

## Houghton Falls Nature Preserve Management Plan (Amended 4/13/2010)

The Houghton Falls Nature Preserve is a 76 acre area that the Town of Bayview, in partnership with the Bayfield Regional Conservancy, has set aside to be preserved for the following reasons: To protect a unique area, in terms of its geological, cultural, and botanical heritage; To maintain and protect it for the enjoyment of the public; To preserve it for the benefit of future generations of Bayview Township.

The goals of the management plan are to preserve the HFNP, allow appropriate public access, and provide information as to the preserve's heritage, while minimizing the impact of public use on the adjacent public landowners, and to cooperatively work with the Department of Natural Resources to designate the gorge, falls, and a portion of the woods as a State Natural Area. To that end, HFNP design and management will be focused on the following areas: 1. to provide an enriching and environmentally low impact experience for preserve visitors. 2.) To use information and preserve design controls to keep visitors away from adjacent private property. Overviews of the State of Wisconsin Goals that will drive the Bayview Township management plan as well as a description of the proposed HFNP and specifics of the Bayview Township HFNP management plan are outlined below.

### **State of Wisconsin Goals related to Houghton Falls Nature Preserve:**

#### **Wisconsin's CELCP Plan Goals**

The Houghton Falls Natural Area site contributes to the priority conservation needs identified in the *Wisconsin CELCP Plan* including:

- **Protection of ecologically diverse or high quality habitats**

Protection of Wisconsin Boreal Forest is a priority for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in order to maintain diverse habitat types in Wisconsin.

Houghton Falls is named in the *2000 Land Legacy Report* as an "Area of Interest" A plant inventory by field ecologists Jim Meeker, Joan Elias and Dr. Mark Leach indicate that this is a high quality natural area.

- **Protection of habitats supporting species listed as Endangered or Threatened, and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin**

Species of concern that have been or could likely be found on this site include: Gray Wolf, Northern Flying Squirrel, Woodland Jumping Mouse and Water Shrew.

- **Protection of critical fish spawning habitat**

The fish habitat value is widely documented in international and state plans for whitefish, trout and Lake Sturgeon. The waters off Houghton Point serve as a fish nursery and habitat area that contributes to the importance of the Chequamegon Bay as a sport-fishing destination.

- **Protection of critical bird habitat**

Historically bald eagles have nested on this site. Merlin, Least Flycatcher, Veery, Wood Thrush, Canada Warbler and others have been heard or seen at this site. As Lake Superior's shore land becomes fragmented by development, unbroken boreal habitat like Houghton Falls becomes more important for resident birds and migratory birds. The Wisconsin CELCP plan indicates the great need for undeveloped natural areas along Lake Superior to serve as migratory rest stops. Lower Chequamegon Bay has been approved as a "Wisconsin Important Bird Area"

- **Supporting critical ecological functions**

The steep slopes and highly erodible sandstone gorge require protecting and maintaining the integrity of vegetation cover types in the riparian corridor and upland area of the Echo Dells portion of the property. Maintaining forested buffers will slow the flow of winter snow melt and heavy precipitation, thus preventing increased sedimentation along Lake Superior coastline in a designated fish nursery area.

- The gorge, waterfalls and the woods area south of the stream are collectively recognized as the “Houghton Falls State Natural Area”. This portion of the project meets the rigorous criteria established for recognition. State Natural Areas are established on the best remaining natural features to enhance a state-wide system that protects these areas for ecological research, education and the long term maintenance of our state’s biological diversity.

### **Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (CZM): A Strategic Vision for the Great Lakes**

The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program October 2007 Strategic Vision for the Great Lakes Plan outlines the goals that support the Congressional findings and policy of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972. The Houghton Falls Natural Area project supports the goals outlined in the Wisconsin plan as follows:

The overarching goal is to preserve, protect, develop where possible, to restore or enhance, the resources of Wisconsin’s coastal area for this and succeeding generations, with governmental coordination and public involvement, giving due consideration to the linkages and impacts to resources of inland areas.

With the Town of Bayview as project sponsor, this project supports the coastal management objective to strengthen local government capabilities to initiate and continue effective coastal management.

The town’s public involvement process supports the coastal management objective to increase public awareness and opportunity for citizens to participate in decisions affecting Great Lakes resources. Houghton Falls also falls within the secondary Wisconsin CELCP project priorities:

**Providing public access to Lakes Michigan or Superior.** The Houghton Falls Nature Preserve will directly advance the state’s efforts to provide opportunities for citizens to participate in a variety of low-impact outdoor recreation opportunities. The goal is to provide permanent public access to this site which has been enjoyed by community members for generations, and has a history of human use spanning from pre-European settlement to the present day. Public access will be low-impact via a designated footpath. Motorized use will be prohibited as well as other activities detrimental to the ecological value of the area.

## **Houghton Falls Nature Preserve**

Description: The HFNP’s entrance will be approximately halfway down Houghton Falls road from where it intersects with Wisconsin State Highway 13. The entrance will consist of a gated, gravelled parking area large enough to accommodate anticipated vehicle traffic and an emergency vehicle turnaround. At the edge of the parking area will be signage giving preserve hours and basic rules and regulations. From the parking lot a walking path will meander due south until intersection with the Echo Dells Ravine. At this point the path will turn southeast to parallel the lip of the ravine until it reaches a designated scenic point in

the Echo Dells area. At this point a small set of stairs will lead to a scenic vantage point near the dells. Unobtrusive signs all along the trail will point out plants, historical notes, interesting geological formations, and other pieces of information of interest to visitors.

