

GLADWIN FIELD TRIAL AREA MASTER PLAN



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE DIVISION

BRUCE BARLOW

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Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

In 1916, lands were purchased to be utilized as a public “grouse field trial area” (ruffed grouse) and was formally dedicated in 1922 as the Gladwin Game Area by the Conservation Commission (now the Natural Resources Commission). In 1946, the area was administratively transferred from the Wildlife Division (WLD) to the Forest Resources Division (FRD) within the Department of Natural Resources. It is currently co-managed by both divisions according to the establishing purpose of the area. In 1947, legislation was passed that dedicated it as a field trial area under Act 82. Finally, it was rededicated by the Conservation Commission as the Gladwin Field Trial Area (GFTA) in 1957.

The majority of the 4,750 acres of land in the GFTA was purchased with federal Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Funds, but some land was acquired through tax reversion and recreation bond monies. P-R funds are a source of federal aid generated from taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and are apportioned to states for wildlife population and habitat management, and wildlife-based recreation. Multiple use of areas supported by P-R funding is encouraged, provided it does not interfere with the primary purpose of wildlife management and habitat restoration.

The GFTA is in the Northern Lower Peninsula Region (NLP) in the northwest corner of Gladwin County (Figure 1). The primary use has been well defined as any management practice that promotes and sustains high quality field trial event standards and conditions. It is unique in that it relies on forest management to maintain a diversity of aspen age classes to support a robust native ruffed grouse population for dog field trialing.

Management for young forest provides a benefit to ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and a variety of other wildlife species. We will continue to manage the GFTA for young forests and the wildlife and recreation that is dependent on them.

