

Muskrat Lake State Game Area Master Plan
Michigan Department of Natural Resources



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Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

The Muskrat Lake State Game Area (MLSGA) originally came into State ownership in the mid-1960s. The original 50+ acres were owned by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fisheries Division and was maintained as a public fishing site with frontage on the northern half of Muskrat Lake. Two purchases by the DNR Wildlife Division in 1973 added nearly 150 acres, consolidating much of the ownership as it exists today totaling over 200 acres (Figure 1). In the face of increasing demands from industry, urban development, and intensive agriculture in southern Michigan, the additional property was purchased to address declining wetland habitat and small game habitat, especially pheasant winter and nesting cover.

The funding sources used to purchase most the land for MLSGA were a split of Recreational Bond Funding and Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. Game and Fish Funds were also used. The MLSGA is located in the Southwest Region (SWR) of the Lower Peninsula in central Clinton County and is managed to provide quality habitat for wild turkey, pheasants, wood ducks, mallards and for recreational opportunities associated with these species.

In the future (50-100 years from now) we want the area to continue to contribute to sustainable populations of important wildlife species, provide valuable hunting, fishing, and trapping recreation in an area where the landscape continues to have increasing demands from agricultural and urbanization.

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 turkey hunting, challenge of small game hunting, and great diversity of high quality waterfowl hunting), the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative, the Division's Southwest Regional Operational Plan, Southwest Region Featured Species and Habitat Priorities documents, and the Southwest Region Land Management Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

Wildlife Species

True to the intended purposes of the SGA when it was originally purchased, we continue to focus our efforts on species and habitats that help meet our goals to provide quality hunting opportunities and access for fishing (Table 1).

Table 1. A list of species projects to be worked on during this planning period, reflecting opportunities for habitat or recreational management.

Common Name	Featured Species
Pheasants	Yes
Wood ducks	Yes
Wild Turkey	Yes

Existing Conditions

Roughly half of the MLSGA is made up of Muskrat Lake and its associated marsh and wetlands. The lake level is maintained by a rock weir structure located northeast of the lake at the outlet to the Stoney Creek. The weir structure is maintained by the Clinton County Drain Commission. The other half of the SGA is split equally between mixed upland deciduous forests and maintained openings. Given the current available habitat, one management goal is to provide quality upland habitat for wild turkey and pheasants. The marsh and associated wetlands will also be maintained to provide quality nesting and brood-rearing habitat for local waterfowl, primarily wood ducks and mallards.

A Boating Access Site off Jason Road is maintained by the DNR Parks and Recreation staff stationed at Sleepy Hollow State Park. It includes parking, a paved launch, and a public toilet. This location provides excellent access to a popular fishery in a part of the State that doesn't have a lot of public access to lakes. It also provides good access to waterfowl hunters during the waterfowl hunting seasons.

Wolverine Pipe Line Company maintains a pipeline that starts in the southeast corner of the SGA and crosses diagonally to the northwest across the east side of the lake. The pipeline has a granted easement and use permits are issued for maintenance of the pipeline as needed.

Recreational Use

The primary recreational use on the area is fishing. Muskrat Lake is a very popular fishing and ice fishing spot for local users. The area also gets a lot of use from deer hunters as well as turkey, waterfowl, and small game hunters.

The MLSGA provides a host of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, including hunting, fishing, 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:

1. The uses do not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. A lack of a specific prohibition in rules and regulations for the area does not constitute approval of the activity.
5. 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 SGA are limited since there is no sharecropping. Currently no timber harvests are planned. This property is used by fishermen and hunters which provide a direct boost to local restaurants, bait shops, convenience stores, and gas stations.

Management Direction

No major changes to the management of the MLSGA are planned during this planning period. Access sites to the lake and upland areas will be maintained to ensure users can continue their recreational pursuits. The marsh, forests, and openings will continue to be maintained to provide quality habitat for the featured species.

Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions

What follows is the strategic direction for the Muskrat Lake 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 MLSGA.

Goal I – Sustainable populations of eastern wild turkey at Muskrat Lake SGA

Objective A – Provide suitable nesting and brood rearing cover

Action – Maintain grass openings with a combination of mowing, burning, and herbicide

Action – Maintain brushy edges around openings

Action – Maintain current forest types to provide suitable hard and soft mast

Goal II – Sustainable populations of ring-necked pheasants at Muskrat Lake SGA

Objective A – Provide suitable nesting and winter cover

Action – Maintain grass openings with a combination of mowing, burning, and herbicide

Action – Maintain lowland cattail and brush cover

Action – Maintain food plot adjacent to winter cover

Goal III – Sustainable population of wood ducks at Muskrat Lake SGA

Objective A – Provide suitable nesting and brood rearing cover

Action – In conjunction with Clinton County Drain Commission, maintain water levels at current height with existing weir structure to provide wetland vegetation and open water areas preferred by wood ducks

Goal IV – Provide access to the SGA to enhance outdoor recreation

Objective A – Maintain current parking areas

Action – Continue to partner with Parks and Recreation staff to maintain boat launch and parking area

Action – Monthly monitor the condition of other parking area and take corrective action as needed

Action – Maintain boundary signs

Action- Monitor for trespass.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

This is an important SGA that provides recreational opportunities to the local residents and visitors. Our overall goal is to continue to provide these opportunities. Since MLSGA is located in southcentral Michigan and within relatively close distances to population centers, the land acquisition strategy would include adjacent parcels to expand current ownership. Parcels will be evaluated as they became available and will be acquired on a willing seller basis only.

