Hubbard Lake State Game Area

Master Plan

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE DIVISION
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Contents

Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

Hubbard Lake State Game Area (HL SGA) is located in Alcona County in the Wildlife Division's Northern Lower Region (NLR, Figure 1). Totaling 446 acres, the HL SGA is comprised of two tracts located in the northeast and southwest corners of Hubbard Lake. To the southwest, the SGA includes approximately 2,600 feet of frontage along Hubbard Lake north of West Branch River, and continues upstream along West Branch River for approximately 1 mile. At 406 acres, this is the largest of the two tracts located in Hawes Township at town 27 N, range 07 E, sections 3 and 10. To the northeast, the remaining 40-acre tract is located in Caledonia Township, town 28 N, range 07 E, section 12. This is upstream from the confluence of Holcomb Creek and Hubbard Lake's East Bay.

The HL SGA became established in 1974 when 40 acres located on Holcomb Creek was gifted to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The purpose of establishing this area was to assure protection of "existing natural habitat for fisheries and waterfowl uses" (January 21, 1974, Memorandum to the Director Re: Gift of Land). The 406 acres on West Branch River was established through two separate purchases in 1988 using Michigan Natural Resources Trust Funds to secure valuable wetland wildlife habitat (April 18 and July 13, 1988, Memorandums to the Natural Resources Commission: Wildlife Land Acquisition and Boundary Dedication).

Wildlife that utilize the HL SGA include white-tailed deer, mink, beaver, muskrats, reptiles, snakes, many species of raptors including osprey and bald eagle, common loons, and wetland and wading birds. In the future, we want the area to continue to contribute to sustainable populations of these and other species, provide valuable hunting recreation, and serve as an area where wildlife watchers can go to view wildlife.

Background

This plan helps fulfill goals and objectives of other higher-level Department and Wildlife Division plans and initiatives. The DNR 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-Enhance sustainable wildlife-based recreation), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (big game adventures, small game hunting, and high quality waterfowl hunting), the Division's NLR Regional Operational Plan, and NLR Regional State Forest Management Plan are all reflected in this master plan. Additionally, this SGA is considered "in-scope" for forest certification, meaning the area is included within the scope of evaluation under MDNR's Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) forest management certificates. As such, the area is categorized as a Special Conservation Area (SCA) type Wildlife Management Area, indicating wildlife management and recreation are the leading conservation objectives/values guiding management. Activities will follow processes and procedures outlined in the DNR's Forest Certification Work Instructions to ensure compliance with forest certification standards.

