

Deford State Game Area

Master Plan



Lead Author: Don Bonnette, Wildlife Biologist – Cass City (03/29/2013)



Michigan Department of Natural Resources

[Michigan DNR Website](#)

Wildlife Division

IC 2039 (Rev. 6-11-2012)

Strategic Plan

When setting the desired future conditions, it is necessary to consider the purpose for which the property was acquired by the state, current land cover conditions, and future social and economic forces that could influence management strategies. The intended purpose for Deford SGA was and still is the maintenance of upland habitat for optimum numbers of white-tailed deer, cotton-tailed rabbits, ruffed grouse, woodcock and wild turkeys. In addition, Deford SGA offers some opportunity for managing special wildlife species such as red-shoulder hawk, northern goshawk and cerulean warbler. However, in some cases enhancing and conserving these special species may be in conflict with management for others that provide hunting and trapping opportunity. As this plan is fully implemented these conflicts will be addressed and a mutually beneficial outcome will be sought to move forward. The purpose of this plan is to simply detail a more strategic approach.

The Deford SGA Master Plan was developed in conjunction with and is consistent with goals and objectives for SGA's and Wildlife Areas identified in the Southeast Michigan Regional Wildlife Area Management Plan. It also supports goals and objectives in the Michigan Wildlife Action plan.

After the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act in 1938, money became available for the purchase of land in the southern half of the Lower Peninsula. At that time, the heart of the thumb was considered the favored hunting ground of Detroit, Pontiac and Flint sportsmen; therefore the Michigan Department of Conservation felt there was no section of Lower Michigan where there was greater need for public hunting land. Because much of the land south and east of Caro in Tuscola County that eventually became part of the game was considered sub-marginal farm land and fit the main requirements for purchase under the Act, the Director of the Department of Conservation authorized the Deford Project in February 1942. The bulk of the land was purchased in the early 1950's and acquisition continued into the late 1960's. Farms that were abandoned due to sandy soil and poor drainage made up the majority of the purchases. Much smaller land acquisitions continue to the present bringing the total acreage of the area to 10,390 acres (Appendix 1).

The Deford SGA is generally level to slightly rolling and is largely forested with second growth hardwood consisting of mixed aspen, lowland deciduous forest, mixed upland deciduous forest and small stands of natural and planted conifers. Poorly drained sites are dominated by cottonwood, silver maple, green ash and elm. Within the forested matrix, many of the sandy, well-drained sites were planted to red pine, jack pine and scots pine. Around 10% of the game area consists of forest openings and old farm fields with some planted to cool and warm season grass mixtures and many others filling in with early successional brush and trees. Appendix 2 provides a detailed cover type analysis for the

game area. Soils on the game area are largely infertile sands with some areas of sandy loam and muck.

Two options were considered when determining management direction of the Deford SGA but were not selected for the following reasons:

1. Develop wildlife food plots: most of the soil types on Deford SGA are very poor and do not yield good crops.
2. Abundant populations of furbearers including raccoon, fox, coyote, muskrat, mink, beaver and otter: suitable habitat for all these species exists on the area, however, specific management activities designed to directly benefit these species are not planned. Protection of riparian and wetland habitats on the area will continue to provide quality habitat for these species.

What follows is the strategic direction for Deford SGA. This plan describes the **goals** or desired future condition for the area, the **objectives** under each goal, and the **actions** associated with each objective. For the purposes of this master plan, the following definitions will be used:

Goal – A desired future condition of the area.

Objective – A management approach or strategy that the best science suggests can be used to move the area toward the Goal. An objective is a quantifiable input to be completed within a defined timeframe that contributes towards accomplishing the goal.

Action – An operational means to accomplish an objective. An action is a step needed to complete an objective and is described in sufficient detail to inform planning. An action is a quantifiable input to be completed within a defined timeframe that contributes towards accomplishing the objective.

It is expected to take approximately ten years to complete all the objectives.

Desired Future Conditions

Goal I Maintain forested and non-forested habitats for optimum numbers of white-tailed deer, cotton-tailed rabbits, ruffed grouse, woodcock and wild turkeys to provide quality hunting experiences.

Rationale: 1) This area was dedicated to provide hunting recreation for Michigan citizens; 2) each of the species listed above are listed as Featured Species; 3) one of the DNR's priorities is to reverse the trending loss of hunters and trappers, this goal will help ensure hunting opportunity remains in Tuscola County; 4) one of the objectives in the Wildlife Division's GPS is related to small game hunting opportunity; 5) there are good populations of all five species on the SGA; 6) this goal address the following strategies in the GPS: 1.1.5, 1.1.7, 2.1.1-4, 4.3.3, 4.3.4; 7).

