



**Proposed Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project  
At Walking Iron Wildlife Area  
August 6, 2015**



Walking Iron County Wildlife Area is 898 acres situated in the Town of Mazomanie between Walking Iron County Park and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Mazomanie Unit Wildlife Area. Dane County Parks has secured matching funds to restore 77 acres of wildlife habitat from the Wisconsin DNR Turkey Stamp Program and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Staff from Dane County Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program are developing a management plan for this project. They have studied past use of the land, physical characteristics including soil, water, existing vegetation, and wildlife opportunities.

The vision is for a mix of woodland, oak savanna, grasslands, and early successional (young forest) habitats. Restoration activities will include tree harvest, invasive species control, seeding, and follow up maintenance with mowing, selective herbicide, and prescribed fire. Wildlife intended to benefit from restoration of these habitats include: wild turkey, white tailed deer, Eastern blue birds, red-headed woodpeckers, ruffed grouse, Bobwhite quail, woodcock, and native pollinators.

**Schedule**

- Summer 2015 public outreach and engagement
- \*Fall/Winter 2015-16 commercial tree harvest (between Oct 1 – March 31)
- invasive species treatment
- Spring/Summer 2016 continued invasive treatment
- seed designated open areas
- Spring 2017 prescribed fire
- Summer/Fall 2017 follow up invasive species management
- Spring 2018 prescribed fire

\*Timber sales are often bid with a two year window to allow for weather and other complexities in the timber industry. As such our schedule is an estimate.

The 77 acre restoration area has been divided into eight management units. Units were designed based on their current condition, physical attributes, and potential for wildlife habitat.

### **Unit 1 Roadside (10 acres – 13%)**

**Current Condition:** Sapling to pole size black and burr oak with a distinct browse line from past cattle grazing. Occasional invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle exist within the oak canopy. One Chinese elm is located within the stand. Roadsides contain invasive species including wild parsnip and spotted knapweed. Some dead oaks are present from past flooding.

**Desired Future Condition:** A healthy invasive free young oak stand that deters trespass vehicle traffic.

**Justification:** Roadsides are often vectors for invasive species to expand to new areas. Controlling limited populations currently contained to the roadside is important for the health of the wildlife area. The wildlife area is open to public recreation. This recreation does not include off road vehicle access. Maintaining a 50 foot buffer of higher tree density along the road perimeter will discourage trespass vehicle use.

**Recommendation:** Mow and selectively foliar herbicide populations of invasive species along the roadway. Several treatments will be necessary. Basal bark herbicide all invasive trees and shrubs within the unit. Where possible soften the straight line of tree edge by selectively removing trees during the timber sale. Seed open areas to a diverse mix of native flowers and grass.

### **Unit 2 Oak Openings (4 acres – 5%)**

**Current Condition:** High cattle traffic and loitering has left open areas with weedy early successional vegetation. Most trees are pole size. There is some tree mortality possibly from livestock pressure. Spotted knapweed is present along the road and property line.

**Desired Future Condition:** A mosaic of diverse prairie understory with scattered oaks with few to no invasive species provides nesting and foraging habitat for wild turkey and savanna dependent wildlife. These open areas will be courtship areas for peenting woodcock and display areas for wild turkeys.

**Justification:** Roadsides are often vectors for invasive species to expand to new areas. Controlling limited populations currently contained to the roadside is important for the health of the wildlife area. A diverse prairie planting amongst scattered oaks is one of the rarest habitats in WI.

**Recommendation:** Mow weedy vegetation. Foliar spray weedy vegetation several times as preparation for seeding. Collect and order seed for the area. Plant the area with a diverse prairie

mix late fall 2017. Some trees may be harvested with the adjacent harvest on other units. Treat all invasive species with appropriate herbicide.

### **Unit 3 Savanna Transition (31 acres – 40%)**

**Current Condition:** Unit is a diverse mixed hardwoods with scattered invasive buckthorn. The unit is trending towards more mesophytic woodland through increased shade and lack of disturbance. Past grazing has left little to no oak regeneration. Dead oaks are present likely from oak wilt. Patches of the invasive Red canary grass, barberry, honeysuckle, and multi-flora rose are present.

**Desired Future Condition:** Oak savanna with 20-50% tree canopy cover dominated by white oaks (burr, white, and swamp) with a scattering of cherry, hackberry, and elm. Few invasive species are present.

**Justification:** Oak savanna and woodland habitats attract game and nongame wildlife for nest, forage, and cover. Changes in land use have left these cover types in rapid decline with a trend towards habitat less favorable to game species. Removing the straight hard edge from the woodland to current crop ground will provide better habitat for turkey and Red-headed woodpeckers. A diverse grass understory will provide nest and foraging habitat for turkey. Increased flowers will promote native pollinators.

