

COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

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CHAPTER 700

ROADS, TRAILS AND ACCESS

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700 ACCESS CONTROL AND HISTORY

Resource management and protection activities, recreational uses, and other public uses on the Polk County Forest require several different types of access. A combination of geography, soils, vegetation, surface waters, seasons of the year, presence/absence of roads or trails, ownership of adjoining lands, and public regulations interact to control access to any part of the Forest.

Many of the existing roads and trails were originally developed as logging roads, forest fire protection lanes, or trails used to reach popular hunting and fishing areas. County personnel did not routinely establish the locations and standards for these earlier roads.

Over the years, the road density and frequency of vehicle use on the Forest has increased as a result of an active timber harvest program. Often times, different uses have occurred on the same trails with minimal conflicts. But the diverse demands for, and uses of, the County Forest has reached the point where an integrated access management plan is needed.

Factors affecting access on the Polk County Forest

User conflict between groups: e.g., hunting on foot versus use of vehicles for access to game populations.

Safety: e.g., pleasure riding of horses on the same trail with ATV vehicle traffic, or hiking.

Erosion: soils eroding due to use, or over-use by vehicles.

Damage to access: rutted or impassable roads requiring costly repair by the county or other specific user groups (e.g., snowmobile club).

Litter: depositing garbage and waste on the Forest.

Crowding: e.g. complaints from hunters about intensified competition for traditional hunting areas as a result of better access.

Fires: e.g. increased exposure of the resource to forest fire occurrence.

Endangered species management: e.g. high road densities conflict with timber wolf recovery, eagle and osprey nest disturbance.

Invasive species: e.g. introduction of invasive exotic species along travel routes.

Developmental trends: e.g. preservation of the County Forest solitude by limiting access versus development of high intensity use by additional roads and unlimited access.

Road placement: e.g. some roads should be closed for improper location and evaluated for replacement.

Clear and concise policy for the public.

705 CHAPTER OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide direction to the committee and resource managers in order to maintain a network of roads and trails on the County Forest. This will meet the needs for resource management and protection activities, as well as provide public access for recreation opportunities.
2. Identify the distribution, density, and types of roads and uses of roads and trails needed to establish a safe and efficient transportation and recreation system that complements the economic, environmental, and social interest in the County Forest.
3. Identify the existing and future County Forest roads eligible for transportation aids under s.86.315(1), Wis. Stats.
4. Identify areas on the County Forest where the access is limited or restricted.
5. Identify the provisions and criteria that will be policy when addressing management issues on the County Forest.

710 ROADS

Polk County Forest staff will oversee the construction and maintenance of all roads within the County Forest. These roads may be constructed and maintained by the County, private contractors working under contract, at the direction of the county, other public resource agencies, or cooperative agreement with non-profit organizations. The specifications for road construction and maintenance will vary with the frequency, duration, and planned use of each road. Three major types of roads occur on the Forest: permanent primary roads, permanent secondary roads, and temporary roads.

New road establishment should consider information identifying areas with sensitive soils or severe slopes that have the potential for adverse water quality impacts from land management practices. County staff can work with local DNR water resources staff to develop site-specific measures where appropriate.

710.1 PERMANENT PRIMARY FOREST ROADS

These roads are the primary roads accessing the County Forest. They are designed, constructed, and maintained for year-round use. These roads serve essential access corridors for multiple use management. Some of these roads are graveled and routinely graded. Vehicle use may be restricted at various times of the year to minimize physical damage to the road or to accommodate a groomed snowmobile trail.

Some forest roads in this category qualify for the County Forest Road Aids program. Qualifying roads must meet minimum design standards of a 16-foot surface width and a 20-foot roadway width. A yearly aid payment is used to maintain and improve these certified public roads. The following table lists the roads currently certified under s. 86.31(1), Wis. Stats. Also included are roads proposed for addition once improvements meet statute requirements.

POLK COUNTY CURRENT AND FUTURE WDOT CERTIFIED

TOWNSHIP	SECTION	LENGTH (MI)	ROAD NAME/COMMENTS
Lorain	36	1.2	Sand Creek Trail
	20	.5	
McKinley	7	.2	Mackie Lake Trail
Sterling	21	1.99	
	22, 27	.99	Bear Track Fire Lane
	23, 26	.47	
	24, 25	1.21	
	25	1.25	
	25, 26	.5	
Total		8.31	

These permanent primary roads will be maintained and remain open to public use. Though these roads are generally not posted as County Forest Roads nor plowed in the winter.

