

The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

Public Hearing Testimony - Sauk Prairie Recreation Area Draft Master Plan
September 10, 2015

I am Rob Nurre, the current President of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance.

The Alliance has been actively engaged in the planning for the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant lands since the plant was decommissioned in the 1990s. In 2001, we served on the Badger Reuse Committee which agreed on the values for the future of the property. Since 2006, the Alliance has been an active member of the Badger Oversight Management Commission. The Commission's mission is to ensure that the vision of the Badger Reuse Plan is realized. We have worked alongside the DNR throughout these planning efforts.

The Alliance's long held priorities for the Badger Lands are the restoration of the native prairie and savanna communities, and to provide for compatible, low-impact recreational opportunities that allow visitors to enjoy and learn from the natural and cultural features of this land.

The DNR's Draft Master Plan for it's the portion of the Badger Lands, the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area, calls for the restoration of nearly all of the 3,400 acres to native prairie, savanna, and oak woodland communities. In collaboration with the land conservation efforts on other public and private lands at Badger, and in the surrounding area, the southern portion of Sauk County will include a vast mosaic of thousands of acres of conservation lands that will provide crucial habitat for many native plants and animals. This will attract many visitors to experience these landscapes. The Alliance commends the DNR for its commitment to this restoration work and looks forward to being a partner in these efforts.

Some recreational components of the Draft Master Plan, however, are troubling. The plan appears to be based on the idea that the SPRA is a vast, empty area that should be able to accommodate a wide variety of recreation that the DNR, or other interests, believe should be available in the region. Some of the proposals appear to disregard the unique natural and cultural history of Badger lands, the agreements that have been made during the Badger reuse process, and the DNR's own commitments to provide for low-impact recreation and recreation which is compatible with the restoration of the land. Off-road, or 'dual-sport' motorcycles, even when used on a limited number of days, simply are not low-impact or compatible with restoration. The same is true for rocketry. The only very generally defined 'special events' that will be allowed are of concern. If properly managed, off-leash dogs and dog training, mounting biking and equestrian trails may be considered low-impact and compatible with restoration. These and all other recreational uses, however, must be carefully monitored to ensure that their cumulative impacts do not undo the important work of restoring the natural landscape.

The Alliance will be submitting detailed written comments to assist in improving this Draft Master Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area. We look forward to an improved plan, which follows the DNR's commitment to low-impact recreation and includes meaningful collaboration with other Badger landowners, which we can fully support when it goes before the DNR Board for approval.