

Keeler State Game Area Master Plan
Michigan Department of Natural Resources



**Wildlife Division
Mark Mills
October 20, 2016**

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Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

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 other Division planning efforts including the Wildlife GPS and Southwest Region Habitat Priorities document. The following information describes some of the considerations used to develop goals and objectives for Keeler State Game Area for 2017 through 2027.

Keeler SGA (396 acres) is located in the southwestern corner of Van Buren County in Keeler Township T4S R16W, Sections 4 and 18 (Figure 1). Communities within 5 miles of the area include: Coloma, Hartford, and Watervliet. Larger communities within 20 miles include: Benton Harbor and St. Joseph.

The land for Keeler SGA was acquired in four purchases: September 1972, 197 acres, November 1972, 20 acres, February 1973, 153 acres and August 1995, 27 acres. The first three purchases were made with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds and the final purchase was made through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The purpose for the acquisitions was to provide public hunting property and wildlife habitat – these are consistent with current and proposed management of the property.

Background

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-Increase public participation in hunting and trapping), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (outstanding grouse, woodcock and turkey hunting, challenge of small game hunting, and great diversity of high quality waterfowl hunting), the Division's Southwest Regional Operational Plan, Southwest Region Habitat Guidance documents, and the Southwest Region Land Management Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

Wildlife Species

Although relatively small, Keeler SGA provides a diverse suite of habitats suitable for many desirable species. Thick cover intermingled with standing corn and green cover crops provide quality bedding and feeding areas to hold white-tailed deer. Mature forest, agricultural fields, and herbaceous open lands provide for wild turkey roosting and brooding. This plan will focus on managing primarily for these two species. However, there are many other species that will benefit from the proposed activities

including fox and gray squirrels, cottontail rabbits, and woodcock. Migratory birds of many species are present at Keeler SGA and numerous wetlands support reptile and amphibian species. No threatened or endangered species are known to exist on the SGA.

Existing Conditions

The landscape surrounding Keeler SGA is comprised primarily of agricultural fields intermingled with wetlands and deciduous woodlots. In contrast, the SGA is primarily composed of forest and wetland habitat with interspersed agricultural and fallow fields (Figure 2). Mill Creek, a designated trout stream, runs through the northeast corner of the southwestern parcel. Northern hardwoods, mixed upland deciduous, and lowland deciduous cover types are the most common forested habitats (Table 1).

Table 1: Cover type conditions on Keeler State Game Area.

Cover Type	Acres	%
Northern Hardwood	132	33
Cropland	56	14
Lowland Deciduous	47	12
Herbaceous Openland	39	10
Mixed Upland Deciduous	39	10
Lowland Shrub	30	8
Low-Density Trees	19	5
Upland Shrub	10	3
Aspen	9.5	2
Lowland Mixed Forest	7	2
Marsh	5.5	1
Oak	2	<1
Total Acres	396	

Recreational Use

Keeler SGA provides a host of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, including hunting, trapping, bird watching and wildlife viewing. State game areas in southern Michigan are under continual pressure for other uses, however under Federal and State regulations, recreational and commercial uses on the area that are not incidental to our management for the purposes described above are generally not allowed. Some of these uses can be allowed, under the following circumstances:

The uses do not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.

The Department has no obligations to determine if requested uses would conflict or interfere; the burden of determining must remain with those requesting the uses.

The requested uses cannot be exclusive of other allowable uses and must not result in the Department losing management control of any portion of the area.

A lack of a specific prohibition in rules and regulations for the area does not constitute approval of the activity.

The Department always reserves the ability to disallow activities previously allowed as wildlife conservation needs dictate.

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

Impacts on the Local Economy

Contributions to the local economy resulting from activities on the game area include sharecropping on 56 acres through an agreement with a local farmer, occasional timber management activities through contracts with local loggers, plus hunter use days through the year that provide a direct boost to local restaurants, sporting goods stores and convenience stores and gas stations.

Management Direction

The desired future condition for Keeler State Game Area is outlined in Table 2. Note that Increases in Oak and Aspen cover type will be due to conversion of Northern Hardwoods and Mixed Upland Deciduous (hence, the Decrease in those cover types).

Table 2. Desired future condition of cover types on Keeler SGA.

