



Saranac-Lowell State Game Area Master Plan



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division
James C. Miller
12/7/2020

Contents

Intended Purpose and General Management Direction 3

Background 3

Wildlife Species 3

Existing Conditions 4

Recreational Use 5

Impacts on the Local Economy 6

Management Direction 6

Goals, Objectives and Management Actions 7

Acquisition and Disposal of Land 12

Plan Review 12

Approvals 12

Intended Purpose and General Management Direction

The Saranac-Lowell State Game Area (SLSGA) was dedicated in 1951. The previous strategic plan (2004) indicated that the area has provided good habitat range for wild turkey, woodcock, deer, squirrel and rabbit as well as good resting locations for various waterfowl. At that time the SGA was managed for these species. Forest management practices (selective harvest and clear cutting) had been infrequently used as a habitat management tool coupled with planting various shrubs. In addition, the Flat River runs through this SGA providing more habitat for waterfowl by giving an open water area to land and feed.

The majority of land on the game area was purchased with federal Pittman-Robertson Funds, but some land was acquired through recreation bond monies. The SLSGA is located in the Southwest Region (SWR) of the Lower Peninsula along the Kent-Ionia county border (Figure 1). Over time, the SLSGA has been expanded to include 2151 acres (Figure 2) and is managed to provide quality habitat for wild turkey and white-tailed deer as well as 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 while providing valuable hunting and wildlife viewing recreation.

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 and wildlife based recreation, Goal 4-Enhance sustainable wildlife-based recreation use and enjoyment), More Bang For Your Buck concepts (outstanding turkey and deer hunting), the Michigan 2015-2025 Wildlife Action Plan, the Southwest Regional Operational Plan, Southwest Region Habitat Priority Guide, the Southwest Region Featured Species Habitat Management document and the Southwest Region Land Management Plan are all reflected in this master plan.

Wildlife Species

True to the intended purpose of the game area when it was dedicated in 1951, we will continue to focus our efforts on species and habitats that help meet the division's current mission to enhance, restore and conserve the State's wildlife resources, natural communities and ecosystems for the benefit of Michigan's citizens, visitors and future generations and our other public trust responsibilities such as following the guidance provided in the Wildlife Action Plan created by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 2015.

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	Threatened, Endangered, or Special Concern	Climate Change Vulnerable	Remarks
White-tailed deer	Yes	No	No	Openings, food plots and grassland maintenance
Wild Turkey	Yes	No	No	Openings, food plots and grassland maintenance
Cerulean Warbler	No	Yes	Yes	Consider presence in developing timber sales
Hooded Warbler	No	Yes	No	Consider presence in developing timber sales
Eastern Box Turtle	No	Yes	No	Consider Presence in developing burn plans

Aspen forest types are predicted to be climate change vulnerable which may impact our ability to effectively meet our desired future conditions outlined in Goal I & II (see below). We will monitor aspen regeneration as part of routine forest inventory and consider projects designed to maintain this species area coverage for the foreseeable future. In general, younger forests are better able to withstand climate shocks and lowering the average age of forested area is likely a good adaptation strategy.

Existing Conditions

The SLSGA consists of gently rolling, mostly forested land. A variety of vegetation types can be found on the area including extensive second growth upland forests (mostly oak, red maple and mixed pine), forest openings that are remnants of agricultural activities and pine plantations.

Compared to other southern Michigan game areas, the SLSGA is small (2151 acres) and provides a diverse variety of cover types (Table 1) that provide valuable habitat for the species we are managing for. This game area will be managed for forest regeneration and sustainability. The game area management goals are to provide quality habitat for wild turkey and white-tailed deer.

There are several invasive species on SLSGA that are impacting the ecological integrity of its various ecosystems as well as the recreational opportunities that it provides. The largest concerns are autumn olive, honeysuckle, tree-of-heaven, Japanese knotweed and black swallow-wort. Treatments for these species will be completed when deemed necessary by local staff.

Table 2. Current cover types on the Saranac-Lowell SGA based on MiFi surveys from 2011.

Cover Type	Number of Acres	Percentage of Composition
Oak	843.1	39%
Mixed Upland Deciduous	556.8	26%
Northern Hardwood	234.6	11%
Red Pine	198.6	9%
Planted Mixed Pines	69.3	3%
Herbaceous Open Land	60.7	3%
Water	48.7	2%
Low-Density Trees	34.4	2%
Upland Mixed Forest	29.7	1%
Aspen	25.1	1%
Lowland Deciduous	15.8	1%
Cropland	10.0	0%
Lowland Shrub	9.7	0%
Upland Shrub	9.6	0%
Marsh	4.7	0%

Recreational Use

The SLSGA provides a host of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, including hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and fishing. 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 SGA that are not incidental to the 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.