**Recommendation:** Leave the lone apple tree as a wildlife tree. Through a commercial timber sale remove all red maple, aspen, and 75% of black cherry. Most elm will remain as future wildlife trees as they succumb to Dutch elm disease. The goal will be to have a minimum of 5 wildlife trees per acre. Aspen will naturally regenerate to provide early successional browse habitat for turkey, ruffed grouse, woodcock, bobwhite quail, and white tail deer. Red maple stumps will be treated with herbicide to prevent resprouts. Herbicide any invasives like Reed canary grass. Clearly establish property lines with adjacent private land. Establish firebreaks for future prescribed fire. Firebreaks could double as hiking trails.

### **Units 4, 5, & 7 Early Successional Habitat (Sum 13 acres – 17%)**

(3, 7, & 3 acres – 4%, 9%, & 4%)

**Current Condition:** Past tree harvests and recent land use have led this unit to be red maple aspen dominated units. River birch is represented well in these units. Invasive species include thistle, Reed canary grass, buckthorn, barberry, and multi-flora rose. Dead black oaks are present presumably from oak wilt.

**Desired Future Condition:** Allow natural regeneration of aspen and river birch for wildlife browse and cover. Wildlife such as ruffed grouse, bobwhite quail, woodcock, and white tailed deer will browse the aspen regeneration.

**Justification:** Early successional habitats are in decline in WI as are the wildlife dependent upon them. Many of these game species the public enjoy harvesting.

**Recommendation:** Invasive brush will be treated with herbicide via basal bark application. All red maple will be harvested in a timber sale. Dead oaks will be left as wildlife trees. Many elms will be left as future wildlife trees as they succumb to Dutch elm disease. Aspen will be coppice cut and allowed to naturally regenerate. Some soil scarification may be implemented to encourage river birch regeneration.

### **Unit 6 Oak Savanna (17 acres – 22%)**

**Current Condition:** The southern portion of this unit received little to no grazing. The northern portion was grazed by cattle. The northern portion contains a small man made open water wetland. Dead oak trees suggest oak wilt is present.

**Desired Future Condition:** A diverse mix of oak savanna from 10% - 50% canopy cover. The white oak family will thrive while oak wilt will continue to create snag trees from black oaks. As Dutch elm disease kills elms additional snag trees will be created for nesting and foraging habitat for red-headed wood peckers and Eastern blue birds.

**Justification:** Oak savanna and woodland attract game and nongame wildlife for nest, forage, and cover. Changes in land use have left these cover types in rapid decline with a trend towards habitat less favorable to game species. Removing the straight hard edge from the woodland to current crop ground will provide better habitat for turkey and red-headed woodpeckers. A diverse grass understory will provide nest and foraging habitat for turkey. Increased flowers will promote native pollinators.

**Recommendation:** Through a commercial timber sale remove all red maple, aspen, and 75% of black cherry. Most elm will remain as future wildlife trees as they succumb to Dutch elm disease. The goal will be to have a minimum of 5 wildlife trees per acre. Aspen will naturally regenerate to provide early successional browse habitat for turkey, ruffed grouse, woodcock, bobwhite quail, and white tail deer. Red maple stumps will be treated with herbicide to prevent resprouts. Herbicide any invasives like Reed canary grass. Establish firebreaks for future prescribed fire. Firebreaks could double as hiking trails.

### **Unit 8 Oak opening (2 acres – 3%)**

**Current Condition:** Dominated by pole size timber with straight edges along crop fields.

**Desired Future Condition:** A grass understory with scattered oaks with few to no invasive species provides nesting and foraging habitat for wild turkey and savanna dependent wildlife. Scattered elm provide nest cavities as they die from Dutch elm disease. An irregular perimeter with crop fields eventually planted to grass habitat for foraging red headed woodpeckers.

**Justification:** Oak savanna and woodland attract game and nongame wildlife for nest, forage, and cover. Changes in land use have left these cover types in rapid decline with a trend towards habitat less favorable to game species. Removing the straight hard edge from the woodland to current crop ground will provide better habitat for turkey and red-headed woodpeckers. A diverse grass understory will provide nest and foraging habitat for turkey. Increased flowers will promote native pollinators.

**Recommendation:** Harvest pole size black oak, aspen and cherry leaving white oak family and elm.

### **Future Efforts**

Trails may be developed connecting other public lands in the area. Examples include connect the Village of Mazomanie/Walking Iron County Park to the Wildlife Area and the Lower Wisconsin River Way. Connect Waling Iron Park to Blackhawk Ridge with a trail.

Convert crop fields to a mix of grassland habitats.

**County Wildlife Areas** are sites designated by the Dane County Park Commission as open to public hunting (all types), trapping and other activities such as fishing, hiking and cross country skiing. Wildlife Area boundary signs include: Entering Hunting Area (green letters, white back ground), Leaving Hunting Area, or Private Lands (red letters, white background). Other signs are Closed Area, No Shooting Area (within 500 feet of buildings that may be occupied), and Crop Field-Do Not Enter Until Harvested. All Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Hunting and Trapping Rules (Natural Resource Chapter 45) apply to County Wildlife Areas unless otherwise posted. Each site may have specific restrictions for use based on the location of adjacent residential areas, endangered resources and other issues that have been identified in a planning process.

