

# Dansville State Game Area Master Plan



*Michigan Department of Natural Resources*  
[MICHIGAN DNR WEBSITE](#)  
*Wildlife Division*  
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## ***Intended Purpose and General Management Direction***

The Dansville State Game Area (DSGA) was approved as a Pittman-Robertson land acquisition project area at the September 13, 1940 Commission Meeting. In early 1941, six parcels totaling 832 acres were optioned for purchase to start the project. The DSGA currently totals over 4,800 acres with over half of the area consisting of forested cover. Currently, primary habitat management techniques include maintaining openings and croplands to provide diverse food and cover for a variety of wildlife species. Future habitat management will include more forest management.

The majority of land on the game area was purchased with federal Pittman-Robertson funds, but some land was acquired through trust fund and license fee monies. The DSGA is located in the Southwest Region (SWR) of the Lower Peninsula in southern Ingham County. Over time, the DSGA has been expanded to include over 4,800 acres (Figure 2) and is managed to provide quality habitat for wild turkey, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, wood ducks, and for recreational opportunities associated with these species.

In the future (50-100 years from now) we want the area to continue to contribute to sustainable populations of important wildlife species, provide valuable hunting and trapping recreation, and maintain a large forested system in an otherwise open landscape.

## ***Background***

At a local level, this plan helps fulfill goals and objectives of other higher level Department and Wildlife Division plans and initiatives. The Department goals (protect natural resources, sustainable recreation, strong natural resource-based economies, and strong relationships and partnerships), the Wildlife Division's Guiding Principles and Strategies (Goal 2-Manage habitat for sustainable wildlife populations, Goal 4-Increase public participation in hunting and trapping), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (outstanding turkey hunting, challenge of small game hunting, and great diversity of high quality waterfowl hunting), the Division's Southwest Regional Operational Plan, Southwest Region Habitat Guidance documents, and the Southwest Region Land Management Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

## ***Wildlife Species***

True to the intended purpose of the game area when it was dedicated in 1940, we will continue to focus our efforts on species and habitats that help meet our goals to provide quality hunting opportunities and our other public trust responsibilities (Table 1).

**Table 1.** A list of species or projects to be worked on during this planning period, reflecting opportunities for habitat or recreational management.

Common Name	Featured Species	T&E, SC Species	Climate Change Vulnerable	Remarks
Cottontail Rabbit	X			Brush piles
White-tailed Deer	X			Openings, food plots, mast trees
Wild Turkey	X			Openings, food plots, oak management
Wood Duck	X			Floodings, nesting/ brood cover

Much of the active habitat management during the life of this plan will focus on forest treatments and maintaining openings. These activities will provide a variety of food and cover for a number of wildlife species. Lowland forests will also provide critical corridors for species shifting distribution in response to climate change and serve to act as carbon storage and will be maintained for these purposes.

### ***Existing Conditions***

A variety of vegetation types can be found on the DSGA, but over half of the area is forested (Figure 1, Table 2). Most of the forested area consists of either lowland deciduous forest or mixed upland deciduous forest. However, the DSGA does have a fair amount of oak and that will be an important focus for future forest treatments. The DSGA also offers a variety of herbaceous open lands and food plots that provide diverse food and cover options for several species of wildlife. The nearly 1,200 acres of marsh scattered throughout the DSGA provide suitable habitat for waterfowl and other wetland-association species.

Given current available habitat, management goals are to provide quality upland habitat for wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and cottontail rabbit. Impoundments will be maintained to provide quality nesting and brood-rearing habitat for local waterfowl, primarily wood ducks.

Most current management activities have been focused on maintaining openings and cropland. In addition to those activities, future management will also focus on forestry practices that will help to balance the age class of the forests while also ensuring adequate regeneration of important key species such as oak.

**Table 2.** Current cover types on the Dansville SGA based on MiFi surveys from 2015.

Cover type	Acres	Percent of Game Area
Lowland Deciduous	928	19.7
Mixed Upland Deciduous	863	18.3
Lowland Shrub	739	15.7
Cropland	536	11.4

<b>Cover type</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of Game Area</b>
Marsh	450	9.5
Oak	370	7.8
Herbaceous Openland	227	4.8
Upland Mixed Forest	146	3.1
Planted Mixed Pines	105	2.2
Red Pine	94	2.0
Northern Hardwoods	90	1.9
Other	169	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>4717</b>	

### ***Recreational Use***

The DSGA provides a host of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, including hunting, trapping, bird watching and wildlife viewing. State game areas in southern Michigan are under continual pressure for other uses, however under Federal and State regulations, recreational and commercial uses on the area that are not incidental to our management for the purposes described above are generally not allowed. Some of these uses can be allowed, under the following circumstances:

1. The uses do not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. The Department has no obligations to determine if requested uses would conflict or interfere; the burden of determining must remain with those requesting the uses.
3. The requested uses cannot be exclusive of other allowable uses and must not result in the Department losing management control of any portion of the area.
4. A lack of a specific prohibition in rules and regulations for the area does not constitute approval of the activity.
5. The Department always reserves the ability to disallow activities previously allowed as wildlife conservation needs dictate.

