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Maple River State Game Area

Master Plan

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MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE DIVISION

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STRATEGIC PLAN

The Maple River State Game Area (SGA) stretches from south-central Gratiot County, through northwest Clinton County and into northeast Ionia County. The Maple River SGA got its start with the initial purchase of land in 1951. Over the next several decades, numerous parcels have been purchased to expand the State Game Area to its current size at 9,578 acres (Figure 1). The intended purpose for these purchases has been to secure valuable wildlife habitat near population centers, increase public recreation, and consolidate State ownership. Due to its central location in the State and its accessibility off U.S. 127, Maple River SGA is a highly used area for many people in pursuit of varying recreational activities. Some of these activities include hunting, trapping, fishing, bird watching, and hiking. The focus of future management will maximize the opportunity for hunting and trapping recreation as well as providing habitat for Featured Species such as ring-necked pheasants, waterfowl, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, and squirrels. Opportunity for other forms of recreation will be managed for and encouraged as long as they do not interfere with management for which the area is dedicated.

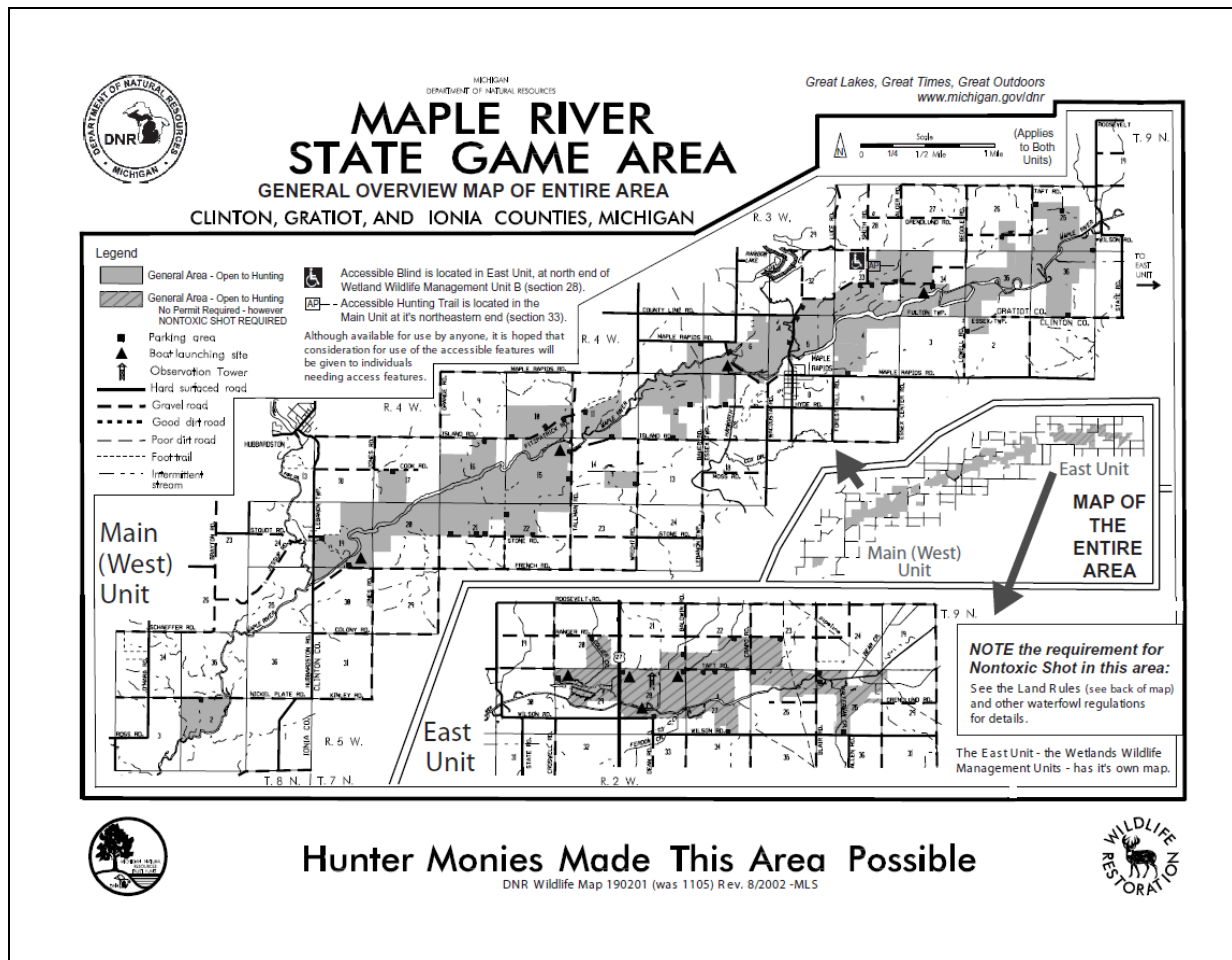


Figure 1: Map of the Maple River State Game Area

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. This plan incorporates goals and objectives of other higher level plans and initiatives including the DNR Evergreen goals (protect natural and cultural resources, ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment, enable strong natural resource-based economies, improve and build strong relationships and partnerships, foster effective business practices and good governance), the Wildlife Division's GPS (Guiding Principles and Strategies), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (outstanding deer and turkey hunting, challenge of small game hunting, and great diversity of high quality waterfowl hunting), the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative, the SWR Regional Operational Plan, and the SWR Land Management Plan.