Assessment: 1) conversations with hunters and users on the SGA will be used to assess success of this goal; 2) annual review of work plan compared to activities completed as described below.

Objective A: Complete forest and non-forested inventory, create habitat treatments and track habitat treatments utilizing the Integrated Forest Monitoring Assessment and Prescription (IFMAP) process.

Action 1. Work with the Michigan Natural Features Inventory staff to complete stage 1 field inventory, assign areas of interest and begin creating treatments for the next 10 years.

Action 2. Update current inventory to reflect habitat treatments completed since 2005 on the portion of the SGA inventoried in IFMAP.

Action 3. Based upon area of interest designation obtain clearance from the State Historic Preservation Officer for all ground disturbing habitat treatments where necessary.

Objective B: Maintain a minimum of 25 acres annually as forest openings in appropriate locations to provide feeding, hiding, nesting, singing/display areas and loafing cover for rabbits, deer, turkeys and woodcock.

Action 1. Using current forest inventory, identify appropriate sites to maintain as openings.

Action 2. Develop a work plan to treat openings at least once every three years.

Action 3. Create brush piles along edges in conjunction with brush clearing operations and nearby timber harvests.

Objective C: Continue to maintain or expand aspen cover types by harvesting a minimum of 60 acres annually over the next 10 years through commercial timber sales. Secondly, increase aspen age class diversity where necessary to provide multiple habitat requirements for grouse, woodcock, deer, rabbits and turkeys.

Action 1. Use current forest inventory to identify aspen stands and other forest cover types where aspen comprises a minimum of 20% canopy cover for commercial harvest.

Action 2. Establish rotation age of 60 years for aspen cover types to ensure even age class distribution across the landscape. Ideally, four aspen age classes of 0-10 years, 11-20 years, 21-40 and 41+ would be within ¼ mile of each other across the area.

Action 3. Where oak is present in aspen types, develop harvest prescriptions designed to ensure its long term persistence.

Action 4. Continue to use harvest specifications that require the retention of coarse woody debris in general. Those specifications with particular emphasis on snags, drumming logs and brush piles must be utilized where appropriate.

Objective D: Continue thinning or final harvest of red pine, white pine and jack pine cover types on a minimum of 15 acres annually with particular emphasis on those stands with advanced oak regeneration in the understory.

Action 1. Use current forest inventory to identify pine cover types suitable for harvest with emphasis on those with significant advanced oak regeneration in the understory.

Action 2. Establish a rotation age of 60 years for all pine types and retain enough pine over story in initial thinning operations to shelter oak regeneration.

Action 3. Use forest harvest specifications to retain white pine supercanopy and legacy trees.

Action 4. Continue to use harvest specifications that require the retention of coarse woody debris in general. Those specifications with particular emphasis on snags, drumming logs and brush piles must be utilized where appropriate.

Objective E: Initiate forest treatments on lowland hardwood and mixed upland hardwood types on a minimum of 20 acres annually.

Action 1. Use current forest inventory to identify lowland and upland hardwood cover types suitable for harvest.

Action 2. Use current forest inventory to identify lowland hardwood sites dominated by ash or where ash is a significant component. Given the presence of the Emerald Ash Borer, these stands will be given harvest priority over all other lowland types.

Action 3. Use appropriate silvicultural prescriptions and harvest specifications on lowland types to ensure their long-term persistence on the landscape.

Action 4. Use current forest inventory to identify mixed upland hardwood sites with a minimum of 20% aspen canopy cover (or 30 sq. ft. BA) for possible conversion to aspen types.

Action 5. Continue to use harvest specifications that require the retention of coarse woody debris in general. Those specifications with particular emphasis on snags, drumming logs and legacy tree retention will be utilized where appropriate.

Goal II Maintain boundary integrity and infrastructure in a manner that is consistent with Goal I and associated objectives.

Rationale: 1) the area provides recreational opportunities related to wildlife; 2) the DNR Wildlife Division supports consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife related recreational activities that promote our state's wildlife heritage; 3) sufficient parking lots, work roads, gates and signs are required for users to take advantage of recreational opportunities; this goal addresses the following strategies in the GPS: 3.2.3, 4.3.4, 4.5.2, 6.1.2, 9.3.1.

Assessment: Discussions with users and observations of use.

Objective A: Maintain 55 parking areas for appropriate numbers of users.

Action 1. Perform monthly inspection of parking areas

Action 2. Maintain access to parking areas with annual grading and trash removal as needed.

Objective B: Maintain boundary signage and maps that identify SGA boundaries and rules.

Action 1. Perform monthly inspection of signage

Action 2. Ensure SGA maps are updated and available

Action 3. Resolve trespass issues through the trespass resolution process

Objective C: Maintain 20 gates and other vehicle barriers to prevent unauthorized motorized vehicle access.