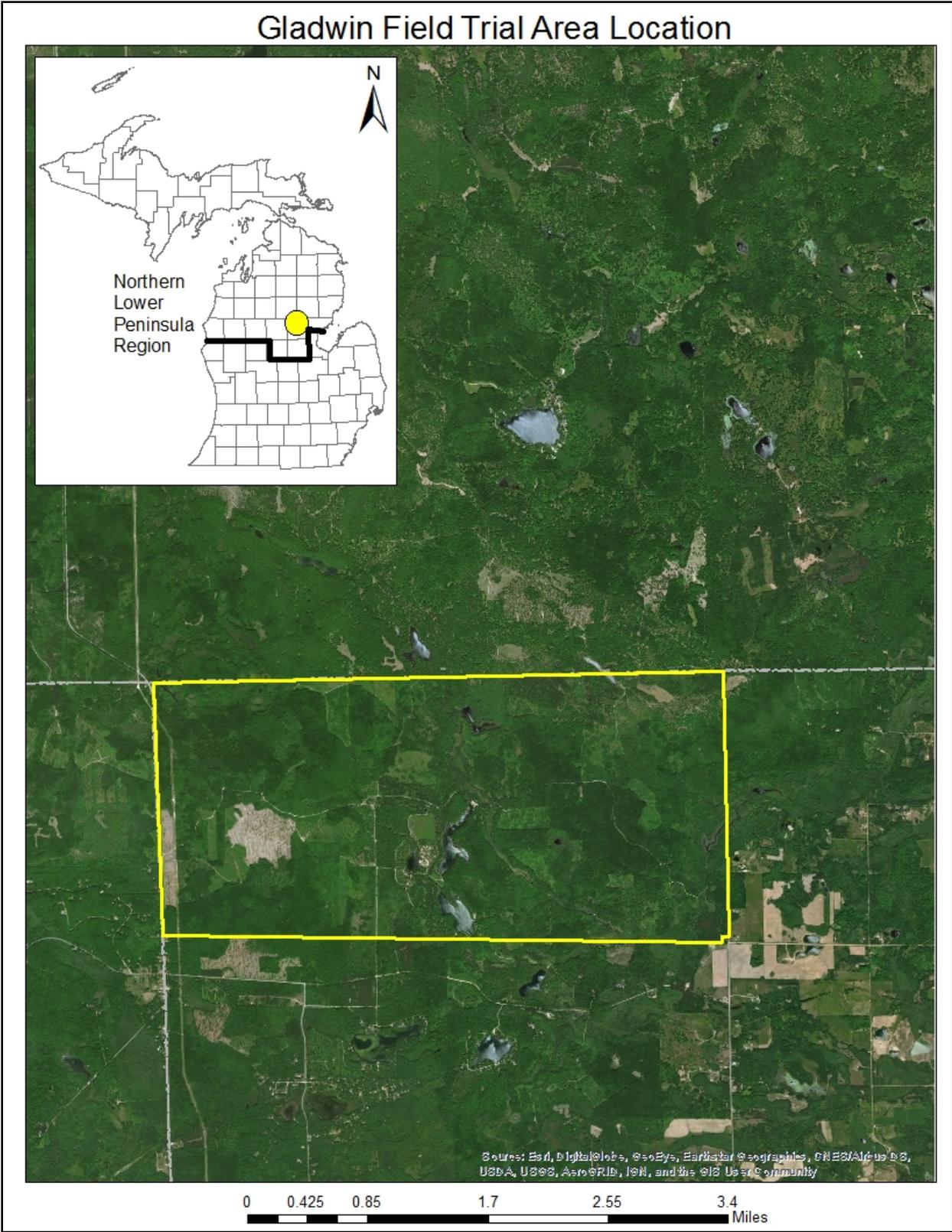


Figure 1. Location of the GFTA.

Background

This plan incorporates, by reference, the Upper Mississippi River Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Implementation Plan, the DNR Northern Lower Peninsula Regional State Forest Management Plan, and the DNR Wildlife Action Plan by maintaining young forests for game and non-game species of conservation concern.

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 (GPS), More Bang for Your Buck concepts, and the Division's NLP Regional Operational Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

Additionally, the GFTA is considered "in-scope" for forest certification, meaning the area is included within the scope of evaluation under DNR's Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) forest management certificates. As such, the area is categorized as a High Conservation Value Area (HCVA). HCVAs are areas of state forest recognized for a specific contribution to conservation or social values, and this classification reflects the GFTAs legal dedication as a field trial area. Activities on the GFTA will follow processes and procedures outlined in the DNR's Forest Certification Work Instructions to ensure compliance with forest certification standards.

Wildlife Species

Robust ruffed grouse populations are managed through intensive forest habitat management. American woodcock and golden-winged warbler benefit from grouse management as well. Other species commonly found on the GFTA include white-tailed deer, black bear, turkey, cottontail rabbit, and snowshoe hare. Fur-bearing animals are present in the area and include otter, beaver, bobcat, red fox, and raccoon. Avian predators, such as the northern goshawk (state special concern), account for some grouse mortality. According to a database maintained by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), spotted turtle (state threatened) has been documented within the GFTA.

True to the intended purpose of the area when it was dedicated, we will continue to focus our efforts on species and habitats that help meet our goals to provide quality dog field trialing opportunities in addition to 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, Special Concern Species	Climate Change Vulnerable	Remarks
Cottontail rabbit	Yes	No	No	Grasslands, shrub-lands, brush piles, young forests
Snowshoe hare	Yes	No	Yes	Young forests, aspen, conifer or lowland conifer understory, brush piles or slash
Ruffed grouse	Yes	No	Yes	Young forests, aspen
Woodcock	Yes	No	No	Aspen, young forests, openings, alder, riparian zones, forest wetlands
White-tail deer	Yes	No	No	Good thermal cover, regenerating hardwoods, shrubs, openings, food plots, mast trees
Golden-winged warbler	Yes	Yes	No	Mosaic lowland and grassland-shrub communities, alder and young aspen

Ongoing shifts in climate are increasing the risk of extremes in hot and dry weather that impact aspen clones, and ruffed grouse are vulnerable to changes in weather that affects nesting and snow roosts. These changes are likely to decrease the cycles and overall population of ruffed grouse in the future. Long term, this may impact our ability to effectively meet our desired future conditions outlined in Goal 1 (see below) on the GFTA. Over the course of this 10-year planning period, we will monitor aspen regeneration as part of routine forest inventory. In general, a variety of age classes and cover types are used by grouse which may help buffer against climate change vulnerability and stressors. Because climate impacts to aspen and grouse are not yet evident on the GFTA, monitoring and maintaining habitat diversity are our best adaptation strategies.