The Maple River SGA is large and consists of a variety of habitat types (Table 1). The size and diversity of habitat types provides the opportunity to manage for more than one set of goals and objectives. Therefore, the SGA is divided into 2 separate focus areas, or Units (Figure 1). The **East Unit** consists of Compartment V which lies immediately adjacent to and east of U.S. 127. Management goals for the **East Unit** will be to provide locally abundant populations of waterfowl, pheasants, and other species associated with wetland and open grassland habitats. The rest of the SGA (Compartments I, II, III, and IV), makes up the **West Unit** where management will focus on providing locally abundant populations of white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, wood ducks, rabbits, and squirrels.

Cover type	Maple River SGA Acres	Maple River SGA % of Area	West Unit Acres	West Unit % of Unit	East Unit Acres	East Unit % of Unit
Aspen	169	1.8	169	2.3	0	0.0
Cropland	531	5.5	238	3.3	293	12.5
Emergent Wetland	696	7.3	324	4.5	372	15.8
Herbaceous Openland	498	5.2	209	2.9	289	12.3
Low Density Trees	146	1.5	98	1.4	48	2.0
Lowland Deciduous For.	3569	37.3	2985	41.3	584	24.8
Lowland Shrub	313	3.3	301	4.2	12	0.5
Mixed Non-For. Wetland	395	4.1	279	3.9	116	4.9
Mixed Upland Deciduous	1310	13.7	1177	16.3	133	5.7
Mud Flats	115	1.2	0	0.0	115	1.2
Northern Hardwood	319	3.3	319	4.4	0	0.0
Oak Types	466	4.9	463	6.4	3	0.1
Upland Deciduous	77	0.8	77	1.1	0	0.0
Upland Shrub	634	6.6	353	4.9	281	11.9
Water	273	2.9	166	2.3	107	4.5
Other	67	0.7	67	0.9	0	0.0
Total	9578	~100 %	7225	~100 %	2353	~100 %

Table 1. Current habitat of the designated Management Areas for the Maple River SGA.

What follows is the strategic direction for the Maple River State Game Area. 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 should come mostly from the featured species and habitat issues relevant for the given SGA, but could also come from recreational infrastructure needs or natural communities. 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 implementation in operational and annual work plans. It is expected to take approximately ten years to complete all the objectives.

Goals/Objectives/Actions

Goal I is to produce locally breeding populations of wood duck, mallard, Canada geese, and huntable populations of migrating waterfowl in the East Unit (Figure 2)

Rationale: waterfowl hunting is the main draw for this portion of the SGA; managing habitat for waterfowl also benefits numerous other wildlife species including bald eagles, ospreys, shorebirds, and furbearer species

Metrics: weekly waterfowl counts throughout fall migration; opening day bag check; staff observation and contacts with hunters

Objective A is to maintain impoundments and ensure all infrastructure (dikes, pumps, gates, etc.) are in good condition.

