

**SEWRPC PLANNING REPORT No. 42**

**A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat  
Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin**  
Adopted September 1997

Presentation to the Washington County Multi-  
Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan  
Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources  
Workgroup and the  
Land Use and Transportation Element Workgroup

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# BACKGROUND OF PLAN

- Undertaken to identify the most significant remaining natural areas—essentially, remnants of the pre-European-settlement landscape—as well as other areas vital to the maintenance of endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species in the SE Wisconsin region, and to recommend means for their protection and management,
- Planning program begun in 1991
- Carried out by Commission staff with assistance of Bureau of Endangered Resources, DNR
- Guided by Technical Advisory Committee

# SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- Primary purpose: To identify and make recommendations for the protection and management of the most significant remaining “natural areas” and “critical species habitats” in the Region.
  - **Natural Areas**: defined as those tracts of land or water so little modified by human activity, or which have sufficiently recovered from the effects of such activity, that they contain intact plant and animal communities believed to be representative of the pre-European-settlement landscape.
    - Classification
      - NA-1: Statewide or greater significance
      - NA-2: countywide or regional significance
      - NA-3: local significance
    - **Critical Species Habitats**: defined as those additional tracts of land or water which support endangered, threatened, or rare plant or animal species.

# SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- Also considered were significant geological and aquatic areas
  - **Geological Sites**: Defined as tracts of land that include such glacial features as eskers and kames, fossil beds, and rock outcrop and exposed bedrock sites of scientific and educational value.
  - **Aquatic Areas**: High quality water bodies (i.e., lakes and streams)

# SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- Additionally, the study was intended to increase the dissemination of information regarding such sites to State, county, and local units of government and to private interests, in order that the preservation of these sites may be properly considered as proposals for development within the Region are advanced.

# IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS

- Maintenance of Biodiversity
  - the entire spectrum of life-forms in a geographic area and the many ecological processes that support those life-forms

# IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS

- Maintenance of Biodiversity
- Support of Basic Scientific Research
  - natural areas provide relatively undisturbed benchmarks to which impacts of urban and rural development on an area may be compared
  - natural laboratories where natural processes may be observed, analyzed, and compared
  - act as early warning systems indicating that more far-reaching environmental degradation may be occurring

# IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS

- Maintenance of Biodiversity
- Support of Basic Scientific Research
- Functional Values
  - Natural areas function as “environmental regulators”
    - Protect ground water and surface water
    - Plant cover protects soil from erosion
    - Wetlands regulate streamflow
    - Wetlands protect shoreline from erosion and support groundwater discharge and recharge



# IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS

- Maintenance of Biodiversity
- Support of Basic Scientific Research
- Functional Values
- Cultural and Educational Value
- Economic Value
- Aesthetic value

# RELATIONSHIP TO THE REGIONAL PLAN

- An important element of the comprehensive plan of the Region
- An important supplement to the open space preservation recommendations of the regional land use and park and open space plans
- One of most important recommendations of the regional plan is preservation of Primary Environmental Corridors—this concept was a major factor in the preparation of the natural areas plan

## PRESETTLEMENT (1836) VEGETATION OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

VEGETATION TYPE	ACRES	PERCENT OF COUNTY LAND AREA
MAPLE—BASSWOOD FOREST	132,062	47.8
BEECH—MAPLE FOREST	90,829	32.9
CONIFER SWAMP	36,240	13.1
LOWLAND HARDWOOD FOREST	8521	3.1
OAK FOREST	5874	2.1
NON-FORESTED WETLANDS	2278	0.8
OAK SAVANNA	405	0.1
PRAIRIE	22	<0.1
TOTAL	276,231	100.0

## CHANGE IN NATURAL VEGETATION OF WASHINGTON COUNTY: 1836 AND 1990

VEGETATION TYPE	ACRES IN 1836	ACRES IN 1990	LOSS OF ACREAGE	PERCENT LOSS
UPLAND WOODS	228,765	22,595	206,170	90.1
WETLANDS	47,039	42,029	5010	10.7
OAK SAVANNA	405	0	405	100.0
PRAIRIE	22	1	21	95.5
TOTAL	276,231	64,625	211,606	76.6

## SUMMARY OF KNOWN NATURAL AREAS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY: 1995

	NA-1	NA-2	NA-3	TOTAL
NUMBER OF SITES	7	29	55	91
AREA (ACRES)	1659	6350	7961	15,970
PERCENT OF COUNTY AREA	0.6	2.3	2.9	5.8
ACRES ALREADY UNDER PROTECTIVE OWNERSHIP	741		5623	6363
ACRES PROPOSED TO BE ACQUIRED	918		8688	9606

## PROPOSED UPDATE TO PR-42

- To begin in 2006
- Based on additional field investigations and analysis of 2005 aerial photography
- Changes to include:
  - Changes in classification (i.e., upgrade or downgrade)
  - Changes in acreage reflecting significant boundary changes
  - Changes in recommended ownership
  - Additional natural areas and critical species habitat areas for each county
  - To be documented in county park and open space plan reports