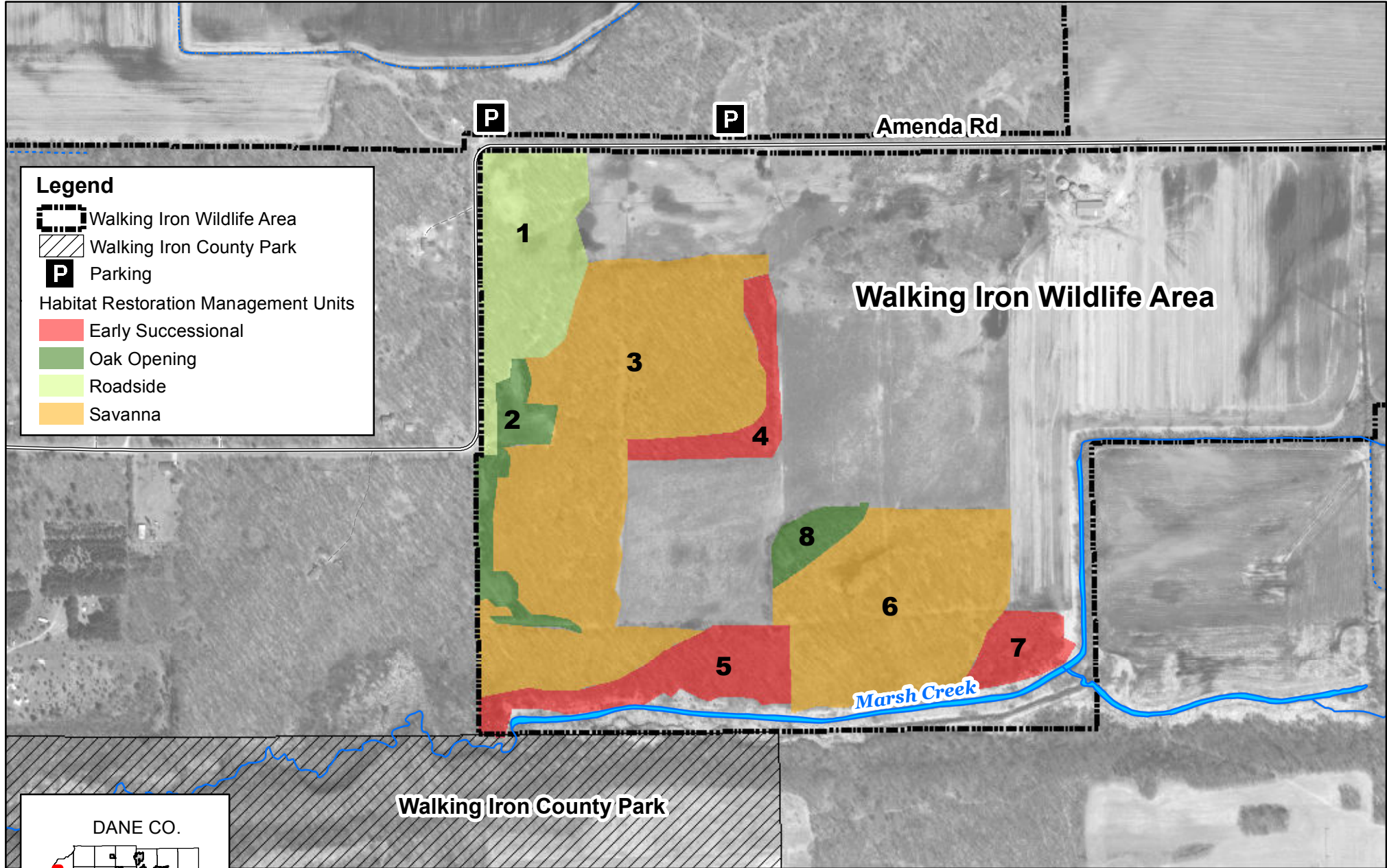
### **Limitations**

No tree harvest between April 1 and September 30 to prevent to limit the spread of oak wilt and protect federally threatened Northern long eared bats. Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required for the timber sale.

Dane County Parks has limited resources for maintaining the restored habitat areas.

Partnerships with volunteers or other agencies such as the WIDNR or USFWS may be explored for ongoing management activities such as prescribed burns, invasive species removal, mowing, etc.

# Walking Iron Wildlife Area Proposed Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project



**Legend**

- Walking Iron Wildlife Area
- Walking Iron County Park
- Parking

Habitat Restoration Management Units

- Early Successional
- Oak Opening
- Roadside
- Savanna