Action 1. Regular inspections of dikes to identify areas in need of repair

Action 2. Regular maintenance on pumps to ensure they are running properly

Objective B is to implement a water level manipulation strategy to maximize habitat for waterfowl as well as access for hunters

Action 1. Lower water levels during the summer months to encourage emergent vegetation growth

Action 2. Raise water levels in designated Units prior to hunting season to provide access for hunters using boats

Action 2. Flood designated Units prior to hunting season to provide access for walk-in hunters

Action 3. Flood the Refuge prior to and throughout hunting season to provide suitable feeding and roosting areas for waterfowl

Action 4. Develop a drawdown schedule to maximize emergent vegetation growth as needed

Objective C is to provide quality waterfowl hunting opportunities throughout the hunting season

Action 1. Maintain a seasonal wildlife refuge to ensure waterfowl utilize the East Unit throughout the entire waterfowl hunting season

Action 2. Provide annual crops, such as corn, buckwheat, and millet for waterfowl as a food source during migration

Action 2. Maintain access spots for boats in designated Units as well as river access at Blair Rd

Action 3. Provide walk-in hunting opportunities in designated Units

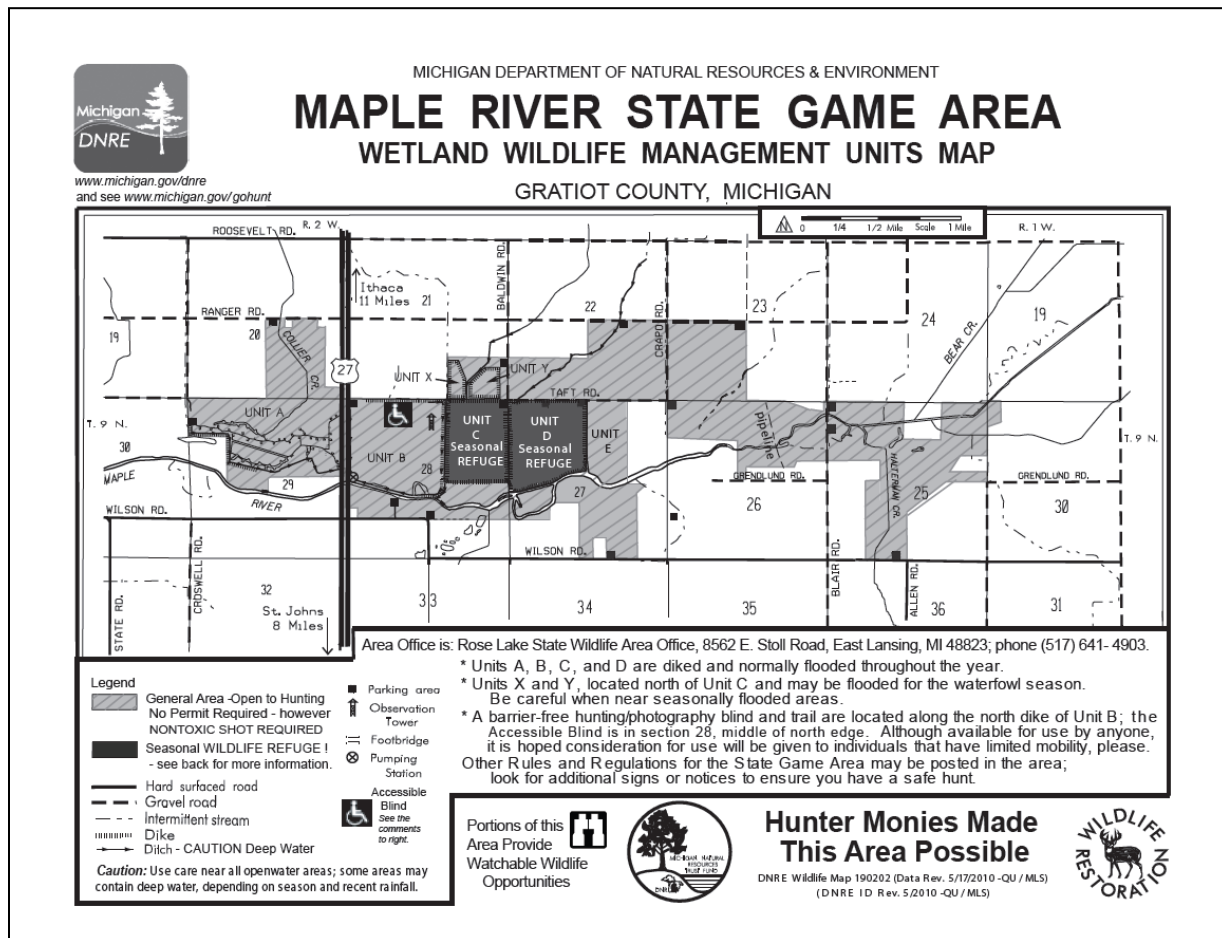


Figure 2: Map of the East Unit of the Maple River State Game Area.