Additionally, the Department will continue to monitor any existing commercial and recreational uses for interference with the intended purposes of the area as described in this plan.

### ***Impacts on the Local Economy***

The DSGA lies in a fairly rural part of Ingham County, but is within driving distance to some large population centers (Lansing, Jackson, SE Michigan). Management

activities on the area do result in contributions to the local economy. Some of these activities include over 300 acres of sharecropping through agreements with local farmers, timber management activities with loggers, and area use by hunters, trappers, and other wildlife enthusiasts provide a direct boost to local restaurants, convenience stores, and gas stations.

### **Management Direction**

The desired future condition for the Dansville State Game Area is outlined in the following table.

**Table 3.** Desired future condition of cover types and habitat issue direction on the Dansville SGA.

<b>Cover type and Habitat Issues</b>	<b>Desired Future Condition</b>
Oak	Maintain
Northern Hardwoods	Maintain
Mixed Upland Deciduous	Maintain
Natural Pines	Maintain
Planted Pines	Decrease
Lowland Deciduous Forest	Maintain
Lowland Shrub	Maintain
Acres of Agriculture	Maintain
Acres of Aspen	Maintain
Acres of Herbaceous Open lands	Maintain
Managed Wetlands	Maintain
Unmanaged Wetlands	Maintain

### **Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

What follows is the strategic direction for the Dansville SGA, to be implemented during this planning cycle. This plan describes the **goals** or desired future condition for the area, the **objectives** under each goal, and the **actions** associated with each objective. Goals come mostly from the featured species and habitat issues relevant to DSGA.

**Goal I:** sustainable populations of wild turkey on the Dansville SGA

**Rationale:** wild turkeys are highly desirable game species and managing for their habitat, especially the oak component of the forest, benefits numerous other wildlife species. White-tailed deer also benefit from Actions taken under this Goal.

**Metrics:** staff observation and hunter surveys; assessment of oak types within MiFi, number of suitable forest openings

**Objective A.** Maintain the current extent (~370 acres) of oak cover type on the SGA

**Action 1.** Develop and implement an adaptive oak management strategy by 2019 that ensures adequate regeneration of young oak stands

**Action 2.** Harvest approximately 70 acres of oak forest during the next decade through a selective harvest strategy

**Objective B.** To maintain suitable herbaceous openlands throughout the SGA for foraging, breeding, and brood rearing habitat for wild turkey

**Action 1.** Maintain herbaceous openings at appropriate locations throughout the SGA

**Action 2.** Provide food source in selected openings through sharecrop agreements or establishment of food plots

**Goal II:** sustainable populations of cottontail rabbit throughout the Dansville SGA

**Rationale:** rabbits are popular game species and important recreational opportunity for new hunters; managing for their habitat benefits numerous other wildlife species

**Metrics:** staff observation and discussion with hunters; number of brush piles created

**Objective A.** Provide suitable escape cover by creating 25 brush piles each year

**Action 1.** Establish a timber harvest regime that will require loggers to create 2 brush piles for every acre harvested resulting in 20 brush piles per year (on average)

**Action 2.** Use DNR staff and volunteers to build 5 brush piles each year

**Objective B.** Provide suitable forest openings (1-10 acres in size), throughout the SGA for nesting and feeding habitat for rabbits by 2025

**Action 1.** Maintain and create small herbaceous openings at appropriate locations the SGA by 2026

**Goal III:** sustainable populations of wood ducks on the Dansville SGA

**Rationale:** wood ducks are popular game species; managing habitat for waterfowl also benefits numerous other wildlife species

**Metrics:** staff observation and contacts with hunters

**Objective A.** Maintain impoundments and ensure all dikes and water control structures are in good condition

**Action 1.** Conduct an assessment of all wetland infrastructure and develop a long-term plan for water control structure and spillway replacement by 2019

**Action 2.** Annual inspection of dikes to identify areas in need of repair

**Objective B:** Maintain forested and emergent wetlands to provide suitable nesting and brood rearing habitat

**Action 1.** Manage wetland vegetation/open water conditions through water level manipulation

**Action 2.** Develop a drawdown schedule for managed wetlands by 2019

**Goal IV** is to provide abundant numbers of white-tailed deer and access for hunters in the Dansville SGA

**Rationale:** white-tailed deer are a popular game species; providing habitat for white-tailed deer will also benefit a wide variety of wildlife such as wild turkey, small game, etc.; deer hunters are the largest user group for the entire SGA.