Saranac-Lowell does host a portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail. This is a unique feature on the game area that provides hiking access. The MDNR maintains a working relationship with the North Country Trail Association based out of Kent County, MI. This group provides trail maintenance annually allowed through a Land Use Permit. The final feature that is unique to this area is the undesignated SLSGA Gun Range. This area has seen increased use in the past 10 years which has brought with it increased illegal activities and abuse. Within this 10 year cycle the gun range will be evaluated and a decision will be made on whether we will allow the activity to continue or not.

Impacts on the Local Economy

Contributions to the local economy resulting from activities on the game area include thousands of hunter and fisher use days per year that provide a direct boost to local restaurants, sporting goods stores and gas stations. Contributions may also include an economic boost from timber management through contracts with a local logger.

Management Direction

The desired future conditions for the Saranac-Lowell State Game Area is outlined in the following two tables.

Table 4. Desired future condition of cover types and habitat issue direction.

Cover Type and Habitat Issues	Desired Future Conditions
Oak	Increase
Mixed Upland Deciduous	Decrease
Northern Hardwood	Maintain
Red Pine	Decrease
Planted Mixed Pines	Decrease
Herbaceous Open Land	Maintain
Water	Maintain
Low-Density Trees	Maintain
Upland Mixed Forest	Maintain
Aspen	Increase
Lowland Deciduous	Maintain
Cropland	Maintain
Lowland Shrub	Maintain
Upland Shrub	Maintain
Marsh	Maintain

Goals, Objectives and Management Actions

What follows is the strategic direction for the Saranac-Lowell SGA, to be implemented during this planning cycle. This plan describes the **goals** or desired future conditions 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 Saranac-Lowell SGA. Due to staff capacity and the local office budget the goals in this plan may not be met within this cycle.

Goal I: Sustainable populations of wild turkey in SLSGA

Rationale: Wild turkeys are highly desirable game species and managing for their habitat, especially the oak component of the forest, benefits numerous other wildlife species. White-tailed deer also benefit from actions taken under this goal.

Metrics: Opportunistic staff observations; assessment of oak types within MIFI

Objective A. Maintain the current extent (~840 acres) of oak cover type on the SGA and balance the age class distribution

Action 1. Develop and implement an adaptive oak management strategy by Fall of 2021

Action 2. Harvest approximately 80 acres of oak forest during the next decade

Objective B. Increase the oak component in non-oak stands

Action 1. When managing other forested cover types, including natural white pine stands and red pine plantations, identify opportunities for maintaining & increasing the oak component

Objective C. To maintain suitable forest openings (1-10 acres in size), on 60 acres (3% of the Saranac-Lowell SGA) for foraging and breeding habitat for wild turkey

Action 1. Maintain herbaceous openings at appropriate locations throughout the Saranac-Lowell SGA

Goal II: Sustainable populations of white-tailed deer in SLSGA

Rationale: White-tailed deer are a highly desirable game species. White-tailed deer also benefit from the actions taken under Goal I (above) as young forests and oak forests provide excellent food and cover for deer.

Metrics: Opportunistic staff observations; assessment of aspen and oak types within MIFI

Objective A. Increase the treatable aspen cover type as well as create early successional forest habitat on the SLSGA to cover approximately 90 acres in combination (~4% of the area) while providing a balance of age

classes for the aspen on a 40 year rotation if possible (25% at age 0-10, 25% at age 11-20, 25% at age 21-30, 25% at age 31-40).

Action 1. Establish an aspen and mixed hardwood harvest regime (~15 acres every decade) that will result in a more suitable amount of young forest on the SGA

Objective B. To provide suitable forest openings (mostly 1-10 acres in size), comprising 60 acres (3% of the SGA) for feeding areas by 2029

Action1. Maintain small herbaceous openings at appropriate locations throughout the SGA

Objective C. Maintain or increase the current extent (~840 acres) of oak cover type on the SGA and balance the age class distribution

Action 1. Develop and implement an adaptive oak management strategy by Fall of 2021

