

Watson Rich Conifer Swamp ERA Plan

Administrative Information:

- Location within state forest (MA, FMU, compartment, stand, etc.)
 - Traverse City Forest Management Area
 - Grayling Outwash Management Area
 - Compartment 61124, 61125, 61126
- Geo-political location info (county; township, range and section (TRS))
 - Kalkaska County
 - T26N R06W Sections 14, 15, 21, 22
- Contact information (local plan writer(s), other staff assisting with plan, conservation partners)
 - Plan Writer: Steve Griffith, TCFMU Wildlife Biologist
 - Local FRD Staff: Kelly Standerfer, TCFMU Forester
- Ownership information
 - State of Michigan
 - Private
- Existing infrastructure/facilities
 - None
- Other documents related to this ERA:
 - MNFI Element Occurrence Record

Conservation Values

- Description of the natural community occurrence for Watson Rich Conifer Swamp:
 - MNFI EO ID #6020, Rank AB, and LASTOBS date 7/20/2007
 - The ERA is recognized as a “Excellent or good estimated viability” as an example of the natural community.
 - The rich conifer swamp is dominated by northern white-cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) with canopy associates including balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), and black spruce (*Picea mariana*). Canopy northern white-cedar range in diameter at breast height (DBH) from 10-40 centimeters. Scattered super canopy Eastern white pine occur throughout and range in DBH from 30 centimeters up. Variable, dense stand.
 - Northern white-cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), black spruce (*Picea mariana*), balsam fir (*Abies bals*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), mountain holly (*Nemopanthus mucronatus*), Sphagnum spp. One hundred twenty-one vascular plant species identified. 2007: Northern white-cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) is the dominant

canopy species throughout the tract, primarily associating with black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and balsam (*Abies balsamea*), with eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)

- Stand examiner notes: Some isn't quite as thick, and some is very thick. Lots of deer yarding in stand. Most is cedary cover but some is mixed swamp conifer.
- High conservation value (HCV) attributes: This Rich conifer swamp is part of a larger wetland complex that includes freshwater forested and shrub wetlands. The white cedar is estimated to 140+ years old, as well as the super canopy white pine.
- Other values for consideration:
 - The presence of red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), and eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*) have been documented nearby. These species are State threatened, State special concern, and US listed State special concern, accordingly.

Threat Assessment for Rich Conifer Swamp

- Rich conifer swamp is considered a self-maintaining, stable community that relies on gap dynamics to regenerate long-lived, shade-tolerant, northern white cedar. The community occurs in a region where deer were scarce prior to logging in the mid-1800s. Because northern white cedar is a main winter-staple of deer in northern Michigan, and deer tend to yard in cedar swamps during the winter, historically high deer densities for the region have led to a decline in the community's ability to naturally regenerate.
- The frequent conversion of rich conifer swamp to hardwood-conifer swamp, hardwood swamp, aspen, and alder thicket following logging is a concern. Prescribed burning is recommended following clearcuts in cedar swamp to help setback advanced regeneration of hardwoods and other conifers and improve seedling establishment by northern white cedar.
- At present, a few exotic invasive species occur within the community. The element occurrence record indicates that narrow leaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*), St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), and autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*). Other exotic invasive plants that occur in rich conifer swamps include marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) and bittersweet nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*). The exotic species with the greatest potential to alter community structure and function now is glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*).