<i>Cover type</i>	<i>Desired Future Condition</i>
Oak	Increase
Northern Hardwoods	Decrease
Mixed Upland Deciduous	Decrease
Herbaceous Open land	Maintain
Lowland Deciduous Forest	Maintain
Lowland Shrub	Maintain
Acres of Agriculture	Maintain

Acres of Aspen	Increase
Unmanaged Wetlands	Maintain

Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions

What follows is the strategic direction for the Keeler 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. Goals come mostly from the featured species and habitat issues relevant to KSGA.

Goal I is to provide food and cover to draw and hold white-tailed deer to improve hunting opportunities.

Rationale: 1) white-tailed deer are listed as a featured species by the DNR Wildlife Division; 2) they are a desirable game species for local hunters, 3) private hunting land is difficult to obtain permission so providing white-tailed deer hunting opportunity on public land is advantageous; and 4) habitat management that benefits white-tailed deer will also benefit other wildlife species, including other featured species such as wild turkeys, American woodcock, and eastern cottontail.

Metrics: staff observations of white-tailed deer sign will provide a qualitative evaluation of trends in use.

Objective A is to maintain 56 acres of row crops for fall and winter food and cover for white-tailed deer.

Action 1. Continue working with local sharecropper to contract planting of desirable agricultural crops with focus on corn, soybeans, rye, and winter cover crops on agricultural fields. Require a minimum of 10 acres of standing corn through winter months to provide food and cover. Require a cover crop (rye, wheat, brassica, etc.) on all harvested, non-corn fields.

Objective B is to improve woody browse diversity/early successional habitat in the southeast parcel.

Action 1. Harvest 10 to 15 acres for aspen regeneration to continue working toward a rotationally harvested aspen complex.

Action 2. Harvest 5 to 10 acres of mixed upland deciduous habitat to improve ground level browse diversity and cover.

Goal II is to provide roosting, nesting, and brooding habitat for wild turkeys.

Rationale: 1) wild turkeys are listed as a featured species by the DNR Wildlife Division; 2) they are a desirable game species for local hunters, 3) private land is difficult to obtain permission so providing for wild turkey habitat is advantageous; and 4) habitat management that benefits wild turkeys will also benefit other wildlife species, including other featured species such as American woodcock, eastern cottontail, and white-tailed deer.

Metrics: staff observations of wild turkey sign will provide a qualitative evaluation of trends in use.

Objective A is to maintain approximately 40 acres of mature forest stands on the Game Area to provide roosting habitat with primary focus on oaks.

Action 1. Protect stands with mature trees, primarily oaks, on the north portions of each of the two parcels.

Action 2. Complete forest management activities to facilitate oak dominance in the existing forest stands.

Objective B is to maintain 77 acres of herbaceous open land for brooding habitat.

Action 1. Maintain 56 acres of agricultural openings as outlined in Goal 1, Objective A.

Action 2. Maintain existing 21 acres of non-agricultural herbaceous openings (5 grass fields) through rotational mowing to prevent invasion by trees/shrubs.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

The stated goal for Keeler State Game Area is to expand ownership to exceed 500 acres to satisfy deficiencies identified by the 2013 Department of Natural Resources Managed Public Land Strategy.

Plan Review

This plan will be available for public review and comment on the DNR website between February 1, 2017 and February 28, 2017. Changes will be made, as necessary, based on public feedback. Once the plan is approved, it will be placed on the [DNR website](#) and will be reviewed again within 10 years of the approved date. Send comments to Mark Mills: MILLSM@michigan.gov