**Metrics:** staff observation, contacts with hunters, and hunter surveys;

**Objective A.** Maintain openings on the SGA

**Action 1.** Continue sharecrop agreements to keep fields open and provide a food source for white-tailed deer

**Action 2.** Develop a mowing schedule to maintain brush control in idle fields by 2018

**Objective B.** Establish and maintain a diverse forest that provides adequate hard and soft mast production

**Action 1.** Analyze MiFi data to identify forest stands due for treatment by 2018

**Action 2.** Develop forest management strategies to increase mast production and oak regeneration by 2019

**Objective C.** Continue to provide access to public land for deer hunters

**Action 1.** Annually maintain parking areas to provide safe access to public land

**Action 2.** Actively pursue land acquisitions that meet criteria in the DNR Land Strategy



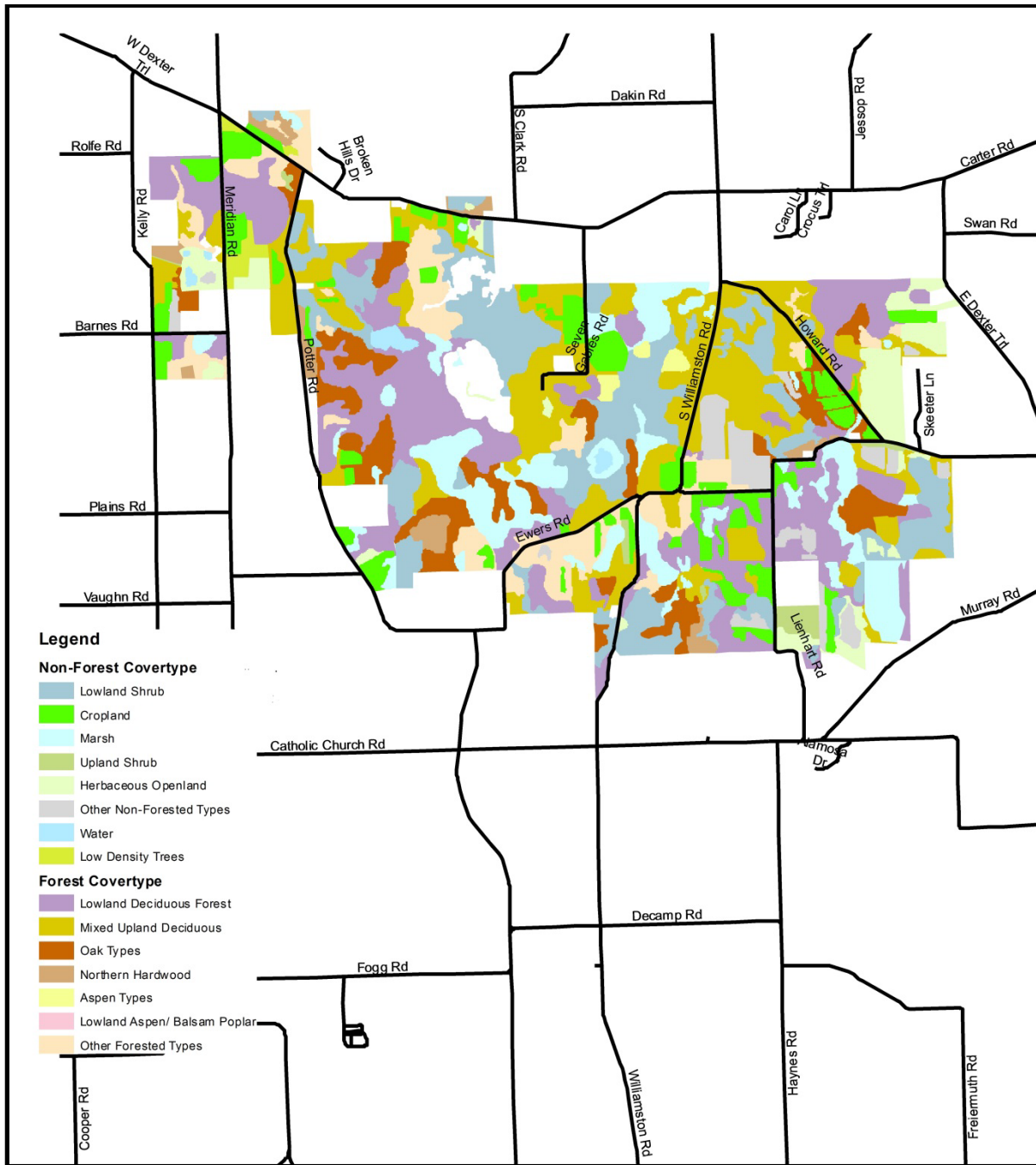


Figure 1. Map representing the major habitat cover type classes in the Dansville SGA.

