

Pere Marquette State Game Area Master Plan



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**WILDLIFE DIVISION
VERNON RICHARDSON
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Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

Located just on the east end of Pere Marquette Lake in Mason County, the Pere Marquette State Game Area (PMSGGA) is in the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) Region (Figure 1). The PMSGGA is 341 acres and is contiguous, except for two open river channels and US-31 isolating a small portion. Most of the PMSGGA was purchased in 1980 using Federal Pittman-Robertson (P-R) funds. Land gifted to the State and land purchased using State Game Fund, from hunting licenses, makes up the remainder of the area.

P-R funds are a source of federal aid generated from taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and are apportioned to states for the purpose of 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 PMSGGA is comprised almost entirely of emergent marsh along and between the two branches of the Pere Marquette River immediately before it reaches Pere Marquette Lake. The game area was created primarily for waterfowl production and migratory habitat as well as outdoor recreation. In the future (50-100 years from now) we want the area to continue to contribute to sustainable populations of a variety of wildlife species, primarily waterfowl, marsh birds, and wetland mammals, provide outdoor recreation, and maintain ecological functions in this unique location.

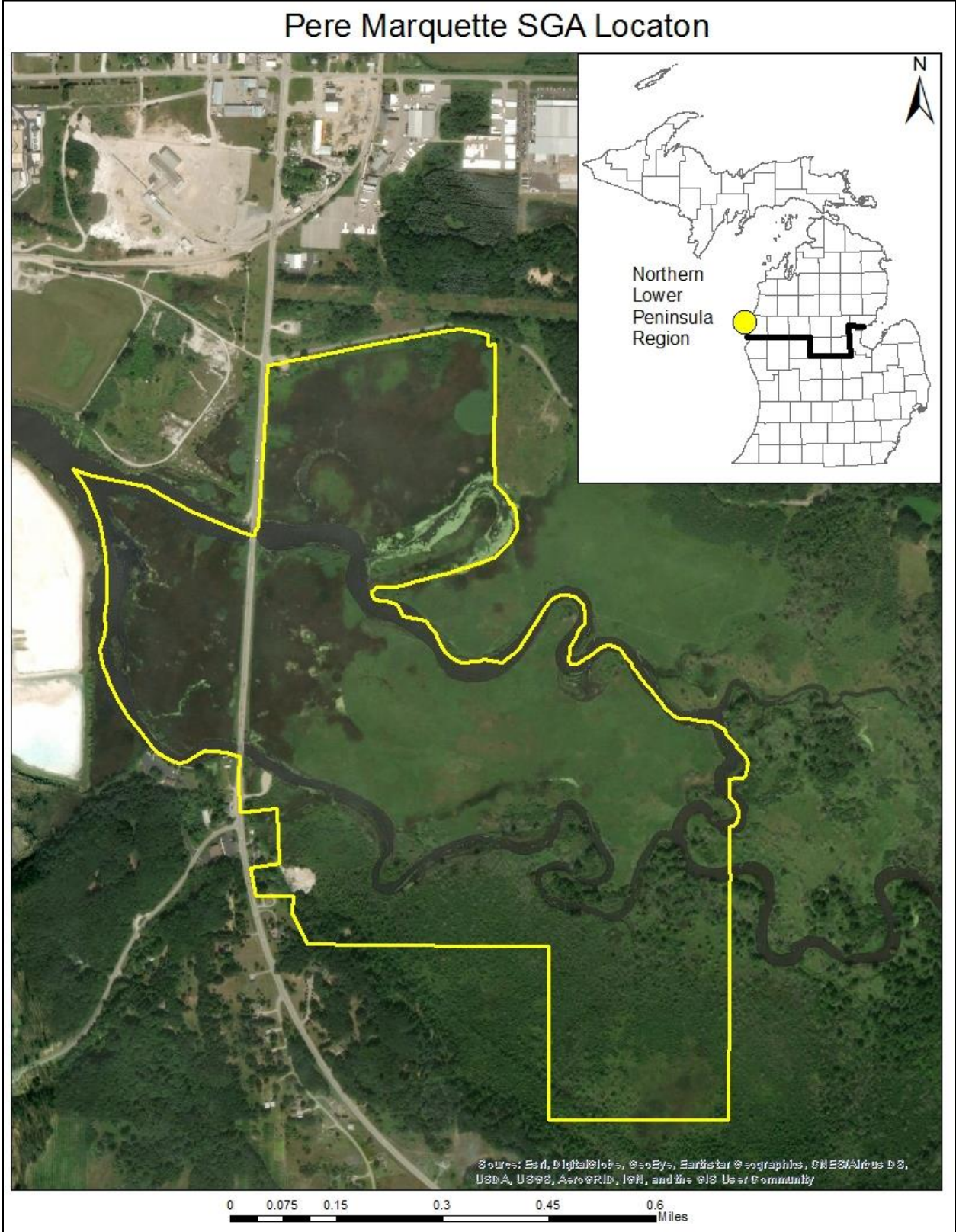


Figure 1. Location of the Pere Marquette State Game Area.