Refer to section 915.8 and 915.9 for the Road Maintenance Policy and County Forest Road Inspection Reports.

710.2 PERMANENT SECONDARY ROADS

These roads often serve a variety of uses including forest management, fire protection, and recreation. These roads are maintained as part of a permanent road system but are often narrower than permanent primary roads and are built and maintained to lower standards. Some of these roads are designed for use only when the ground is frozen or firm.

Some roads in this category are located in areas on the Forest where motor vehicle use is limited or restricted. Unless posted otherwise or physically blocked these roads are open for use by the public.

In instances where motorized traffic is restricted, vehicle access will only be authorized for planned management activities or fire protection. Foot traffic is allowed on all roads.

710.3 TEMPORARY ROADS

Many of the roads on the Forest fall into this classification. These roads are designed and constructed for short-term use for a specific project; often for timber harvest access. These roads are used only for a short duration and when the activity is done, the temporary road is closed. These roads are naturally or artificially revegetated and closed by use of earthen berms/bunkers or other physical barriers.

Temporary roads on existing and past sales will be considered for closure. Reasons will include protection of perpetually wet soils, human safety, and prevention of illegal dumping.

The need for new temporary roads will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Road locations will be included in designing timber harvests. Consideration will be given to the objectives within each County Forest unit, existing road density, potential use, and soil type.

720 RECREATIONAL TRAIL ACCESS

This trail network provides access for many recreational opportunities on the Forest. An important role of the Forest is to provide sustainable recreational trails that do not cause long-term natural resource damage, and that are compatible with other uses. Management activities adjacent to recreational trails will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Where deemed necessary, alterations will be made to accommodate the recreational use. The committee has the authority to open, close or relocate trails.

If in the opinion of the committee an existing trail has either failed to satisfy the intended purpose

or is found to contribute to resource degradation, a trail may be closed or its use designation changed.

720.1 TRAIL CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Requests for recreational trails will be reviewed by the Committee. Groups requesting specific trail development or use must present a plan for the long term funding and maintenance of proposed trails

Construction or maintenance of any recreational trail in which the activity would increase the erosion potential of one acre or more of land is subject to state and federal stormwater runoff requirements (NR216, Wis. Adm. Code and s. 283.33, Wis. Stats). Construction or development for silvicultural purposes is presently exempt from these requirements. Recreational trail development in Polk County that meets these parameters will employ best management practices for water quality (PUB-FR-093-95) to mitigate any adverse impacts. In addition, an erosion control plan will be prepared for each project depicting the location of the project and surrounding wetlands and what erosion control measures will be employed.

Refer to 915.8 to view the Road Maintenance Policy and 915.9 for the Inspection Report.

725 NON-MOTORIZED RECREATIONAL TRAILS

725.1 HIKING

725.1.1 Undesignated Hiking Trails

All portions of the County Forest are open to hiking or foot travel unless marked with signs closing an area.

National Scenic Trails

One National scenic hiking and backpacking trail is present on the Polk County Forest.

Ice Age Trail

The Ice Age Trail crosses the Forest in section(s) 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, and 27 of the Town of Lorain. The trail is both a national and state scenic trail and follows the end moraines of the most recent glaciation of Wisconsin. It is intended to provide a high

quality rustic walking experience across Wisconsin.

Management practices on, and adjacent to, these designated trails will be designed to maintain the character of the landscape and minimize disruption to the trail and its users.

The trail corridors are considered Zone B aesthetic management zones and referenced in Chapter 500. Temporarily rerouting the trail to avoid conflict and safety concerns may be necessary. Trees and signing identifying the trail will be maintained and protected by inclusion into timber sale contracts. In order to avoid confusion with trail users, an effort will be made to avoid the use of yellow paint on projects immediately adjacent to the Ice Age trail. Yellow (IAT) are the standard colors for designating this trail. Trails bisecting timber sales will be cleared of trees and logging debris daily.

725.1 BICYCLING

725.2.1 Undesignated Bicycle Trails

All trails, roads, and fire lanes are open for recreational bicycle use. Off-trail mountain bike use may be restricted in specific areas if use causes erosion or other environmental damages.

725.3 HORSEBACK RIDING

725.3.1 Undesignated Horseback Riding Trails

Horseback riding is allowed on all trails, roads, and fire lanes except the ice age trail (IAT), ATV trails (when open) and snowmobile trails (when open). Off-trail riding within 50 feet of rivers, streams, or lakes is not permitted except when watering horses.