Snowshoe hare is also predicted to decline on the landscape, as snowfall becomes less predictable in a warmer, drier climate. Recent research suggests that early successional habitat projects can offset climate impacts to snowshoe hare up to a point, but eventually snowshoe hares are likely to be replaced by eastern cottontail rabbits in coming decades.

Existing Conditions

The land surface of the GFTA is undulating throughout, sometimes characterized by steep ridges, though there are a few areas of more level plains. The majority of the GFTA is underlain by well-drained sandy to loamy sand soils associated with moraines and outwash plains. The exception to this is where water features occur; these are underlain by mucks associated with depressions on poorly drained outwash plains.

The low-lying southeastern portion of the GFTA hosts several water features including marshes, streams, and several kettle lakes. Trout Lake (28 acres), Hoister Lake (23 acres), and House Lake (4 acres) are found east of Joy Rd. and north and east of the 2 campgrounds. Hoister Lake and Trout lake, though natural kettle lakes, have dam structures. Part of Rust Eaton Lake lies within the GFTA boundary in the northeast corner, and there are several beaver ponds located throughout the GFTA. Three groundwater-fed, cold water streams originate in the GFTA and are designated trout streams.

To maintain national recognition, habitat management on the GFTA needs to meet specific criteria in each field trial course. The GFTA consists of 15 field trialing courses (forest stands meeting specific cover type and stem densities), 1 bird area (a special event area consisting of a 5-acre field with a grass cover 16 inches to 18 inches maximum height), and 1 puppy area (forested habitat; habitat quality is not emphasized in these areas).

Most of the GFTA is a mosaic of aspen and oak stands (Table 2, Figure 2). Aspen is the most important and intensively managed forest cover type. Aspen typically produces excellent quality timber at high volumes.

White, red, and pin oak are found in relatively pure stands and also in mixed stands with aspen and red maple. Although grouse do consume acorns, the major importance of oak is in its high stem density post-treatment (up to 15 years old). In these age classes, grouse broods can flourish. It also provides fair drumming habitat for adults and protective cover for young birds. Understory components, where present, usually consist of witch hazel, red maple, white pine, balsam fir, spruce, hawthorn, junberry, black cherry and viburnums. In addition, there are northern hardwood and red pine stands scattered throughout the GFTA.

Table 2. Current cover types on the GFTA based on state forest inventory surveys.

Cover Type	Acres	Percent of GFTA
Aspen	2190	46.1
Oak	997	21.0
Mixed Upland Deciduous	786	16.6
Lowland Coniferous Forest	239	5.0
Planted Pines	126	2.7
Northern Hardwood	85	1.8
Water	75	1.6
Lowland Deciduous Forest	58	1.2
Emergent Wetland	52	1.1
Herbaceous Open land	42	0.9
Lowland Shrub	38	0.8
Natural Pines	21	0.4
Upland Mixed Forest	20	0.4
Low Density Trees	11	0.2
Other Upland Conifers	6	0.1
Upland Shrub	2	<.1
Sand, soil	1	<.1
Total	4750	100