Action 2. Harvest approximately 80 acres of oak forest during the next decade

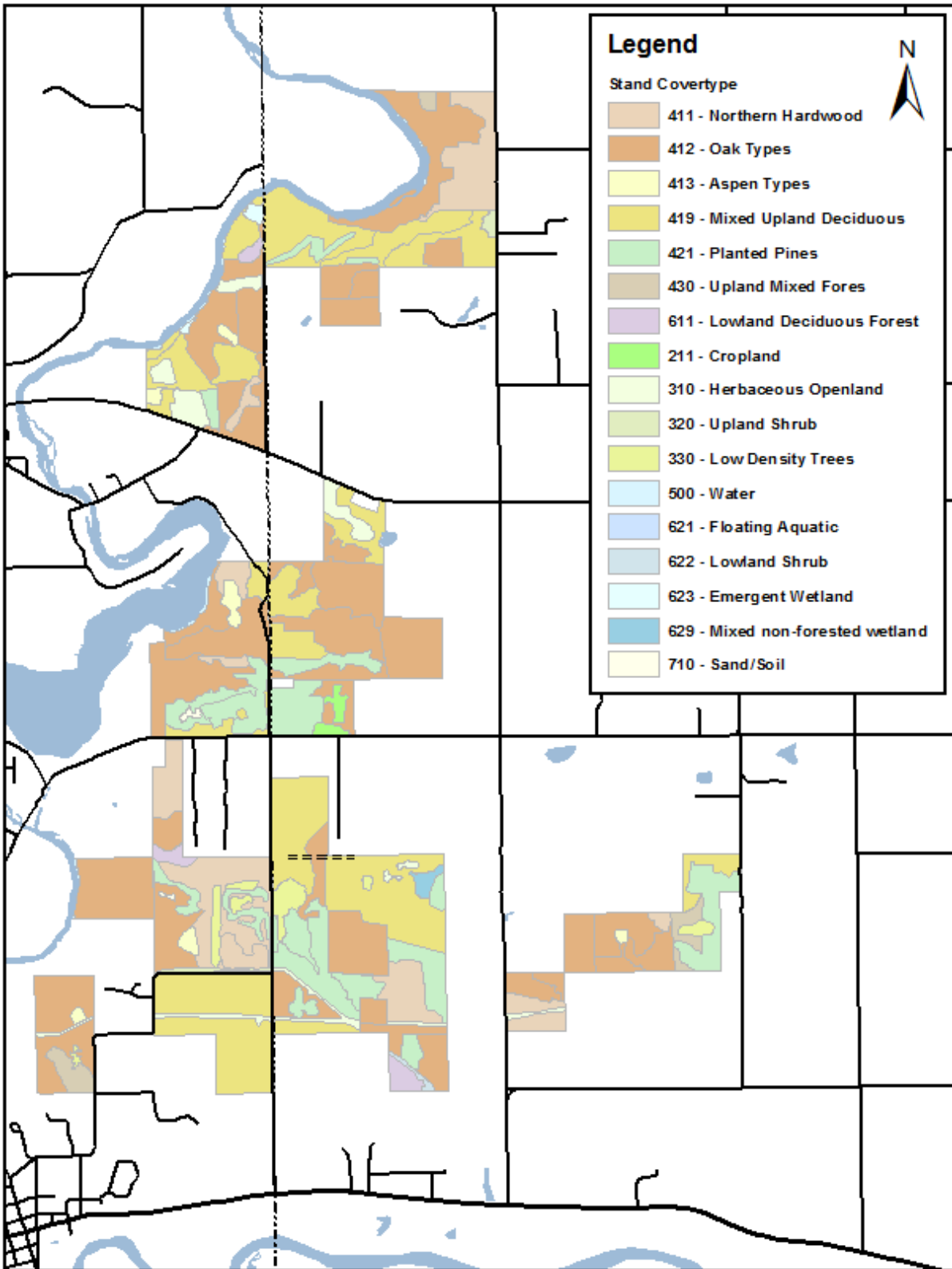


Figure 1. Map representing the major habitat cover type classes in the SGA.



Figure 2. Location of the Saranac-Lowell SGA.