Action 1. Perform monthly inspection of gates and vehicle barriers

Action 2. Identify and close sites of unauthorized access

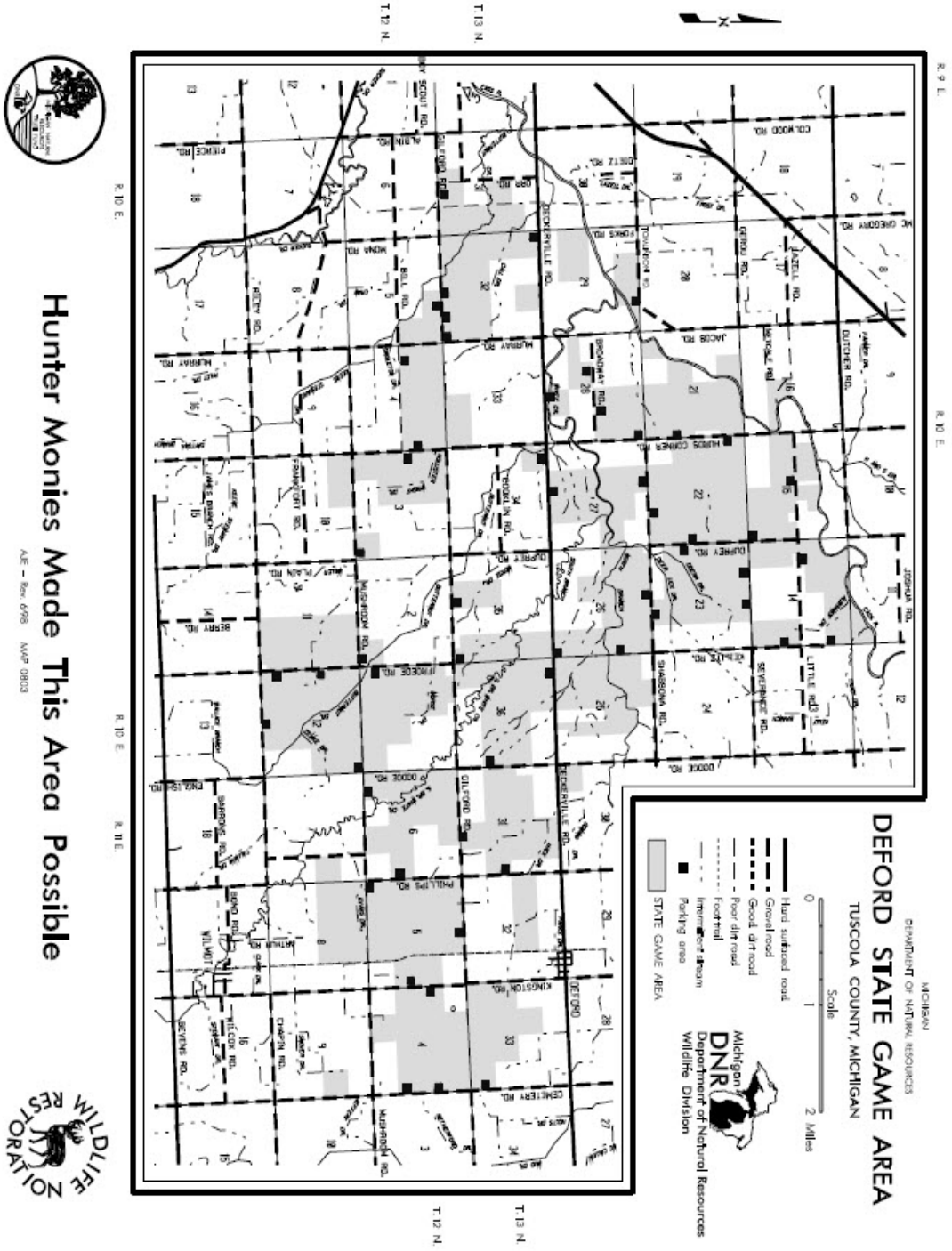
Recreational and Commercial Uses

Recreational and commercial uses on the area that are not incidental to our management for the purposes described above are generally not allowed. These uses can be allowed, however, under the following circumstances:

1. The uses must not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. The DNR 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 DNR 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 DNR always reserves the ability to disallow activities previously allowed as wildlife conservation needs dictate.

Other than commercial timber harvest, there are currently no commercial uses on the Deford SGA. Commercial timber harvests are utilized to achieve forest habitat management objectives. The DNR will continue to monitor existing commercial and recreational uses for interference with the intended purposes of the area as described in this plan.