Background

This plan incorporates, by reference, the Upper Mississippi River Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Implementation Plan, and the DNR Wildlife Action Plan by maintaining marsh and forest habitat 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 (Goal 2-Manage habitat for sustainable wildlife populations, Goal 4-Enhance sustainable wildlife-based recreation), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (great diversity of high quality waterfowl hunting), and the Division's NLP Regional Operational Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

Wildlife Species

Consistent with the purpose of the game area and the nature of the land within the game area we will continue to manage this area for wetland vegetation, associated wildlife species, and recreational opportunities.

This area has not required or received much management attention in the recent past and, therefore, not many details are available on what species are found there. Canada goose and mallard have been documented nesting on the PMSGGA. Other species observed on the PMSGGA include great blue heron, trumpeter swan, and river otter. Based on records of species seen in the area and pervasive habitat types, most of the species using the PMSGGA will be waterfowl, marsh bird, and aquatic mammal species.

One notable species recorded on the PMSGGA, found in the Michigan Natural Features Inventory database, is a marsh wren (state special concern) heard in the northwest corner of the PMSGGA in 2005.

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 or Project	Featured Species	T&E, SC Species	Climate Change Vulnerable	Remarks
Mallard	Yes	No	No	Invasive plant species management
Marsh Wren	No	Yes	No	Invasive plant species management
Recreation Sites	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Infrastructure, vegetation management, and viewing quality
Signage	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Boundaries, information, and education

Climate change is expected to have a minimal to beneficial impact on the habitat quality on the PMSGGA. The main change expected to impact the habitat in this area is the increase in the severity and frequency of flood events. Under a more frequent flood regime, the cattail that currently dominates a large portion of the marsh should be opened up and allow other wetland plants to grow, increasing vegetative species diversity. The other change likely to affect the PMSGGA will be a shift in migratory times to later in the fall and earlier in the spring or waterfowl and other species. Some models predict some species overwintering in the area in mild winters rather than migrating at all.

Existing Conditions

The PMSGGA is dominated by dense cattail marsh and associated alder swamp along the Pere Marquette River and floodplain (Table 2, Figure 2). Some forest types are found on the southeastern edge of the PMSGGA including aspen, maple, cherry, hemlock, and cedar.

The Pere Marquette River is designated within the state's Natural Rivers Program and is a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. These designations afford a level of protection for the river, both ecologically and aesthetically, as land use and construction are regulated close to the river.

This area is subject to seasonal water level changes as well as long term changes because of its proximity to Lake Michigan.

The PMSGGA has seen some impact from invasive species including purple loosestrife, phragmites, Japanese knotweed, autumn olive, honeysuckle, and Japanese barberry. Treatment is ongoing for the phragmites and knotweed. Additional treatment is planned for honeysuckle, autumn olive and Japanese barberry. Purple loosestrife occurrence has been greatly reduced on the PMSGGA due to a biological control effort in the 2000s.

The status of purple loosestrife will be monitored, and appropriate management action will be taken as necessary.

The City of Ludington wastewater discharge pipe terminates within the game area, with level three (chlorinated) effluent entering the Pere Marquette River directly. Historically, this termination was on an oxbow of the river about 550 feet east of US-31 and 650 feet south of Conrad Road. Part of this oxbow was cut off by cattails in 1988, thereby reducing water flow at the effluent discharge site. This has resulted in high nutrient loading because the effluent was no longer sufficiently diluted. A new discharge pipe has been installed along the US-31 right-of-way, terminating at the north bridge into the main river channel. Effluent flow was switched to the new discharge site in June of 2018 and the former pipe in the was plugged.

Table 2. Current cover types on the Pere Marquette SGA based on inventory done in 2019.

Cover Type	Acres	Percent of Game Area
Cattail/Emergent Wetland	212	62
Lowland Shrub	67	20
Water	39	11
Low Density Trees	12	4
Lowland Coniferous	4	1
Aspen	3	<1
Roads/Parking Lots	3	<1
Upland Shrub	1	<1
Total	341	