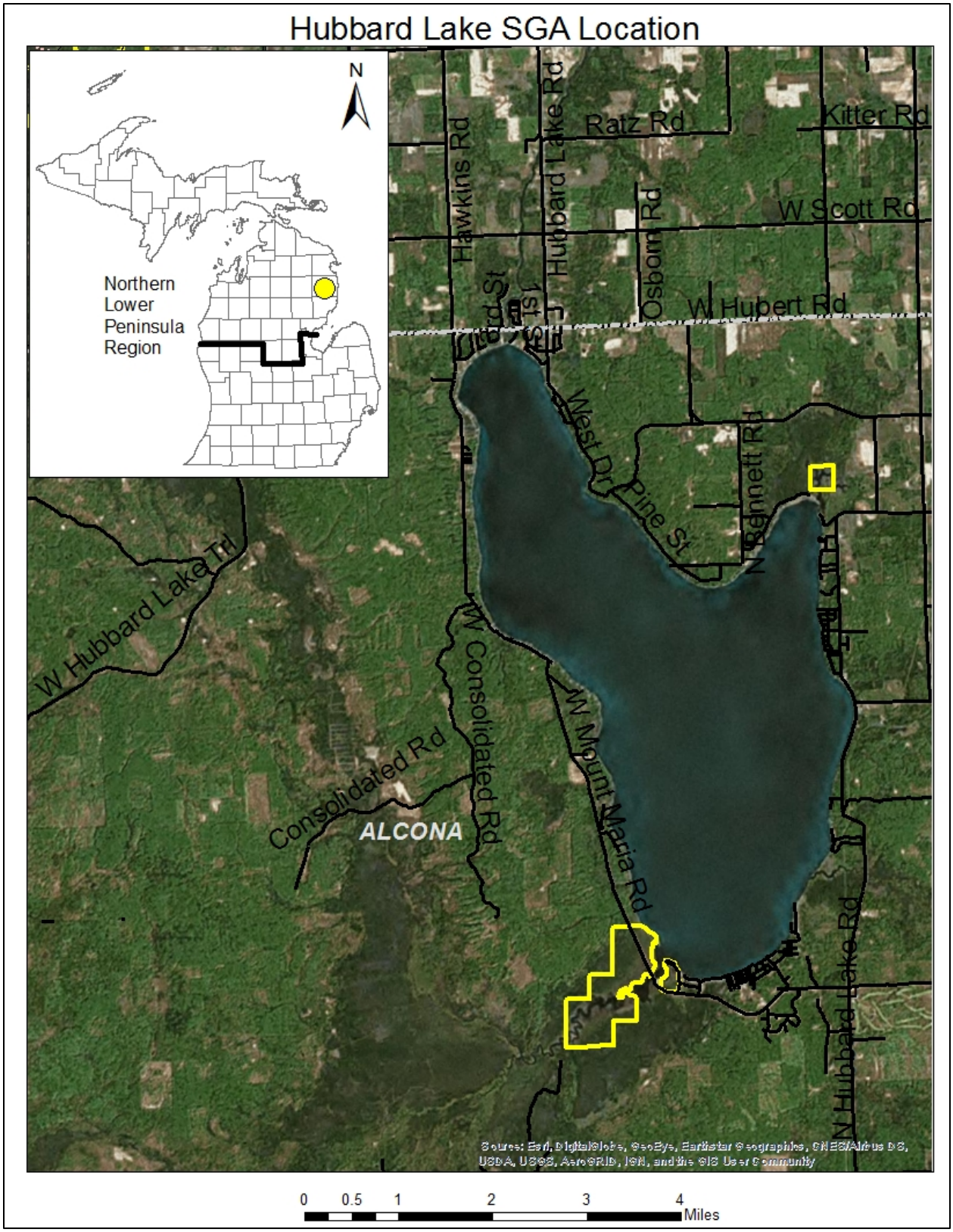

Figure 1. Location of the HL SGA, Alcona County.

Wildlife Species

According to a database maintained by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), common loon has been documented on the West Branch River tract of the SGA and on Hubbard Lake. Bald eagle and eastern massasauga rattlesnake have been documented within several miles to the south and southwest of the West Branch River tract. Given the occurrence of a northern fen natural community and adjacency to Hubbard Lake, the potential exists for both species to occur on the HL SGA. Likewise, Blanding's turtle has been documented less than a mile from the Holcomb Creek tract of the SGA. Habitat needs for several species (Table 1) are considered when deciding management direction for the Hubbard Lake SGA.

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, Special Concern Species***	***Climate Change Vulnerable***	***Remarks***
White-tailed deer	Yes	No	Presumed Stable	Maintain lowland conifers
Mallard	Yes	No	Presumed Stable	Maintain emergent wetlands, monitor invasives
Black bear	Yes	No	Presumed Stable	Maintain lowland conifers
Wood duck	Yes	No	Presumed Stable	Maintain emergent wetlands, monitor conifers

Though white-tailed deer populations are "presumed stable" under climate change scenarios, warmer summers could increase disease outbreaks farther north (e.g., Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease) that may have temporary negative local population impacts.

Existing Conditions

Both tracts of the HL SGA are primarily wetlands, comprised of emergent wetland vegetation and forested vegetation tolerant of poorly drained soils. The forested areas are dominated by lowland conifers, mixed upland conifer, and to some extent swamp hardwoods (Figures 2 and 3).