The trail will continue to follow the lip of the ravine generally eastward until it intersects the old Chicago NW railroad grade. A small wood walkway will provide access over the substantial ditch to the RR grade. From here, the path will follow along the northern edge of the falls area, paralleling the 90 degree turn the ravine makes below the falls. It will follow the top of the canyon ending in a small stairway permitting access down to the area traditionally called Houghton Point. On the north side of the trail, set back from the actual property line of HFNP, will be a split rail fence to discourage people from wandering onto private property.

At the southern limit of HFNP property on the railroad grade, a substantial barrier with signage stating no access to Houghton Falls Preserve will be installed. On the North limit of HFNP property on the railroad grade, a substantial locking gate will be installed, also with signage stating no access to Houghton Falls and denoting that vehicles parked on roadway will be towed at the owner's expense. In addition, fencing between the private property and HFNP will be extended for a length to discourage skirting the gate.

A Bayview township directive will be to install partition fencing and/or signage separating the preserve from the adjacent local property to delineate the preserve boundary and prevent encroachment and problems with trespass. Completion of this directive will be on or before October 2015

The five Nature Based Outdoor Activities are encouraged with one limitation. Because of the adjacent presence of residential homes and outbuildings, highly restricted sightlines, and the popularity of the area for multiple uses, hunters would be limited to archery equipment for all species and all hunters would be required to procure a town permit. Trapping would be allowed with town permit. Fishing is encouraged, as the mouth of Houghton Falls is known for its fishing. Cross country skiing, Archery Hunting, Hiking, and Snowshoeing are encouraged as well.

#### I. Administrative

##### A. Hours of operation

1. Sunrise to Sunset
2. During times of high fire risk, severe flooding or other safety issues, park admittance will be restricted.
3. Entrance to parking area to be gated and closed except for hours of operation.
4. No pets will be allowed.
5. Signs prohibiting rock climbing will be posted

##### B. Access to the preserve

1. from parking area midway down Houghton Falls Road.
2. No access to the falls area will be allowed from North Houghton Point Road or Gary Road. Signs to this effect will be posted at those spots, as well as "No Parking" signs, and "Vehicles will be towed" signs.
3. Access in the preserve will be on walking trails.
4. Stairways and possible wooden walkways to assist in protecting sensitive areas from erosion as well as for public safety, will be installed in the following areas:
  - a. Echo Dells
  - b. West entrance onto the railroad grade from Echo Dells section.
  - c. Leading down to Houghton Point

- C. Maintenance will be by Town Employees and HFNP volunteers on a regularly Scheduled basis
1. Trash Pick up
  2. Trail Inspection
- D. An organized system to deal with parking violators and after hours use of the Preserve will be instituted by the Bayview Town Board in conjunction with the Bayfield Sheriff's department, adjacent property owners, and other affected Parties.

Problems:

- 1.) The challenge to prevent routine access and subsequent degradation of the most ecologically fragile area in the Preserve, The Echo Dells. Intelligent placement of signage and path placement should alleviate this problem considerably.
- 2.) One problem foreseen is preventing encroachment and trespass onto adjacent private properties by visitors. As described above, a planned out series of signs and proper placement of trails, as well as use of fencing in some areas should minimize this problem
- 3.) The Third challenge will be preventing disturbance of the Eagles nest located on the property during nesting season. Not having a formal trail on the south side of the falls area should help alleviate this problem.
- 4.) Because of the year round popularity of this area for multiple uses of NBOAs, and the fact the preserve is surrounded by residences and structures that are not easily visible, effort was put into how to provide a hunting experience, yet maintain personal safety for all preserve visitors and nearby residents. Allowing hunting by bow and arrow meets the criteria of NBOAs as well as satisfying the safety issue.

Adjacent Land Uses.

Adjacent land uses are limited to Full time residential and seasonal residential properties, ranging in size from 2 to 40 acres in size. There are no anticipated changes in adjacent property use.

Public Uses.

Public use of this property would include hiking, primitive picnicking, walking, nature study, bird watching, bow hunting, trapping, unsupervised swimming and wading. Possible uses could include environmental education, cultural and historical education.

Land Management practices.

The overall goal of HFNP land management practices will be to minimize the impact on the HFNP. To that extent, very little in the way of major trail construction, and no major structural improvements such as shelters will be undertaken. The goal will be to keep HFNP in as undisturbed and pristine a state as possible for a public accessible nature preserve. The HFNP will be passively managed with respect to vegetation. No timber harvest or timber stand improvement will be conducted on the property. Timber salvage following a major blow down will be evaluated following consultation with the State

Natural Areas Program. Periodic surveys will be conducted along trails and other public use areas in order to detect the presence of non-native invasive plants. Herbicide use will not be allowed, other than for the purpose of controlling non-native invasive species.

Implementation of Plan:

Formation in April of 2010 of the following committees:

Houghton Falls Nature Preserve Ad Hoc volunteer and Fundraising Committee

Map and Sign design Committee

Trail Construction Committee

The goal is to have all plans for the above in place by July 2010

Monitoring)

Trail maintenance and inspection: Twice weekly by town road crew, officials or town volunteers.

Erosion and habitat degradation inspection: Every Six months by Bayfield county Soil Conservation officials.

Invasive Species inspection and review: Once yearly by county invasive species specialist.

Maps (See initial attachment.)

Approved on this date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Chairman- Town of Bayview

Approved on this date \_\_\_\_\_

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Authorized signatory-State of Wisconsin