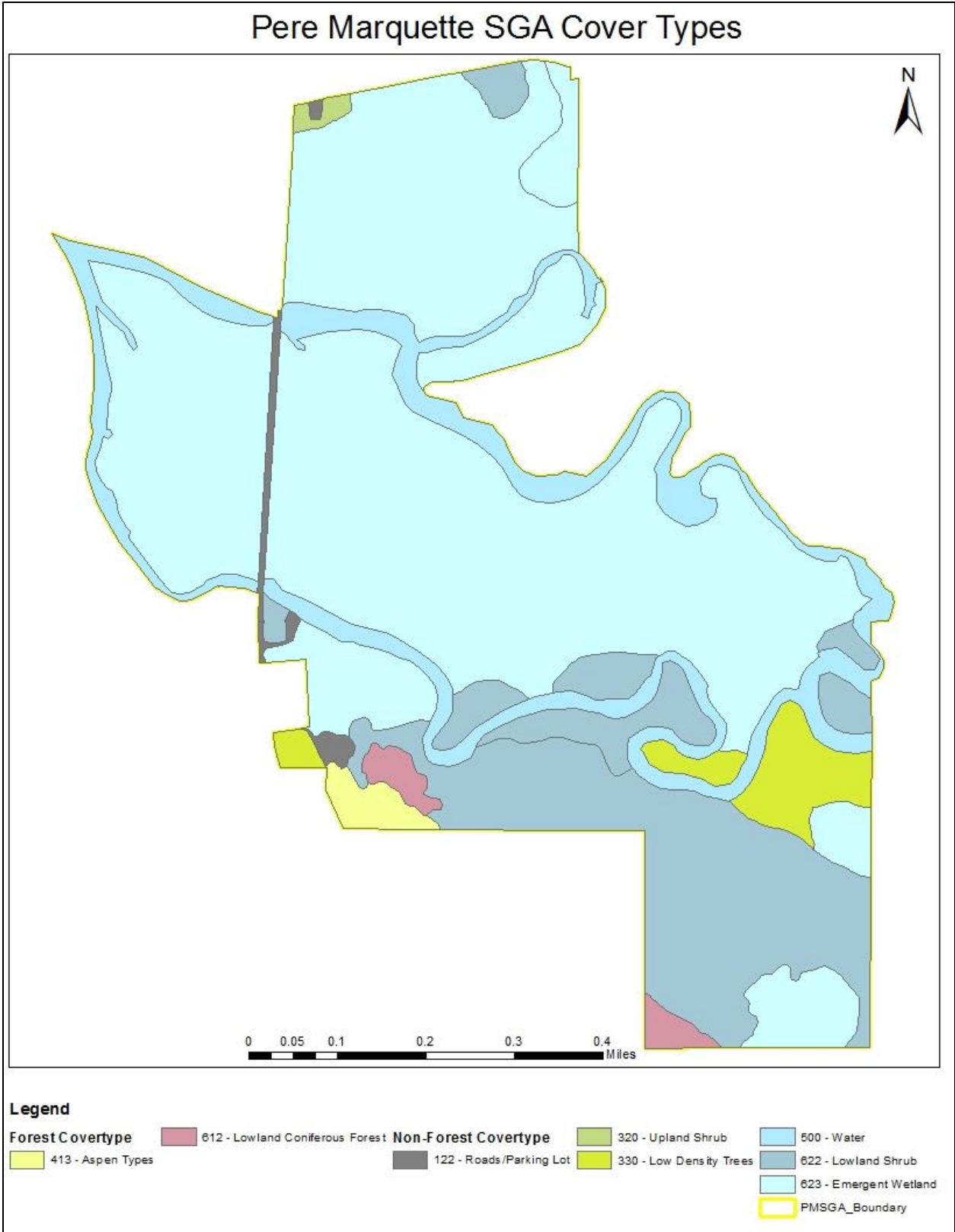


Figure 2. Pere Marquette SGA Cover Types.

Recreational Use

The PMSGGA provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Wildlife viewing is likely the most common use of the area. Popular viewing sites are the US-31 roadway, the observation tower, along Conrad Road and via watercraft along the river. Waterfowl hunting in the PMSGGA varies year to year based on water levels and vegetative condition. Some deer hunting also occurs in the PMSGGA. 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 PMSGGA, and management endeavors that uphold that purpose.

There is a parking lot and wooden observation tower (built in 1987) at the corner of US-31 and Conrad Road, in the northwest corner of the PMSGGA. The tower receives some use, but with the solid cattail cover in the area it no longer provides good visibility of the wetlands.

On the south side of the Pere Marquette River there is a small boat launch operated and maintained by Parks and Recreation Division (PRD). This launch site receives a high level of use by anglers launching watercraft as well as fishing from shore. Some level of wildlife viewing also occurs. There is another launch being constructed on the north branch just west of US-31, which may reduce some pressure on this site. Given the continued popularity of salmon and steelhead fishing in this river, and the increasing participation in paddle sports, this site will continue to receive significant use.

Impacts on the Local Economy

Contributions to the local economy resulting from activities on the game area include year-round wildlife viewing, waterfowl and other hunting, as well as fishing and paddle sports on the Pere Marquette River. These activities may provide a direct boost to local restaurants, sporting goods stores, convenience stores and gas stations.