Appendix 1



Hunter Monies Made This Area Possible



AE - Rev. 6/98 MAP 0803



Fig 1: Current Deford SGA map.

Appendix 2

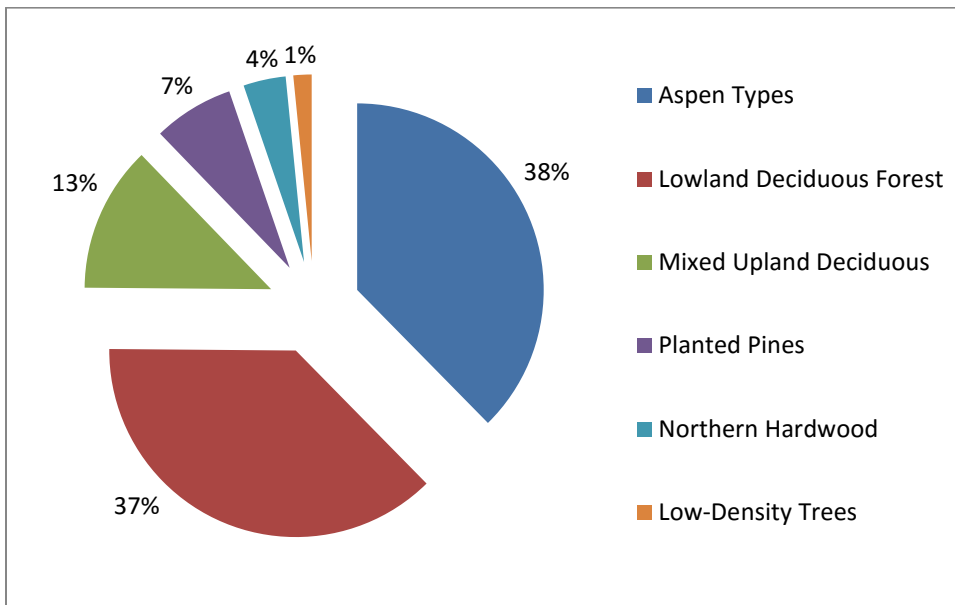


Figure 1: Deford SGA forested cover type analysis. Total acreage = 8,789 acres.

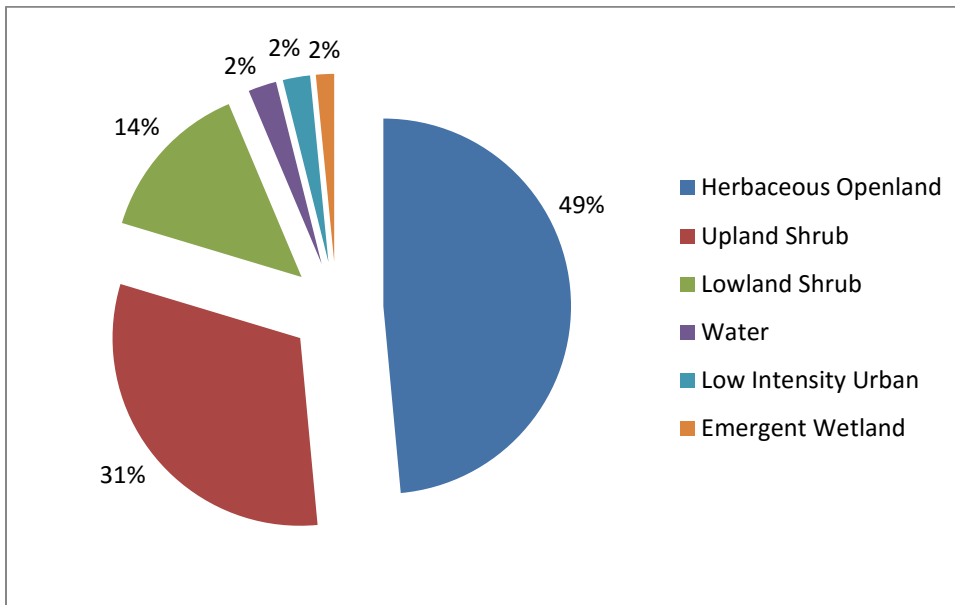
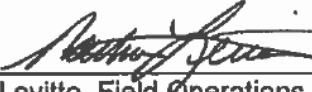



Figure 2: Deford SGA non-forested cover type analysis. Total acreage = 1,195 acres.

Public Input

This plan was available for public review and comment on the [Michigan DNR website](#) between March 14, 2016 and April 25, 2016. During this period 1 comment was received and considered before finalizing this plan.

Approvals

	<u>7/8/16</u>
Nate Levitte, Field Operations Manager	Date
	<u>7.13.16</u>
Tim Payne, [REDACTED] Regional Supervisor	Date