Gladwin Field Trial Area Cover Types

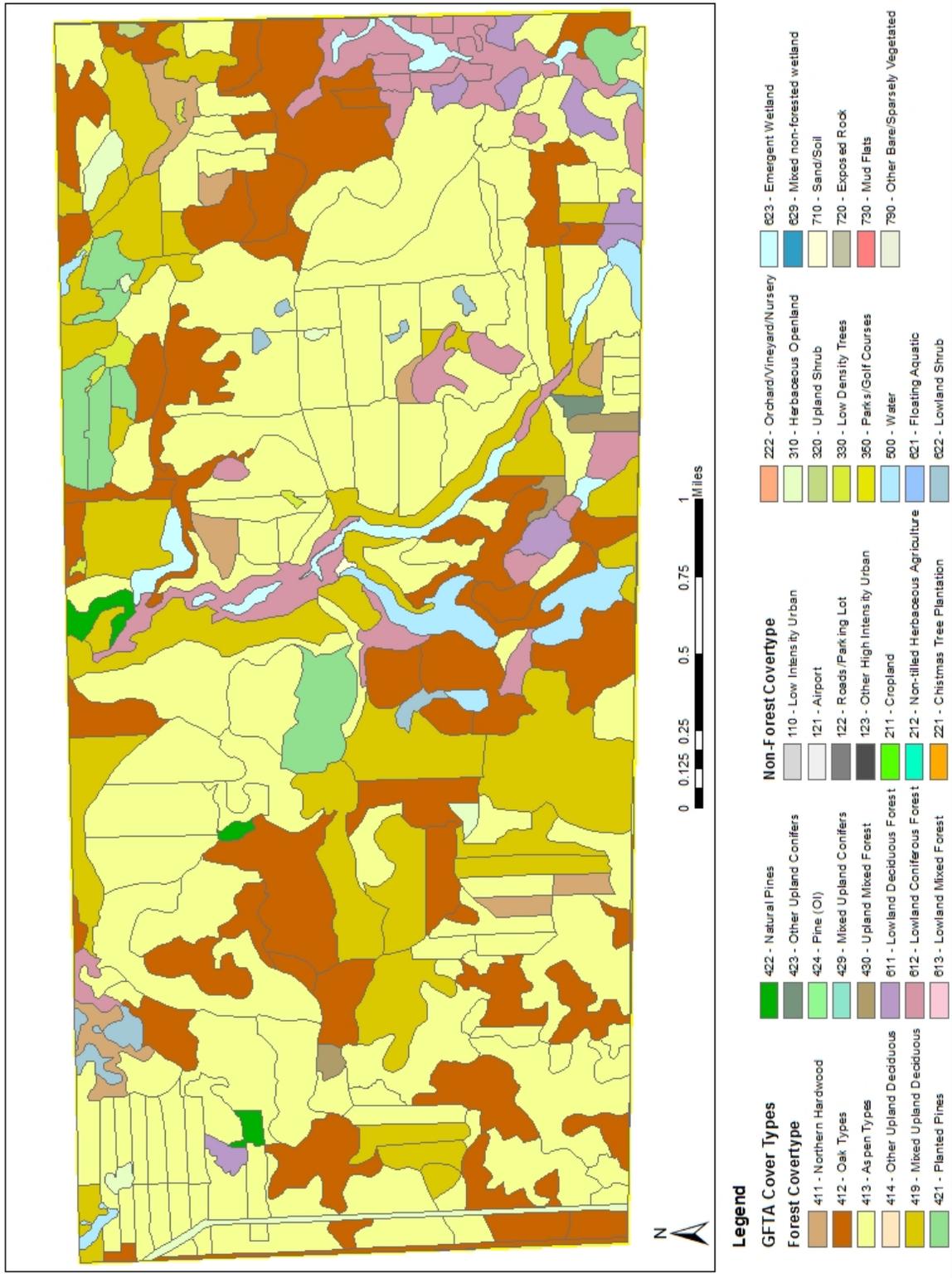


Figure 2. Cover Types on the GFTA based on state forest inventory surveys.

Recreational Use

The GFTA has a unique and specific purpose for dog field trialing. As such, there are many policies, regulations and laws regarding its intent, use, and management. Within the GFTA, there are two special management areas that allow for other specific uses of the area.

Beginning in the 1940s, the GFTA gained national recognition and began hosting the Grand National Grouse Championship on a three-year rotation along with Pennsylvania and New York. This tradition continues today. Additionally, there are several grouse field trialing events throughout the year, coordinated by five field trialing clubs that comprise the main stakeholder groups for the area.

Due to an increase in human population throughout the county over the last decade, the GFTA has become popular to many different user groups. Because the area has such a specific focus, other uses are permitted but restricted in some cases. Some uses can cause conflicts during those years when dog trials extend through the first full week of November. Popular uses on the GFTA are formal (2 campgrounds, 76 sites) and dispersed camping, fishing, boating, dispersed and trail snowmobiling, mushroom picking, firewood gathering, horseback and mountain bike riding. Hunting and trapping on the GFTA are limited to deer hunting starting November 15 (or with a managed deer hunt permit) and beaver and otter trapping from November 15 to March 15.