Management Direction

The desired future condition (Table 3) for the PMSGGA is to continue to maintain and improve the quality of the marshland by treating invasive species. Recreational opportunities will be enhanced through vegetative management designed to provide aesthetically pleasing views of the game area from the four primary areas where wildlife viewing is easily accessible. These are the boat launch parking lot on the south branch, the US-31 road corridor, viewing platform at the corner of Conrad Road and US-31, and along Conrad Road.

Table 3. Desired future condition of cover types and habitat issue direction on the Pere Marquette SGA.

Cover type and Habitat	Desired Future Condition
Cattail Marsh	Increase
Lowland shrub	Maintain
Lowland trees	Maintain
Open water	Maintain
Phragmites	Decrease
Developed land	Maintain
Upland trees	Maintain

Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions

What follows is the strategic direction for the Pere Marquette 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.

Goal I. Adaptively manage marshland habitat for sustainable populations of waterfowl and other species.

Rationale: Waterfowl are highly desirable game species, and the PMSGGA provides nesting, brood-rearing, feeding, and loafing sites. Together with other marshlands along the Lake Michigan shoreline, the PMSGGA serves as a stopover for migratory species.

Metrics: Staff observations of wildlife activity and species presence along with acres of lowland habitat types over time.

Objective A. Maintain a minimum of 270 acres of lowland habitat (within limitations caused by fluctuating water levels in the Pere Marquette River and Pere Marquette Lake), consisting preferentially of cattail, shrub, and open water with minimal invasive species.

Action 1. Continue to work with contractors and partners such as the Mason-Lake Conservation District and local CISMA to conduct invasive species treatments for phragmites and knotweed through both chemical and physical means.

Goal II. Provide accessible wildlife viewing opportunities.

Rationale: The proximity of this game area to US-31, US-10, and the City of Ludington and its presence on Pere Marquette Highway makes this an attractive wildlife viewing site.

Metrics: Number of projects by Wildlife staff.

Objective A. Manage vegetation as well as infrastructure to ensure easy viewing of the marsh.

Action 1. Cut or trim tree and shrub species at viewing sites to provide viewing opportunities while also maintaining as natural an appearance as practical. Utilizing native species such as red osier dogwood and willow and cutting them every couple of years in these areas is desirable for ease of care and aesthetic values.

Objective B. Maintain the observation tower in good repair at US-31 and Conrad Road.

Action 1. Conduct biannual structure inspections and address basic repairs in a timely manner.

Action 2. Conduct parking lot inspections when inspecting the structure. Work with PRD, if possible, to address any parking area needs when they are in the area.

Action 3. Secure funding and address larger repairs when they become apparent. This structure is approximately thirty years old any may require major repairs before the next planning cycle.

Objective C. Partner with Parks and Recreation Division to maintain the current boat launch.

Action 1. Provide assistance to PRD if needed to facilitate their maintenance of this facility.

Goal III. Increase awareness of PMSGAs boundaries, uses, and partnership opportunities.

Rationale: State-owned lands are often subjected to unauthorized uses which degrade wildlife habitat and impact use by the public. This game area is relatively free of such problems at the time this plan is written. Ownership information, mostly mapping and signage on site, informs users and adjacent landowners of proper uses and boundaries.

Metrics: Number of boundary signs posted, staff observation of unauthorized uses, number of partnerships.

Objective A. Ensure internal and external mapping is updated to reflect current conditions and boundaries.

Action 1. Conduct internal review of existing maps across all DNR mapping platforms to ensure accuracy.

Action 2. Resolve the apparent conflict between Directors Order 3.2 prohibiting access to a portion of the PMSGGA near the viewing platform and current land use by the end of 2020 and complete any associated actions by 2021.

Objective B. Establish signage to raise awareness of PMSGGA boundaries and allowable uses.

Action 1. Post boundary, safety zone, and no motor vehicle signs as needed.

Action 2. Install wooden SGA sign by end of 2021.

Action 3. Install information signs at parking areas detailing allowable uses by 2022.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

This is a regionally unique game area that provides a host of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Our overall goal is to continue to provide these opportunities. The land acquisition strategy for the PMSGGA is to opportunistically acquire parcels adjacent to the PMSGGA boundary. Parcels will be evaluated as they become available and will be acquired on a willing seller basis only.

Plan Review

This plan will be available for public review and comment on the DNR website between July 7, 2019 and September 10, 2019 and available for review during the Cadillac Forest Area Open House held at the Carl T. Johnson Hunting and Fishing Center on August 7, 2019. The compartment review will be held on September 10, 2019. During this period comments on the plan will be accepted and will then be reviewed and considered before finalizing this plan. The final plan will be approved by the end of 2019 and will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals

Dale Rabe, Field Operations Manager

Date

Rex Ainslie, Regional Supervisor

Date