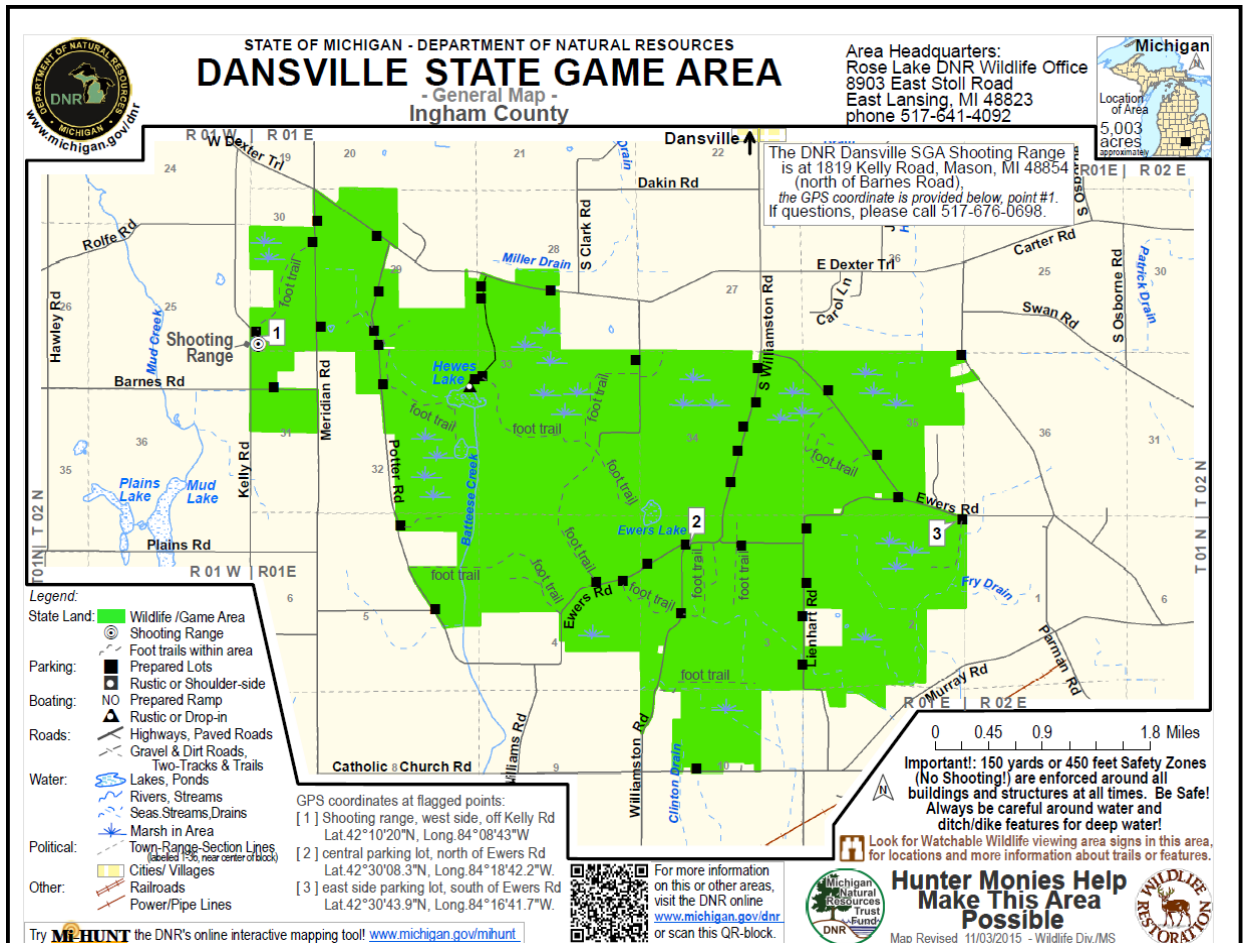


Figure 2. Dansville SGA boundaries.

## Acquisition and Disposal of Land

This is an important game area that provides a host of recreational opportunities for local resident and visitors. Our overall goal is to continue to provide these opportunities. Since the DSGA is located in southcentral Michigan and within relatively close distance to population centers, the land acquisition strategy for the DSGA is to fill in state ownership by acquiring available blocks located within and among current state ownership. Parcels will be evaluated as they become available and will be acquired on a willing seller basis only.

## Public Input

This plan will be available for public review and comment on the DNR website between July 1, 2016 and July 31, 2016. Changes will be made, as necessary, based on public feedback. Once the plan is approved it will be placed on the [DNR website](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr), and will be reviewed again within 10 years of the approved date. Send comments to: Chad Fedewa [FEDEWAC1@michigan.gov](mailto:FEDEWAC1@michigan.gov)

# Approvals

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(Name), Field Operations Manager

Date

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(Name), Regional Supervisor

Date