Other miscellaneous uses include berry picking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, swimming, bird watching and wildlife viewing. These activities have little or no impact on the priority use of the area.

Impacts on the Local Economy

Contributions to the local economy resulting from activities on the game area include field trials, camping, and firearm deer season. Other activities, such as fishing, trapping, snowmobiling, and wildlife viewing are popular uses of the GFTA. These recreational activities may provide a direct boost to local restaurants, sporting goods stores, convenience stores and gas stations. Timber sales with local logging operators are a regular occurrence and support local jobs.

Management Direction

The desired future condition for the GFTA is outlined in Table 3. Management goals are designed to provide a forest treatment schedule that will improve and maintain existing grouse habitat while providing the basic stem densities necessary for a championship field trial. Secondary management is to establish some general guidelines for future recreational development and uses other than field trialing that are compatible with the primary use.

Over the next ten years, we will maintain and promote the aspen cover type by decreasing mixed upland deciduous utilizing specific harvest techniques. Additional approaches to increasing aspen cover type would be to expand aspen cover in adjacent stands where cover types are less desirable. Oak will continue to be managed and maintained accordingly for its properties listed earlier. All other cover types will be maintained as they occur within the field trial area.

Table 3. Desired future condition of cover types and habitat issue direction on the GFTA.

Cover type and Habitat Issues	Desired Future Condition
Aspen	Increase
Oak	Maintain
Mixed Upland Deciduous	Decrease
Lowland Coniferous Forest	Maintain
Planted Pines	Maintain
Northern Hardwood	Maintain
Water	Maintain
Lowland Deciduous Forest	Maintain
Emergent Wetland	Maintain
Lowland Shrub	Maintain
Herbaceous Open land	Maintain
Natural Pines	Maintain
Upland Mixed Forest	Maintain
Low Density Trees	Maintain
Other Upland Conifers	Maintain
Upland Shrub	Maintain
Sand, soil	Maintain

Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions

The following strategic direction for the GFTA will 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 GFTA.

Goal I. Manage aspen and other cover types to maintain a robust population of ruffed grouse on the GFTA according to the establishing purpose of the area.

Rationale: The GFTA is unique in that it was established as a grouse field trialing area and is nationally recognized for its quality and ability to produce grouse. Grouse are an important game species valued by hunters and non-hunters alike and can serve as an indicator of high quality early successional forest for other wildlife species. Managing young forests for grouse benefit other species including woodcock, deer, cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hare, and golden-winged warbler.

Metrics: Ruffed grouse drumming surveys, percentage of aspen cover across four age classes based on state forest inventory surveys.

Objective A. Continue to manage aspen so that age classes are balanced.

Action 1. Evenly distribute four age classes over the available aspen cover type such that each age class represents 25% of the total and maintain a 40-year rotation harvest schedule. Disperse age classes throughout the GFTA as much as possible.

Action 2. Maximize stem densities (5,000 stems per acre) in forest treatments.

Action 3. If necessary, treat 30 to 39-year-old sites to meet desired age class distributions, even if that requires out-of-entry year adjustments.

Action 4. Explore the necessity of achieving a variable retention exception request to allow every stand to undergo evaluation for ruffed grouse management. If granted, include in all timber sale proposals. Include the drumming log specification in all aspen treatments/timber sales.

Action 5. Annually conduct ruffed grouse drumming surveys according to Wildlife Division protocols to evaluate the effectiveness of habitat management.

Action 6. Establish the GFTA as a demonstration area for young forest management and the positive impacts it has for recreational users and wildlife alike with informational signage strategically placed throughout by 2023.

Objective B. Manage deer densities as necessary to allow for sustained production of quality grouse habitat.

Action 1. Annually assess the need to initiate managed deer hunts based on deer population trends in Gladwin County and observed impacts to aspen regeneration on the GFTA. When necessary, the number of managed hunt permits available will be proportionate to the number of antlerless licenses available for Gladwin County.

Objective C. Work closely with FRD to establish and implement compartment goals and treatment prescriptions.

Action 1. Continue to maintain large areas free of interior roads, which were established to meet habitat quality requirements for field trialing.

Action 2. Implement approved compartment prescriptions in 5-year increments, though compartment inventory occurs every 10 years.