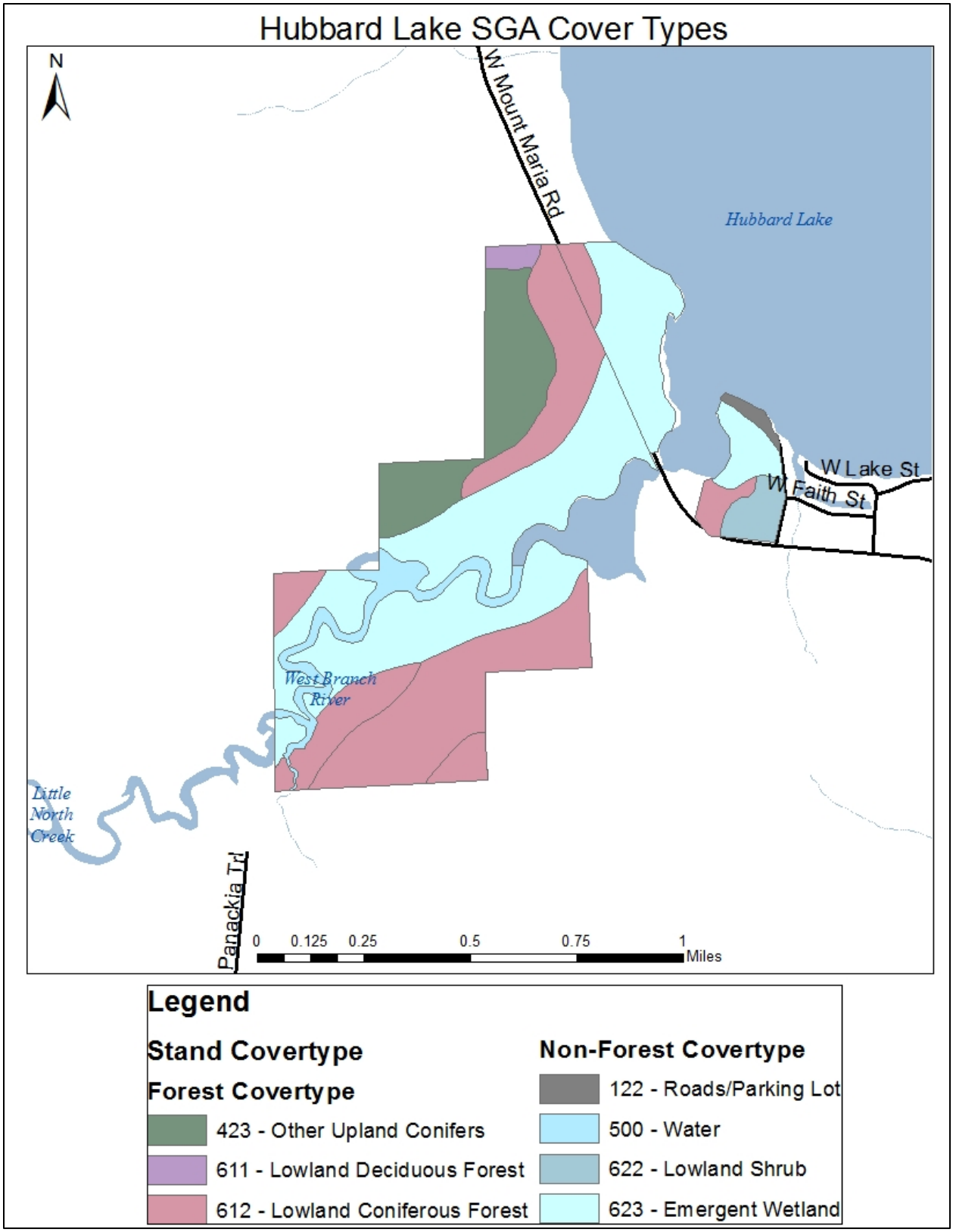

Figure 2. Map representing the major habitat cover type classes in the West Branch River Tract of the HL SGA.

