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Cornish State Game Area & Kinney Waterfowl Production Area Master Plan



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
WILDLIFE DIVISION
MARK MILLS
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Introduction and Background

State Game Area (SGA) Master Plans provide direction for habitat management based on the Featured Species selected for the particular SGA and direct recreational use of the area. Master Plans also help determine operational details to achieve goals and objectives outlined in Department, Division, and Regional planning efforts. The following information describes some of the considerations used to develop goals and objectives for Cornish State Game Area and Kinney Waterfowl Production Area (WPA).

Cornish State Game Area and Kinney Waterfowl Production Area are located in Porter Township, Van Buren County south of Interstate 94 near the villages of Paw Paw and Lawton. The Game Area consists of approximately 385 acres and the WPA is 77 acres (Figure 1).

The Master Plan for Cornish State Game Area has two main foci – 1) grassland and wetland management for waterfowl, and 2) grassland and agricultural management for waterfowl nesting and pheasants. This focus meshes with the current management of the adjacent Kinney Waterfowl Production Area as well as the collaborating partners expected to assist with the development of the Game Area and is in alignment with Southwest Region habitat priorities. The Kinney Waterfowl Production Area is owned by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and managed in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. By managing these two properties with consistent, overarching goals we expect to create synergy in their value for wildlife and hunting.

The upland habitat in the Game Area and WPA consist of open grassland with patches of trees interspersed along field edges and bordering the wetland portions of the Areas. Grass Lake, a shallow lake with extensive emergent vegetation, comprises the majority of the wetland habitat and is used by many different waterfowl and other wetland bird species. Mallards, wood ducks, and Canada Geese are the primary waterfowl species that use Grass Lake. Historically, the Areas have harbored ring-necked pheasants – it is likely that pheasants still exist on or around the property.

Future habitat goals associated with the area will focus primarily on providing year-round habitat for waterfowl and ring-necked pheasants as well as wild turkeys and white-tailed deer. Wetland management on the Areas may include some enhancement but will target invasive species to preserve the integrity of the present wetlands. Upland management will continue to focus on grassland initiatives with added food plots to diversify the available food and cover resources.

What follows is the strategic direction for the Cornish State Game Area and Kinney Waterfowl Production Area complex. 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 (listed as highest priority to lowest)

Goal I is to provide quality spring, summer, and fall habitat for mallards and wood ducks.

Rationale: 1) this goal provides consistency between the management of Kinney WPA and Cornish SGA – it makes sense to create synergy between the parcels by managing them toward consistent, overarching goals; 2) mallards and wood ducks are Featured Species and also popular game species; 3) waterfowl management is supported locally by multiple sporting groups; 4) waterfowl are valued by non-hunters for viewing purposes; and 5) multiple other Featured Species will benefit from habitats desired for mallards and wood ducks (ex. Canada Geese, Ring-necked Pheasants, American Bittern).

Objective A is to maintain Grass Lake as an open water/marsh complex

Action 1. Monitor to identify any existing or invading species of vegetation and remove or manage them appropriately.

Objective B is to preserve, enhance and restore grassland habitats to create and maintain approximately 250 acres for nesting habitat.

Action 1. Continue Conservation Reserve Program enrolled lands in current management until CRP agreement is concluded.

Action 2. Evaluate current and potential grassland areas for restoration or enhancement.

Action 3. Restore or enhance areas with marginal grassland habitat or that are invaded by brush or early successional species using mechanical, herbicide, or prescribed burning treatments.

Goal II is to provide habitat for ring-necked pheasants.

Rationale: 1) ring-necked pheasants are Featured Species and a desirable game species; 2) quality pheasant habitat currently exists and can be improved with strategic management; 3) it would be desirable to designate the property as a “Public Land Core Area” for the Pheasant Restoration Initiative; 4) habitat projects associated with this goal will also benefit many other wildlife species and associated recreation (especially wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and cottontail rabbits); 5) pheasants already exist on the property; and 6) this would keep management of the property similar to that already occurring at Kinney Waterfowl Production Area.

Objective A is to preserve, enhance and restore grassland habitats over approximately 250 acres for nesting habitat (overlaps with Goal I, Objective B).

Action 1. Same as needed in Goal I, Objective B

Action 2. Work independently or with partners to remove trees invading grasslands on the property and begin efforts to remove old tree lines between fields on Cornish SGA.

Objective B is the use of agricultural practices to provide pheasant food and cover.

Action 1. Begin working with current farmer to establish a Sharecropping Agreement for continuing corn, soybean, and wheat production with corn left standing overwinter or cover crops planted after bean/wheat harvest. Currently, 13 acres are farmed with a goal to increase to approximately 30 acres.

Action 2. Establish approximately 15 acres of various foodplots with seed provided by Pheasants Forever chapters to create foraging habitat and provide heavy winter cover, possibly using volunteers for planting.

Objective C is to use the property as a “Core Area” for the Pheasant Restoration Initiative – a collaborative project between Pheasants Forever, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Ducks Unlimited, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Additionally, this would work toward satisfying desired goals attached to the recent License Package (More Bang for the Buck).

Action 1. Work with Pheasants Forever and other partners to promote habitat management on private properties adjacent to the proposed Cornish SGA in order to increase the wildlife value of the landscape to wildlife.