General Management of ERAs

- ERAs will generally not be managed for timber harvest. Management activities or prescriptions in Ecological Reference Areas are limited to low impact activities compatible with the defined attributes and values of the community type, except under the following circumstances:

i. Harvesting activities where necessary to restore or recreate conditions to meet the objectives of the ERA, or to mitigate conditions that interfere with achieving the ERA objectives. In this regard, forest management activities (including timber harvest) may be used to create and maintain conditions that emulate an intact, mature forest or other successional phases that may be under-represented in the landscape.

ii. Road building only where it is documented that it will contribute to minimizing the overall environmental impacts within the FMU and will not jeopardize the purpose for which the ERA was designated.

iii. Existing and new land use activities should be evaluated in the context of whether they detract from achieving the desired future conditions of the natural community for which the ERA was designated. The acceptability of land use activities within DNR administered ERAs will be evaluated using severity, scope, and irreversibility criteria, as established in DNR IC4199, Guidance for Land Use Activities within DNR Administered Ecological Reference Areas.

iv. Threats such as fire, natural or exotic pests or pathogens may warrant other management measures.

v. Harvesting and other management activities in presently accessible areas located within the peripheral boundary of an ERA that are NOT the natural community of focus and which may or may not be typed as a separate stand or forest type (e.g. an upland island of previously managed aspen within a bog complex) may be prescribed for treatments, contingent upon a determination of no anticipated direct or indirect adverse impact to the defined attributes and values of natural community for which the ERA was designated. The FRD Biodiversity Conservation Program leader shall be consulted regarding the determination of any direct or indirect adverse impact.

vi. Land management activities immediately adjacent to an ERA should consider any anticipated direct or indirect adverse impact to the defined attributes and values of natural community for which the ERA was designated. Management will be adaptive. ERAs will be monitored to determine if implemented management activities are moving the natural communities forward or maintaining them at their desired future condition. The network of ERAs will be evaluated every five years for their contribution to the overall goal of biodiversity conservation. This review cycle will allow for the potential addition or subtraction of lands from an ERA, designation of new ERAs, or removal of the ERA planning designation.

Management Goals for Rich Conifer Swamp

- Restoration of Rich Conifer Swamp where applicable with specific emphasis on northern white cedar and hemlock regeneration
- Maintain and promote representation of native plants, indicator species, rare species, and promote regeneration of woody species via gap dynamics to maintain a multi-aged forest.
- Assess deer herbivory on plant diversity and regeneration of northern white cedar.
- Prevent environmental damage from vehicles
- Eliminate or maintain absence of invasive species such as marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), bittersweet nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*), and glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*).
- Prevent conversion of Rich Conifer swamp to another cover type.
- Allow natural processes to occur

Management Objectives for Rich Conifer Swamp

Management objectives are the means to achieve the management goals of the specific site and should be time specific if possible.

- Identify and eliminate illegal ORV access points when detected
- Identify and prioritize critical areas within the ERA to treat for invasive species
- Assess EO quality every 10-20 years
- Determine if there are impacts to hydrological system
- Work with adaptation specialist to determine threats associated with climate change

Management Actions

- Close illegal roads and trails (M, R)
- Avoid creating new roads and trails adjacent to ERA
- Install culverts or other structures as needed to mitigate impacts to hydrological system
- Identify vectors of invasive species and reduce their introduction to the site. Partner with local CISMA
- Remove invasive plants using appropriate control methods for that particular species (hand-pull, herbicide, Rx) using partnerships where appropriate, develop FTP's and PAP's (M, R)
- Write a wildfire plan to incorporate a "let it burn" policy where safety concerns allow. (M, R)
- Should retain an intact buffer of natural communities surrounding this wetland.
- Work with MNFI and other experts to update EO inventory (M, R)
- Update plan with additional knowledge as it becomes available.

Monitoring

- Monitoring should generally be based upon the 10-year planning cycle, although some issues may need to be addressed in a shorter time period
- Monitoring needs:
 - Representative and rare species occurrences
 - Presence of rare animals
 - Populations of invasive species – number and scope by species
 - Effects of invasive species treatment – growing year post treatment and for two successive years thereafter.
 - Change in EO rank
 - Any illegal ORV activity
 - Any changes in hydrology
 - Any illegal timber harvest activity
- Explore potential to partner with GTRLC and MNFI for monitoring efforts, along with local staff

Signatures & Approval Date:

- Each plan will require formal approval from all relevant resource divisions
- Date of final approval