Action 3. Continue to utilize joint discretion by both the area biologist and area foresters in prescribing timber treatments and addressing unforeseen issues, with the understanding that ruffed grouse habitat is the primary management focus.

Action 4. Opportunistically monitor for invasive species, with emphasis on spotted knapweed, and treat as needed according to the Wildlife Division's Invasive Species Strategy.

Objective D. Consider management of alternative stands/cover types to supplement ruffed grouse habitat management.

Action 1. Consider mixed upland deciduous for potential grouse management areas as the need arises and according to Wildlife Division guidelines.

Action 2. Maintain and manage oak using the best management practices promoting high stem densities within oak cover types.

Goal II. Recognize user diversity while ensuring the protection and prioritization of the intended purpose of the GFTA.

Rationale: National field trialing standards are stringent and necessitate compliance with specific acreage requirements in given cover types. While this takes priority, other uses are allowed that don't conflict with these requirements.

Metrics: Number of successful field trial events conducted, number of total field trial participants, number of antlerless deer licenses purchased, number of otters sealed, number of camp nights sold, number of unauthorized use violations.

Objective A. Work with FRD to ensure permitted activities on the GFTA are compatible with grouse field trials.

Action 1. Work with FRD to restrict firewood gathering permits during both the early and late sanctioned field trialing seasons.

Objective B. Proactively address potential user conflicts to ensure the ability to conduct grouse field trialing remains unimpacted.

Action 1. Request additional Directors Orders if necessary to establish restrictions on activities that either negatively affect habitat or field trial events.

Goal III. Improve and maintain infrastructure to facilitate the intended purpose of the GFTA.

Rationale: National field trialing events require the ability to accommodate people, dogs, and horses for the duration of the events through provision of adequate facilities.

Metrics: Number of field trials per year, average number of events per trial, average number of dogs participating per event, number of field courses available for field trials, number of gates, berms and signs maintained, feet of fence maintained.

Objective A. Maintain infrastructure to accommodate field trial events.

Action 1. Maintain perimeter fence for dog safety during field trial events.

Action 2. Evaluate the feasibility and functionality of developing parking areas (leveling an area using best management practices) in open or semi-open stands near active dog courses to accommodate event participants.

Action 3. Work with FRD and other partners to replace and upgrade stream crossings (Stoney Creek, South Loop, Trestle Junction) to accommodate secure access to field trial participants, recreational users, and timber harvesting operations by 2028.

Action 4. Address the declining condition of Alibi Hall and horse corral that are used during field trials by 2023.

Objective B. Create a formal agreement with field trialing clubs to delineate priorities and responsibilities for course and infrastructure maintenance.

Action 1. Develop a mutually beneficial Memorandum of Understanding with the 5 field trialing clubs that addresses areas of responsibility for use of the GFTA by 2022.

Goal IV. Maintain or increase acreage available for field trialing within the GFTA to ensure national qualification standards are met.

Rationale: National field trialing standards are stringent and necessitate compliance with specific acreage requirements in given cover types. It is nationally recognized for its quality.

Metrics: Acreage available in prescribed cover types for field trial qualification.

Objective A. Work with other divisions and partners to maintain acreage available to field trialing or for grouse habitat management.

Action 1. Utilize the compartment review process to continuously assess acreage needs in the aspen, oak, and mixed upland deciduous cover type.

Action 2. Work with power companies to manage rights-of-way for early successional habitat as stipulated in the easement agreement; continuously assess treatment options through the compartment review process.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

Though there is currently no interest in expanding the size of the GFTA, consideration would be given to acquiring adjacent parcels of land if they become available. Particularly if doing so would enhance grouse populations and support field trialing goals on the GFTA. Any land acquisition would be on a willing seller basis only.

Plan Review

This plan was available for internal DNR review between April 17 and May 1, 2018. DNR comments consisted of fisheries considerations that were deemed outside the scope of this plan. This plan was also available for public review and comment between June 24 and August 7, 2018. No comments were received. This plan will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals

	8/10/18
Dale Rabe, Field Operations Manager	Date
	08/14/2018
Rex Ainslie, Regional Supervisor	Date