725.3.2 Designated Horseback Riding Trails

- (1) Governor Knowles State Forest Bridle Trail. This trail utilizes many miles of Polk County Forest in the town of Sterling.

725.4 CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

725.4.1 Undesignated Cross-Country Ski Trails

All trails, roads, and fire lanes are open for cross-country skiing. Cross-country skiing on

groomed snowmobile trails is not permitted due to serious safety concerns.

725.5 OTHER NON-MOTORIZED USE

Hiking / Snowshoe Trail

Other non-motorized recreational trail uses including, but not limited to, snowshoeing, dog sledding and, hunting on foot are permitted on all trails except where otherwise posted as closed.

730 MOTORIZED RECREATIONAL TRAILS

The use of motorized vehicles on the Forest continues to increase. The design, maneuverability, and power of the vehicles have improved. This has led to greater use; increased trail use conflicts, unnecessary environmental damage, and increased expenses for trail maintenance. Additional regulation on these types of recreational vehicles is needed to protect the Forest and limit adverse impacts on non-motorized uses.

730.1 SNOWMOBILING

730.1.1 Undesignated Snowmobile Trails

No cross-country use is permitted; however, snowmobile use is permitted on all logging road, and fire lanes when the ground is snow-covered. Use on the Forest during other times of the year is not allowed.

730.1.2 Designated Snowmobile Trails

Two types of groomed snowmobile trails are authorized on the Forest: state-funded trails and local club trails. Annual agreements outline the operation, maintenance, and insurance obligations between Polk County and local snowmobile clubs.

State trails: A system of state approved and funded snowmobile trails is authorized on designated trails, logging roads, and fire lanes. This system is part of the statewide network of snowmobile trails, which links Polk County with adjoining counties as well as the rest of the state. Snowmobile registration and out-of-state user fees are used to support trail development, signing, maintenance, grooming and bridge construction.

Local trails: A smaller network of local club-sponsored snowmobile trails is also permitted on designated trails, logging roads, and fire lanes. Maintenance of these trails is supported by club membership fees and fund raising activities.

All groomed snowmobile trails are closed to all cars and trucks from December 1st through March 31st unless vehicle use is authorized by Polk County. When vehicle use is authorized for timber sale access, contractors must maintain the trail in a safe condition, free from debris and equipment, and with a minimum of 1 inch of snow pack.

DNR's Trail Signing Handbook will be used as the guide for posting standardized signs and will assist in promoting uniformity for trail signing throughout the county. Only trail signs that provide information for safety, regulations, or trail directions will be permitted. Private and business signs are not authorized on the Forest. All trail signs must be mounted on wooden or metal posts.

730.2 ALL TERRAIN VEHICLES (ATV)

ATV's are permitted on designated trails only

730.2.2 Designated ATV Trails

1. Sterling ATV Trail

Trail use may be temporarily closed for protection against forest fires during dry periods.

730.3 OTHER MOTORIZED RECREATIONAL VEHICLE TRAILS

730.3.1 Undesignated

Other motorized recreational use of the County Forest is prohibited on those trails designated for other recreational uses or where trails are rocked, bermed, gated or otherwise blocked. Cross-country use of the forest for motorized use is also prohibited.

740 WATER ACCESS

Water access may be planned, developed, or restricted as a component of the overall Forest access management plan. Canoe landings or adjacent roads currently provide water access on the Forest primarily for recreational activities. Not all watercraft will be able to use these access points. Mooring or storing boats for longer than 24 hours is prohibited.

740.4 UNDEVELOPED WATER ACCESS POINTS

1. Mackie Lake

Other undeveloped water access points for canoes and boats currently exist on the Forest. These are used routinely to hand launch boats or canoes but have not been developed for boat trailer launching. These sites are not routinely maintained and may be closed if erosion damage becomes severe. All new sites for developed water access must be reviewed and approved by the Committee.