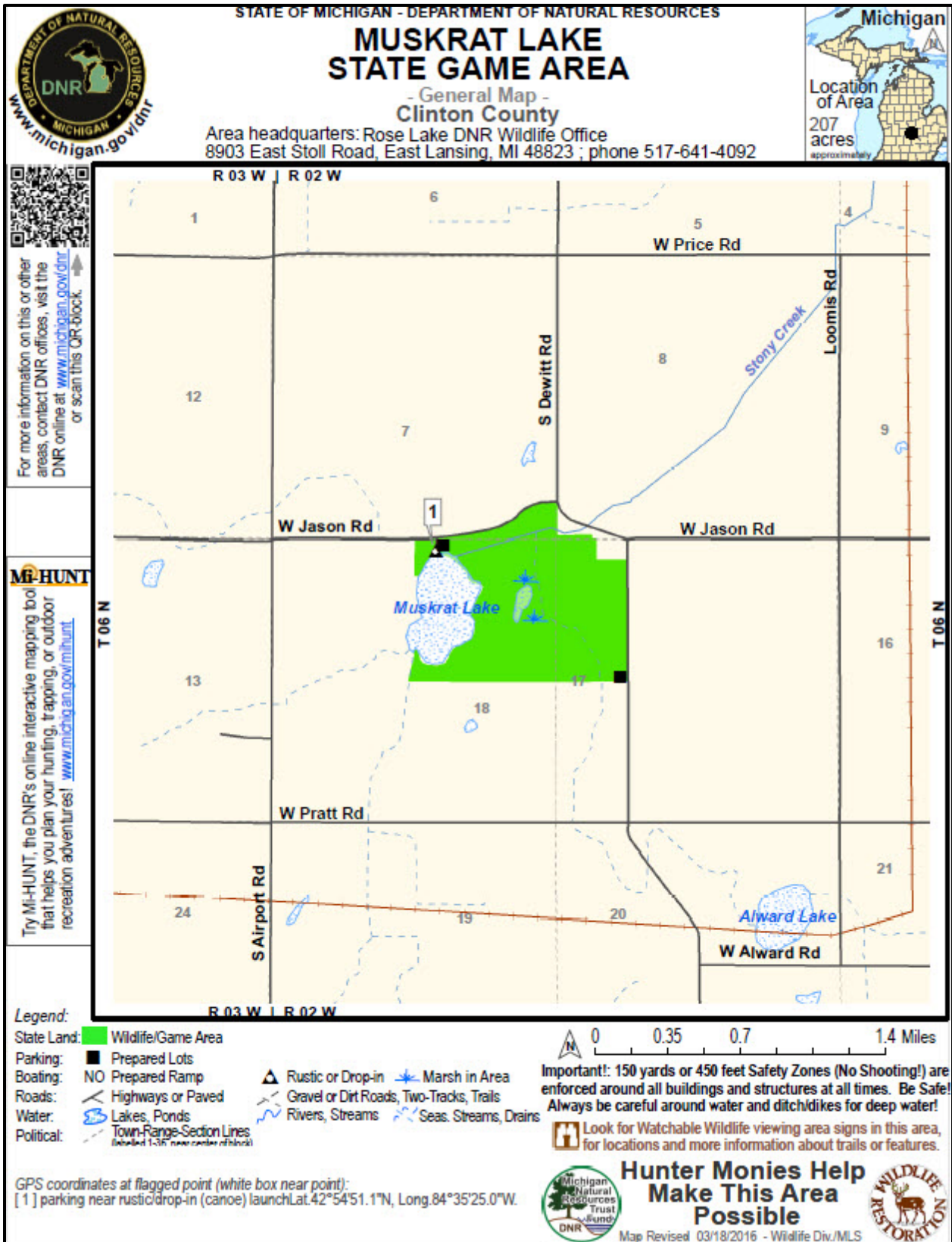


Figure 1: Map of Muskrat Lake SGA

Muskrat Lake SGA Review and Approval

This plan will be available for public review and comment on the DNR website between **???, 2017 and ???, 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 Chad Fedewa at fedewac1@michigan.gov

Approvals

(John Niewoonder), Field Operations Manager

(Mark Sargent), Regional Supervisor