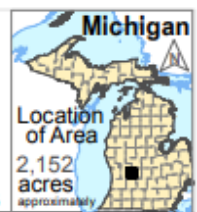


STATE OF MICHIGAN - DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

SARANAC-LOWELL STATE GAME AREA

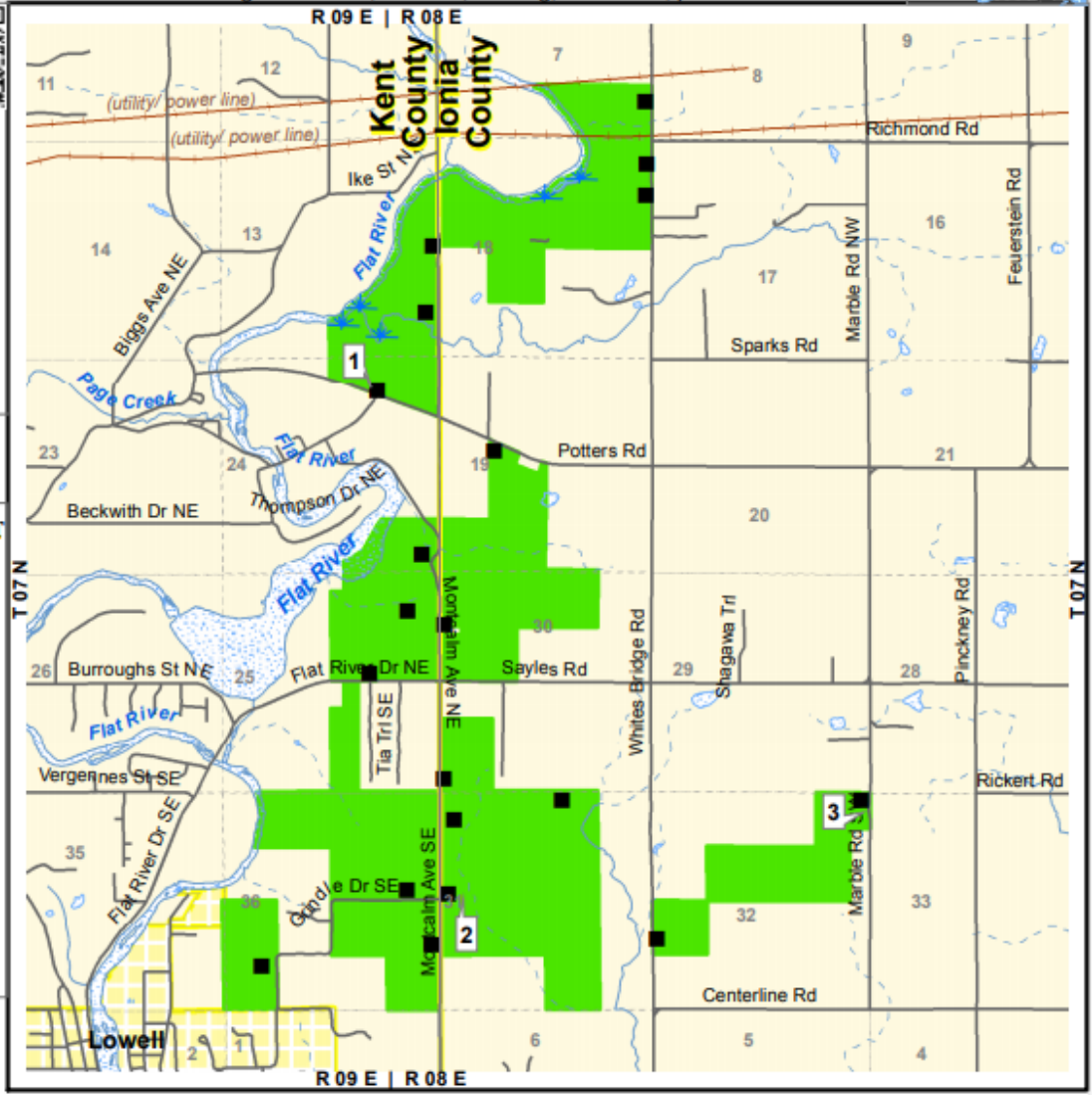
- General Map -
Ionia and Kent Counties

Area headquarters: Flat River DNR Wildlife Office
6640 Long Lake Road, Route 2, Belding, MI 48809 ; phone 616- 794-2658



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)
 - ~ NO Rustic or Drop-in
 - ~ Gravel or Dirt Roads, Two-Tracks, Trails
 - ~ Rivers, Streams
 - ~ Seas, Streams, Drains
 - ~ Marsh in Area
 - ~ Cities or Villages
 - ~ County Boundary

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

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!

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 | north-side parking off Potters Rd Lat.42°59'07.4"N, Long.85°19'03.2"W.
- 2 | south-side parking off Montcalm Ave Lat.42°57'06.2"N, Long.85°18'38.7"W.
- 3 | east-side parking off Marble Rd SW Lat.42°57'28.1"N, Long.85°16'23.4"W.

Hunter Monies Help Make This Area Possible

Map Revised 03/02/2016 - Wildlife Div./MLS

Figure 3. Saranac-Lowell SGA boundaries.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

This is an important game area that provides a host of recreational opportunities for local resident and visitors. Our overall goal is to continue to provide these opportunities. Since the SLSGA is located in southern Michigan and within relatively close distance of the city of Grand Rapids, the land acquisition strategy for the SLSGA is to both fill in state ownership by acquiring available blocks located within and among current state ownership and to expand the area by obtaining appropriate parcels that are outside the current ownership but within the acquisition boundary. Parcels will be evaluated as they become available and will be acquired on a willing seller basis only.

Plan Review

This plan was available for public review and comment on the DNR website between (Month) (Day), 2020 and (Month) (Day), 2020. During this period ***** comments were received and considered before finalizing this plan. The final plan was approved on (Month) (Day), 2020 and will be reviewed within 10 years of the approved date.

Approvals

(Name), Field Operations Manager

Date

(Name), Regional Supervisor

Date