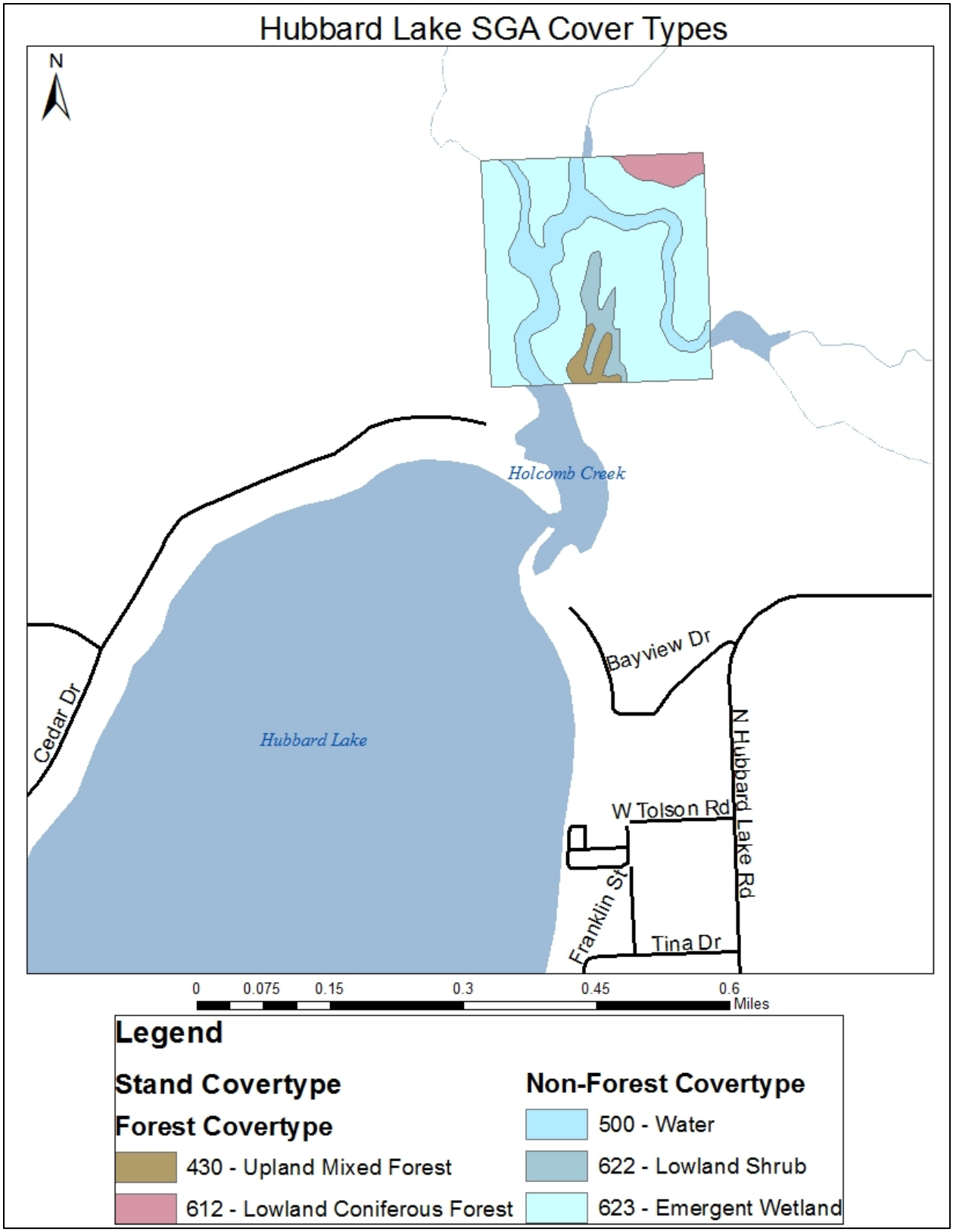

Figure 3. Map representing the major habitat cover type classes in the Holcomb Creek Tract of the HL SGA.

Soils are characterized as Histosols and Aquents in both the West Branch River and Holcomb Creek tracts. Histosols are often associated with glacial outwash or drainage channels and have high organic content due to incomplete decomposition of plant material. Aquents are more recent soils associated with sandy deposits. Both are very poorly drained soils associated with depressions on flood plains and are found in lowland marshes.

Holcomb Creek is dominated by steep ice contact ridges, broad moraine ridges, and many lakes, occurring on ground moraine formed in fine-textured till. Specifically, the area associated with the SGA is ice contact outwash sand and gravel.

A diverse variety of cover types (Tables 2 and 3) provide valuable habitat for the species managed for on the SGA. This includes northern fen and rich conifer swamp natural community Ecological Reference Areas (ERAs) that have been identified by MNFI in the West Branch River section. Northern fens are wetlands occurring on peat or marl beds and are dominated by a unique assemblage of sedges, rushes, and grasses, and can host many rare plant species. They occur where calcareous bedrock underlies a thin layer of glacial drift or kettle depressions north of the climate tension zone, and primarily near the lakeshore. Rich conifer swamps are forested wetlands on peaty soils dominated by cedar trees and characterized by mosses and lichens. The ERA designation means that these are high-quality examples of these natural community types.

Because both areas are on low-lying outwash plains with no water control structures, habitat management is minimal and will focus on maintaining wetland integrity and function.

Table 2. Current Natural Communities and Desired Future Condition on the HL SGA.