Goal II is a sustainable, abundant population of ring-necked pheasants in the East Unit (Figure 3)

Rationale: 1) pheasants are a Featured Species and a highly desirable game species; 2) The Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative calls for doubling the current pheasant population in Michigan; 3) Maple River SGA was identified as an area to increase habitat management for pheasants; and 4) there is a local stakeholder group that actively advocates for and funds pheasant management.

Metrics: crowing surveys and hunter satisfaction; observation of pheasants and pheasant sign.

Objective A is to establish and maintain a large grassland complex in the East Unit by 2018

Action 1. Continue planting selected fields to switchgrass or a warm season grass/forb mix to provide suitable winter and brood-rearing cover

Action 2. Reclaim selected old fields by mowing back brush by September 2014

Action 3. Continue sharecrop contracts to keep fields open and provide winter food and cover for pheasants

Objective B is to control invasive species where appropriate in the grassland unit.

Action 1. use mowing/cutting and herbicide to control autumn olive, honeysuckle, and black locust

Action 2. Spot treat herbaceous invasives such as spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, etc. with herbicide as needed

Objective C is to establish and maintain suitable woody vegetation that provides escape cover for pheasants within the East Unit

Action 1. Maintain brushy edges along grassy fields as escape cover for pheasants

Action 2. Remove tall trees from fence rows and field edges that act as raptor perches

Goal III is a stable, abundant cottontail rabbit population on both Units of the Maple River SGA

Rationale: 1) cottontail rabbits are a Featured Species and are a desirable game species; 2) quality habitat for these species currently exists on the Maple River SGA; 3) small game hunting is important as recreational opportunity for new hunters; 4) habitat projects associated with this goal will also benefit numerous other wildlife species.

Assessment: Discussion with hunters and observation of rabbits and rabbit sign.

Objective A is to establish and maintain dense brush/grassy vegetation and food sources in idle fields throughout the SGA

Action 1. Continually manage selected fields and forests in early successional stages through timber sales and mowing

Action 2. Create brush piles suitable for rabbit cover in selected old fields and forest edges throughout the SGA

Goal IV is to continue to provide access for hunters and other users; including those with disabilities and/or limited mobility

Rationale: Maple River SGA has one ADA compliant blind for waterfowl hunters in the East Unit as well as three ADA compliant upland blinds in the West Unit; Increasing public participation in hunting and retaining hunters meets objectives of Goal 4 in the Wildlife Division GPS.

Metrics: Staff observations, contacts with users.

Objective A: Maintain blinds to ensure they are in usable condition

Action 1. Annually clean up blinds before hunting season

Action 2. Annually maintain access trails up to ADA standards

Action 3. Make repairs to blinds as needed to keep them in good condition

Objective B: Provide suitable cover and/or food source for desired game species within shooting distance of each blind

Action 1. Maintain open water in front of the blind in the East Unit

Action 2. Clear brush and trees from shooting lanes of the blinds in the West Unit in winter of 2014

Action 3. Determine suitable location for food plots next to blind(s) in the West Unit by May 2014

Goal V is a sustainable population of wood ducks on the West Unit of the Maple River SGA

Rationale: wood ducks are popular game species and protecting and maintaining their preferred habitat along the Maple River corridor will provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. In addition, these forested riparian corridors are habitat to a variety of wildlife species and protect water quality

Metrics: staff observation and hunter surveys; assessment of lowland forest types within IFMAP

Objective A. Maintain the current extent (~3,200 acres) of lowland forest and shrub cover type on the West Unit of the SGA

Action 1. Do not implement forest management activities in lowland forest and shrub stands adjacent to the Maple River

Action 2. Restrict forest management activities in upland stands within 100' of the Maple River and its tributaries

Objective B: Manage emergent wetlands (~300 acres) to provide wetland vegetation and open water areas preferred by wood ducks

Action 1. Monitor (and treat as necessary) emergent wetlands for presence of invasive plant species including phragmites and purple loosestrife

Goal VI is to provide abundant numbers of white-tailed deer and access for hunters on both Units of the Maple River 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 September 2014

