes/No) Once grant funding is received for a specific project, the WWA ecologist will undertake the permitting required.*
3. *(Yes/No) Once grant funding is received for a specific project, the WWA ecologist will undertake arranging contracting for engineering and other contractors, as needed, to align with the available funding*
4. *(Yes/No) Once contracting is arranged, the WWA will oversee the contract management and on-site work*

**Objective:** The purpose to this program is to accelerate the identification and design of worthy restorations of state-owned wetlands and associated uplands in the south, east and central locations of the state.

*(Yes/No) Once funded through various sources, this program will also accelerate the actual restoration of those properties.*

**Background:** The volume of wetland and associated upland acres on state-owned properties exceeds the capacity and expertise of DNR property managers to develop and oversee restoration opportunities. Once-vibrant wetlands have fallen into decay, and opportunities to restore altered hydrology are being missed. However, through Pittman-Robertson Act (P-R) funding, the state DNR has funds available to assist in addressing this issue. The DNR does not have the staffing flexibility to hire wetland ecologists specialists directly for this purpose, but can use the P-R funding to engage partners with this expertise through contractual agreements.

WWA has a 35-year track record of restoring hydrology to altered landscapes and protecting wetlands and their associated uplands. Restorations on both public and private lands have been well-received, efficient and stand the test of time. WWA has been successful in applying for and managing wetland restoration grants to achieve the purposes and administrative requirements of the grants. It has been a consistently helpful partner to the DNR, other levels of government and non-profits organizations when collaborating on wetland restoration projects. However, WWA does not have current capacity to undertake this program without additional funding to hire and manage an ecologist focused on this program.

**Program Description:** The DNR and WWA will reach a contractual agreement that outlines the expectations of each party, including funding levels, goals, and metrics indicating expected levels of activity. Based on that agreement, WWA would receive funding to assist in hiring a 2-year limited term, FTE wetland ecologist

to undertake the duties outlined. This position would be funded 25% by WWA and 75% WDNR (PR funding). [Recently, the Waterfowl Hunters EXPO has begun discussing but has not yet formalized a willingness to use excess EXPO funds for this purpose. ] This ecologist would be a WWA employee, under the supervision of the WWA Executive Director.

WWA will monitor progress and provide regular updates to the DNR for their own reporting requirements under their P-R funding expectations.

**Program Activities:** The goal is to review state wildlife areas (WA) for potential wetland restoration. It is suspected that potential restoration projects are present within many of the WA.

*Discussion item: (Yes/No) A second tier would be non-DNR lands open to the public such as those purchased with K-N Stewardship funding, or State Natural Areas, or forest lands.*

The WWA ecologist would undertake desktop reviews utilizing standard available resources such as but not limited to Surface Water Data viewer, county GIS, NRCS soils, TNC wet tool, historic air photos and original land surveys. Analysis would identify current cover type, presence of potential drainage features, soil type, located in floodplain or not, note of potential obvious obstacles, general comments and question from review and local contact for land manager/wildlife biologist.

WDNR staff and county wildlife biologists would be consulted on priorities and projects they have identified. Additionally identified projects from the desktop review would be consulted with WDNR staff to determine interest and overlap and review of findings. Field review of all opportunities identified by WWA would occur to verify and identify feasibility of on-the-ground conditions. This field information would be collected in a GPS-based app for ease of transferring information to the desktop.

Selection of sites warranting design and restoration plan development will be prioritized by:

1. A mutual verbal agreement between WWA and WDNR of any high priority projects.
2. Utilizing the WWHCS HUC 12 ranking.
3. Other, as agreed with DNR program leadership

Top priority sites would go through field work typical of base wetlands restoration information gathering to prepare a restoration plan. This could include but is not limited to- survey, design, soil profiles, monitoring wells, pre review of plans with WMS if desired need seems appropriate and ER review. WWA's wetland ecologist would be responsible for developing discrete site designs/descriptions and preparing a package of project information that would be easy to modify for submission to various funding sources.

*Discussion item: Second stage activities: WWA Ecologist would assist DNR Wildlife Biologist in applying for permits and funding sources once plan is developed and help facilitate bidding and construction. This would relieve DNR staff but allow them to be engaged and help facilitate project completion through efficiencies. Example: DNR would be the applicant on permits to minimize fees and expedite timelines but Ecologist would prepare the permits for submission. DNR staff would be application on state funding sources but WWA would be co-applicant that would carry out duties to facilitate bidding and contracting to minimize time and expense with state contracting and field staff work load.*

## Possible Metrics of Activities to be included in the DNR-WWA Agreement:

### *Outline FOR DISCUSSION ONLY*

16 counties with HUC 12- 9 ranking in Eastern WI from Brown to Jefferson (NED SOD primarily)- total of 67 properties numerous have multiple tracts with some properties outside the priority area of the WWHCS. This constitutes just WA , but could be more on state NA, State Forest Lands.

- Review all properties 67, 536hrs
- Meet with local staff 12, 96hrs
- Plans for 12, 480hrs- (difficult to estimate accurately)
- Site visits 64, 512 hrs
- Staff meetings 45, 45 hrs
- *Funding request (grant writing) 120*
- *Construction 291 hrs*

Total hours = 2080hrs

### **Timeline:**

- Spring 2022: DNR and WWA reach agreement on contractual expectations and funding availability. WWA develops job description for ecologist, starts seeking candidate.
- Summer 2022: WWA's dedicates some time (up to 20 hours per month) of current ecologist to initiate program and identify "low hanging restoration fruit" to jump start program;
- Fall 2022: WWA hires new ecologist 2 year LTE

*Discussion item: Part time/ full time? Seasonal?*

**Next Steps:** WWA and DNR agree to specifics of program outline and timeline to implementation.

### **Annually:**

*Personnel (Wetland Ecologist)- \$41,600 = 2080/yr = \$20/hr*

*Mileage- 10,000miles x .56= \$5,600*

*Discussion item:*

*Overhead cost reimbursement?*

*Reimbursement vs ?*