Action 2. Utilize the habitat efforts at the Cornish SGA as educational plots to provide examples of habitat management techniques to interested local landowners.

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:

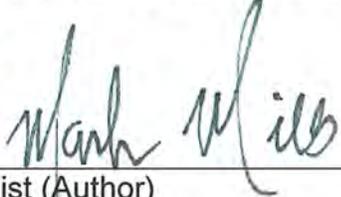
1. The uses must not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. The DNR has no obligations to determine if requested uses would conflict or interfere; the burden of determining must remain with those requesting the uses.
3. The requested uses cannot 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.

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.

Additionally, the DNR will be evaluating the waterfowl hunting pressure on Grass Lake to determine whether a need exists to manage waterfowl hunting activities on the lake. To accomplish this, DNR staff will observe usage during the first two waterfowl seasons to determine the extent of hunting pressure on Grass Lake or whether other activities are having a detrimental effect on waterfowl use and/or waterfowl hunting. After observations, staff will explore alternatives to current management and make recommendations for desired management alterations.

This plan was available for public review and comment on the DNR website between August 26, 2015 and November 1, 2015 and was also available for review during the Cornish State Game Area Open House held at the Porter Township Hall on August 26, 2015. During this period no comments were received or therefore considered before finalizing this plan. The final plan was approved on November 1, 2015 and will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals

	1 November 2015
Wildlife Biologist (Author)	Date
	11-13-15
Field Operations Manager	Date
	11-1-15
Regional Supervisor	Date

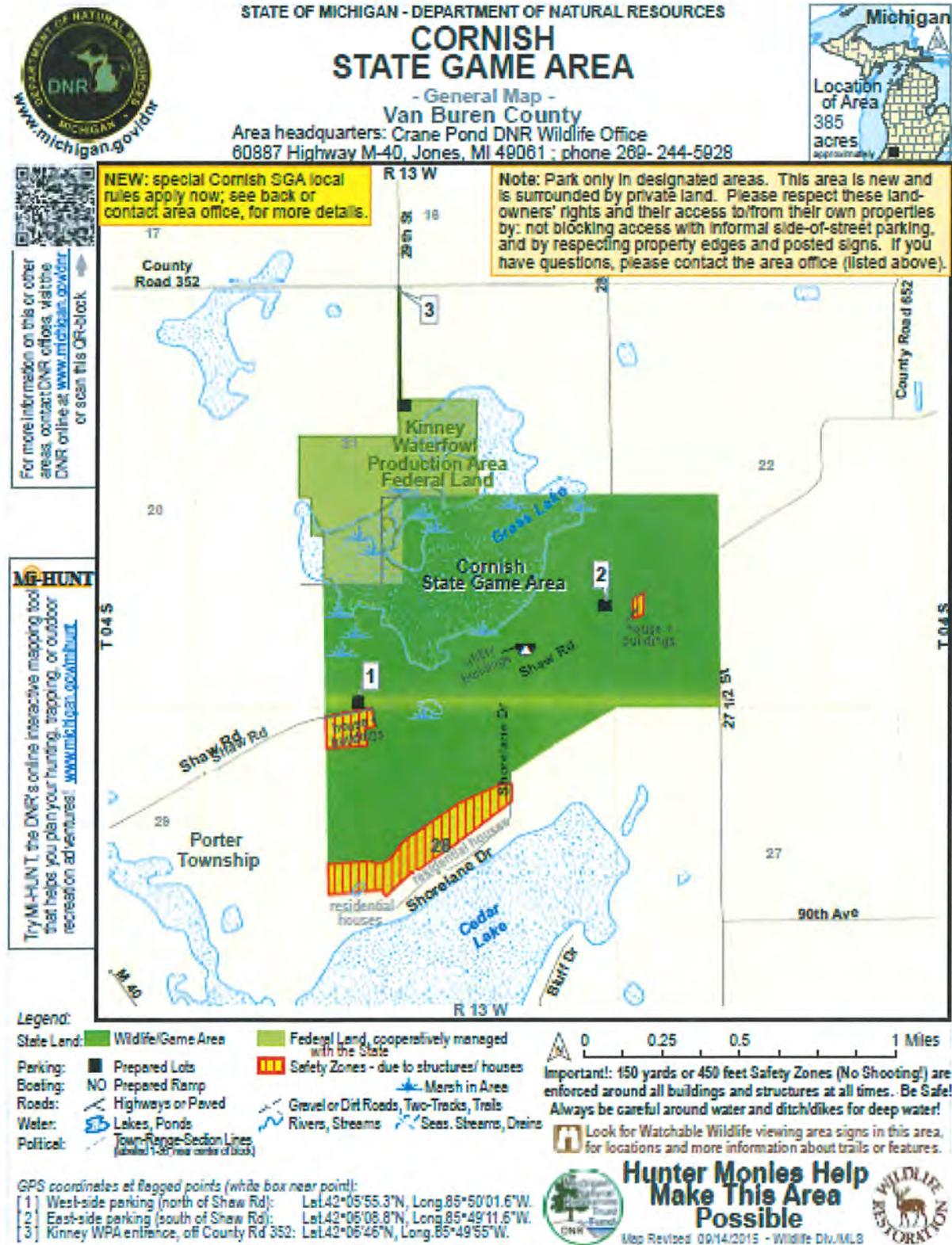


Figure 1: Official Cornish State Game Area map.