Natural Community	***Number in SGA***	***Number Known in State***	***Number Known in Region***	***Rarity***	***Desired Future Condition***
Northern Fen	1	48	28	S3	Maintain
Rich Conifer Swamp	1	100	52	S3	Maintain

Table 3. Current cover types within the HL SGA based on Michigan Forest Inventory surveys.

Cover Type	***Acres***	***Percent of Game Area***
Emergent wetland	207	46%
Lowland coniferous forest	147	33%
Mixed upland conifer	54	12%
Open water	31	7%
Lowland deciduous forest	4	1%
Lowland shrub	2	0.5%
Upland mixed forest	1	0.5%
Total	**446**	**100%**

Recreational Use

The HL SGA provides a host of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, including hunting, trapping, bird watching, and wildlife viewing. State game areas in Michigan are under continual pressure for other uses, and those uses will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis for their compliance with State and Federal regulations, their compatibility with the establishing purpose of the SGA, and management endeavors that uphold that purpose.

Impacts on the Local Economy

Contributions to the local economy resulting from activities on the game area by hunters and wildlife watchers may include a direct boost to local restaurants, sporting goods stores, convenience stores and gas stations.

Management Direction

With no water level management capabilities, the desired future condition of the HL SGA is to maintain the habitat types that are present on site (Table 4).

Table 4. Desired future condition of cover types on the HL SGA.

Cover Type and Habitat	***Desired Future Condition***
Emergent Wetland	Maintain
Natural Pines	Maintain
Mixed Upland Conifers	Maintain
Lowland Coniferous Forest	Maintain
Lowland deciduous-mixed conifer	Maintain

Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions

What follows is the strategic direction for the HL 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 primarily from the featured species and habitat issues relevant to HL SGA.

Goal 1. Protect and maintain wetland habitat for wildlife.

Rationale: Wetlands have declined in Michigan by 50% since pre-European settlement, underscoring the importance of maintaining and protecting what wetlands remain. Both HL SGA tracts were acquired to set aside valuable wetland habitat for wildlife and fish species and to provide public access for wildlife-based recreation in a county where not much public land is available.

Metrics: Acres of wetland cover types via Michigan Forest Inventory surveys, documentation of species encountered on the HL SGA, number and size of invasive species occurrences, acres of invasive species treated.

Objective A. Promote native plant species and healthy wetland ecosystem function by monitoring for invasive species.

Action 1. Monitor the phragmites stand adjacent to the West Branch River tract of the SGA for infiltration onto the SGA. DNR Parks and Recreation Division manages the area where the phragmites is located and has plans to treat as necessary and feasible in accordance with the DNR's Invasive Species Strategy.
Action 2. Monitor for invasive species on the SGA when possible.

Objective B. Protect and maintain the northern fen and rich conifer swamp natural community ERAs on the SGA.

Action 1. Management within and adjacent to the natural communities will follow the ERA management plan, once written. Prior to that, any management activity within or adjacent to the northern fen and rich conifer swamp natural community will be with the intent to promote, protect, and restore those natural communities.
Action 2. Prevent any intrusive activities that may result in degrading the natural communities.

Goal 2. Increase awareness of the HL SGA.

Rationale: Hubbard Lake is surrounded by private hunt clubs and residences which would benefit from better boundary signage to help prevent trespass

issues, and local residents and visitors alike would likely increase use of the property if better known.

Assessment: Number of signs posted, number of private land trespass complaints.

Objective A. Establish one official HL SGA sign on the West Branch River tract and ensure adequate boundary signage throughout the SGA.

Action 1. Erect a wooden HL SGA sign on the West Branch River tract at Mt. Maria Road where it crosses the West Branch River.
Action 2. Ensure property boundaries are clearly marked with standard state land boundary signs.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

This game area provides recreational opportunities for local resident and visitors. Our overall goal is to continue to provide these opportunities. If any parcels adjacent to the HL SGA become available, we will assess them for acquisition.

Plan Review

This plan was available for internal DNR review between July 21, and August 7, 2017. A general DNR comment for all master plans suggested taking a more deliberate invasive species approach that focuses on what resource or value is being managed for. This plan was also available for public review and comment between September 11, 2017 and November 1, 2017. No comments were received. This plan will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals

02/05/2018

Brian Mastenbrook, Field Operations Manager — Date

02/05/2018

Rex Ainslie, Regional Supervisor — Date