Approvals

(Mark Mills), Field Operations Manager

Date

(Mark Sargent), Regional Supervisor

Date



STATE OF MICHIGAN - DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

KEELER STATE GAME AREA

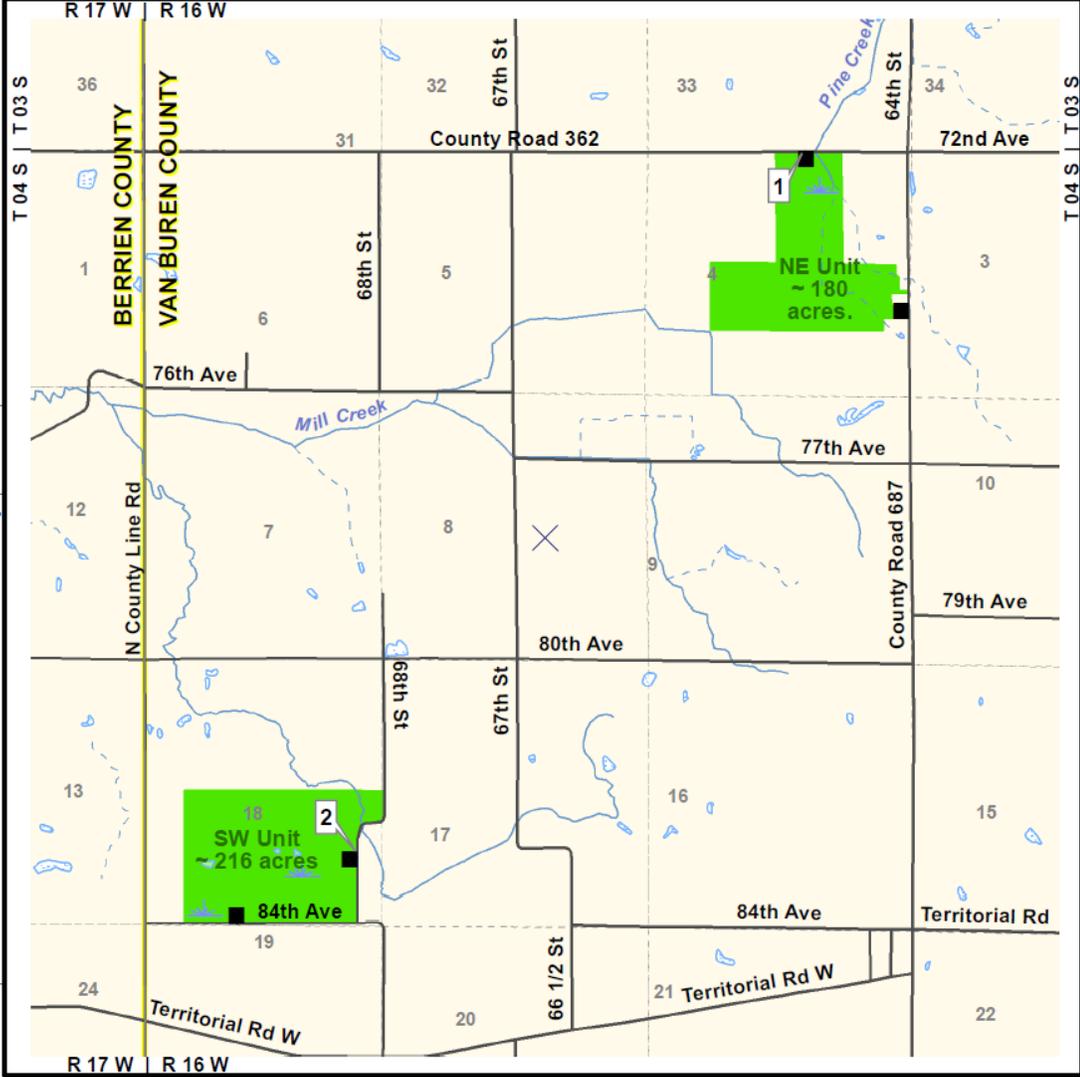
- General Map -
Van Buren County

Area headquarters: Crane Pond DNR Wildlife Office
60887 Highway M-40, Jones, MI 49061 ; phone 269- 244-5928

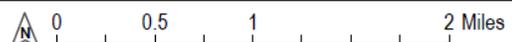


For more information on this or other areas, contact DNR offices, visit the DNR online at www.michigan.gov/dnr or scan this QR-block.

MI-HUNT
Try MI-HUNT, the DNR's online interactive mapping tool that helps you plan your hunting, trapping, or outdoor recreation adventures! www.michigan.gov/mihunt



- Legend:**
- State Land: Wildlife/Game Area
 - Parking: ■ Prepared Lots
 - Boating: NO Prepared Ramp
 - Roads: Highways or Paved
 - Water: ~ Lakes, Ponds
 - Political: Town/Range Section Lines (labeled 1-36 near center of block)
 - * Marsh in Area
 - Gravel or Dirt Roads, Two-Tracks, Trails
 - ~ Rivers, Streams
 - ~ Seas, Streams, Drains
 - County Boundary



Important! 150 yards or 450 feet Safety Zones (No Shooting!) are enforced around all buildings and structures at all times. Be Safe! Always be careful around water and ditch/dikes for deep water!

I Look for Watchable Wildlife viewing area signs in this area, for locations and more information about trails or features.