745 WILD LAKES

The surface waters encompassed under the wild lakes designation include those restricted use areas that are not open to any gasoline-powered vehicles, watercraft, or snowmobiles except when snow covered. In general, all or most of the shorelines of these lakes and streams are owned by Polk County. Counties may request that townships, under authority of s. 30.77 (3) Wis. Stats., establish regulations restricting motorized use on these surface waters. Canoes, kayaks, and boats propelled by wind, oars, or electric motors are permitted. Gasoline or diesel powered equipment is not permitted. The intent of these restrictions is to protect the aquatic resources of these lakes but still allow human access. On the Polk County Forest the following lakes are designated as “Wild Lakes”:

1. Mackie Lake – McKinley Township

750 WETLANDS

In addition to surface waters, all wetlands on the Forest are closed to motorized recreational vehicle use when soils are not frozen. Vehicle use during non-frozen seasons causes soil rutting, compaction and damage to vegetation. The wetlands are not listed individually here but include all areas where soils, groundwater or surface waters support the growth of vegetation commonly associated with wetland plant communities.

755 ACCESS TO PRIVATE LANDS

Applications by private parties to build or improve access roads through County Forest land will be considered by the Committee on a case-by-case basis. The following stipulations will be adhered to before an "Access Permit" is granted.

1. Access across County Forest lands must be demonstrated by the applicant as the route of last resort. The applicant must document proposed uses.
2. No legal easement will be granted, just permission to cross county lands.
3. The permit is non-transferable. New landowners must apply to continue the land use agreement.
4. Road improvements and upgrading must be approved and will be supervised by the Forestry Department staff. Prior notification of three (3) days is required before work starts.
5. All wood cut are the property of Polk County.
6. Roadway must be opened to the public through county land. No gate may be erected on county land.
7. The County continues full ownership of the improved roadway; however, it shall not be liable for maintenance or upkeep of the road.
8. Permittee waives any rights to any declaration of ownership or interest in the road on county land for administrative costs as a result of this "Access Permit". The access permit is granted upon the signature and any fees being received by the Polk County Forestry Department.
8. The fee schedule for a one-time payment is set at \$.25 per lineal foot and a minimum fee

of \$200.

9. The standard Land Use Agreement Access permit is included as an exhibit in Chapter 900.

760 PUBLIC UTILITY ACCESS

Access of the County Forest for utility reasons is covered under Chapter 500-, Special Uses.

765 BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The layout and construction of any new road or trail situated on the County Forest shall adhere to *Wisconsin's Best Management Practices for Water Quality* (PUB-FR-093-95). This access management plan addresses the need and diversity level of forest roads and trails within the County Forest. Chapter 6 of the BMP Manual provides guidelines for road construction. Areas with highly erodable soil types, close proximity to streams or lakes, or steep slopes are identified on the erosion susceptibility map included in Chapter 900-appendix. Soil disturbance activities in these areas may require mitigating measures in excess of those currently listed in the *Best Management Practices* manual PUB-FR-093-95. Wider buffers, sediment control structures and water diversion techniques will be used as appropriate in these sensitive areas. To Quantify logging equipments impact on soils, Polk County will use as its standard, the rutting/soil productivity guidelines as set forth in the DNR Timber Sale Handbook (2461).

770 SIGNS

Signs on the County Forest will be used discreetly to perform and function with minimal disruption to the multiple uses of the Forest. Private signs promoting personal, commercial or political objectives will not be permitted without authorization from Polk County. Signs erected by the county for management purposes or by non-profit recreational trail groups will be as follows:

1. Informational Type Signs
 - A. Interpretive Signs - to educate the general public about forest management practices.
 - B. Public Land Signs - to identify the land as Polk County Forest

- Property.
- C. Trail Markers - to provide direction and safety to trail users.
 - D. Scientific, Historical or Geological Markers - to identify points of interest.
 - E. Recreational Facility Markers - to identify park entrances, etc.
 - F. Directional Markers.
2. Regulatory Type Signs - to regulate the use of the Forest in specific areas.

770.1 **SIGNING STANDARDS**

To assure that signs will serve a purpose without damaging aesthetics, the following standards will be maintained:

- 1. All signs will be mounted on treated wood posts, steel posts, or flexible plastic posts.
- 2. Routed wood signs will be used wherever practical. Fiberboard or painted metal signs, when used, will be of neat appearance.
- 3. Signs placed on snowmobile trails must conform to state standards and be approved by the committee. Posts should be used whenever possible. Signs placed on trees must use aluminum nails.
- 4. All authorized signs shall be protected by ordinance from being damaged, defaced, obstructed, removed, or possessed by unauthorized persons.
- 5. The Forestry staff will remove all unauthorized signs. No compensation will be afforded for loss or damage to signs during removal. Individuals erecting unauthorized signs may be prosecuted under s. 943.13(3), Wis. Stats.