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

Action 1. Identify and inventory current oak stands by December of 2014

Action 2. Develop forest management strategies to increase mast production and oak regeneration by April 2015

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

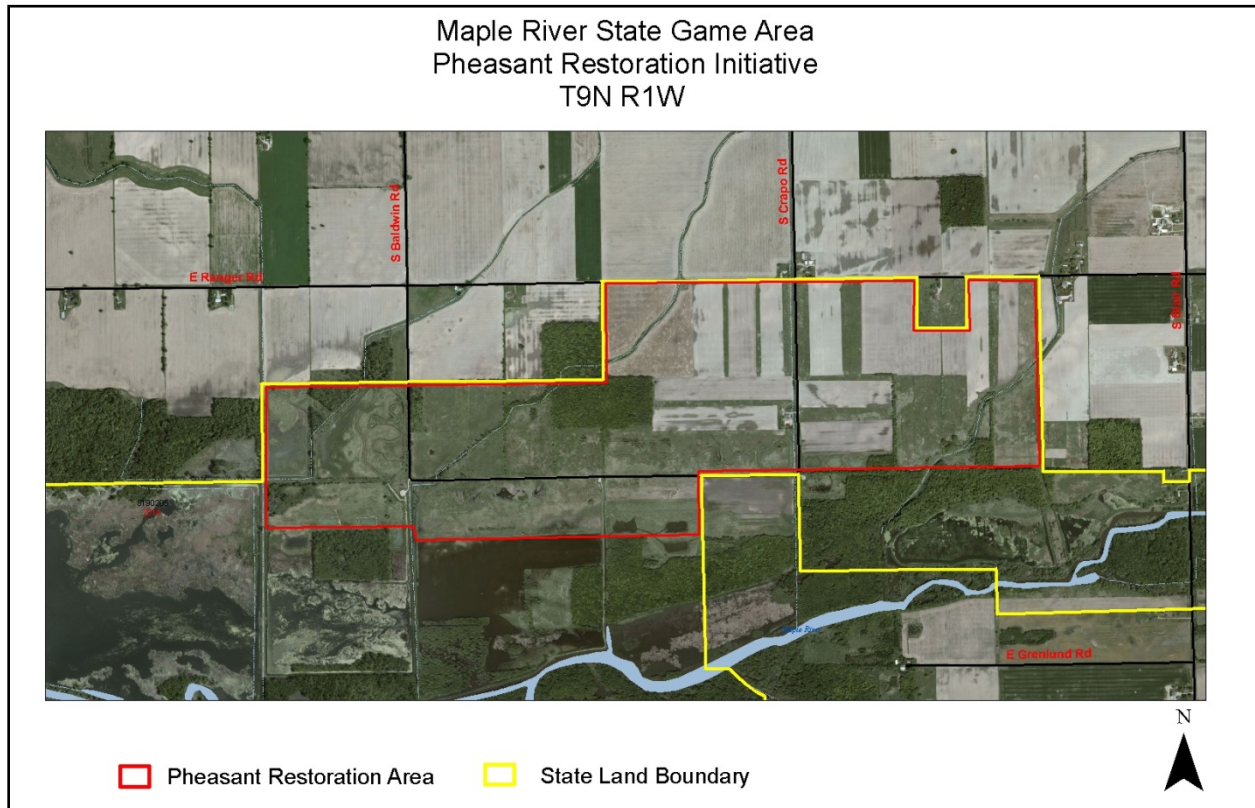


Figure 3: Map of the Pheasant Restoration Initiative at the Maple River State Game Area.

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.

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


Acquisition and Disposal of Land

Since the Maple River SGA is located in southern Michigan and within relatively close distance of the city of Lansing, the land acquisition strategy for the Maple River SGA is to both fill in state ownership by acquiring available blocks located within and among current state ownership and to expand the area by obtaining appropriate parcels that are outside the current ownership but within the acquisition boundary. Parcels will be evaluated as they become available and will be acquired on a willing seller basis only.

Review and Approval

This plan was available for public review and comment on the DNR website between May 1, 2015 and May 31, 2015. During this period no comments were received before finalizing this plan. The final plan was approved on June 25, 2015 and will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals


Chad Fedewa, Wildlife Biologist (Author) 6/25/15
Date


John Niewoonder, Field Operations Manager 6/25/15
Date


Steve Chadwick, Regional Supervisor 6-25-15
Date