GPS coordinates at flagged points (white box near point):
 [1] NE unit parking, off 72nd Ave Lat.42°09'24.5"N, Long.86°10'26.9"W.
 [2] SE unit parking, off 68th St Lat.42°07'06.3"N, Long.86°12'28.4"W.



Hunter Monies Help Make This Area Possible



Map Revised 03/18/2016 - Wildlife Div/MLS

Figure 1: Keeler State Game Area map.

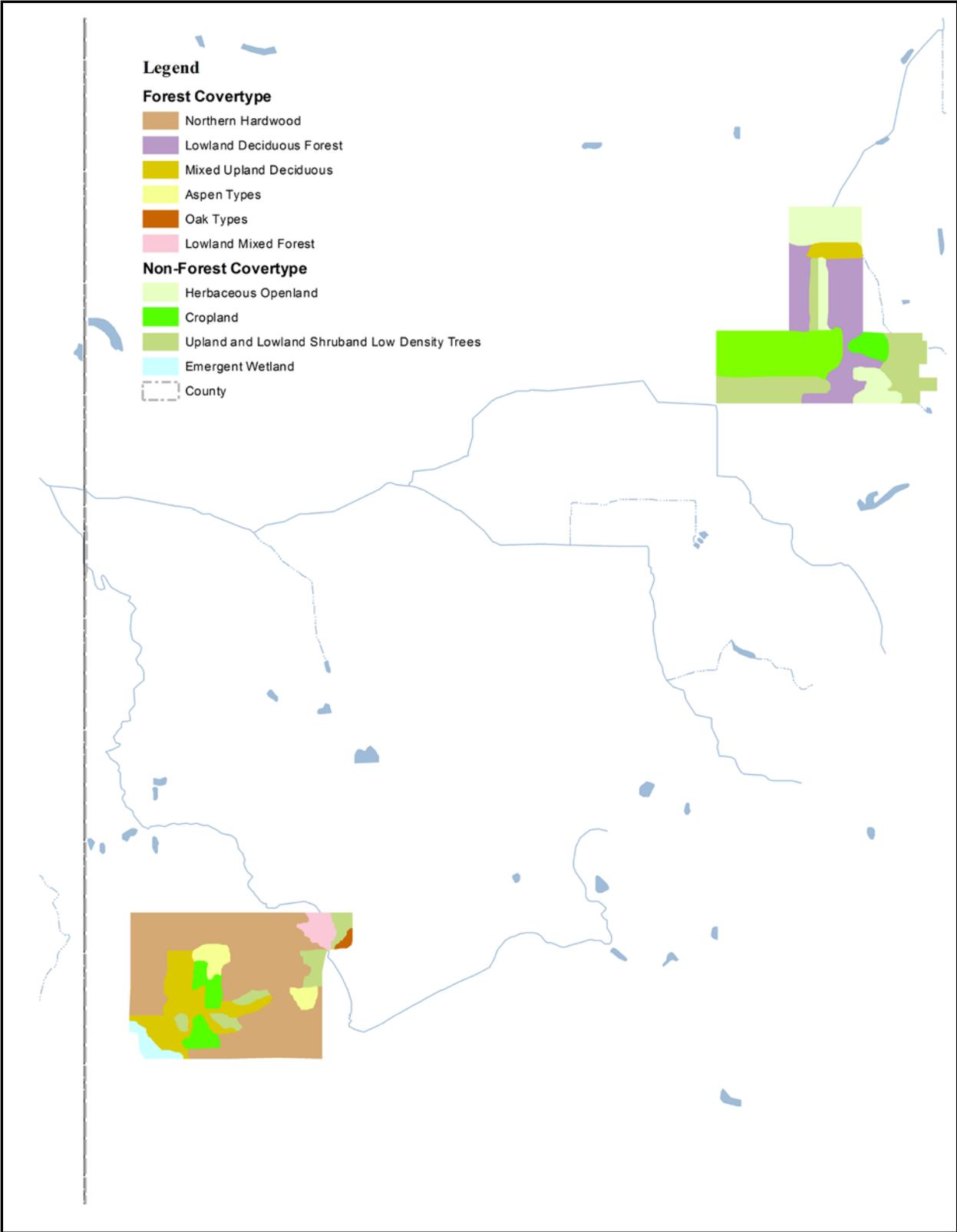


Figure 2: Cover type map of Keeler State Game Area.