CHAPTER 900

RECREATION

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RECREATION

Recreation is an integral part of the management of the Vernon County Forest and recreation uses are referenced in most of the previous chapters. Due to the tremendous growth in recreational demands over the duration of the last planning period, this Plan recognizes the importance of more intensive recreational planning and emphasizes its importance with a separate chapter.

PLANNING

In addition to this Plan, the Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan also guides the recreation program. This plan is revised every five years and is made part of this Plan. The Vernon County Outdoor recreation Plan includes, but is not limited to, activities on the Vernon County Forest. It incorporates snowmobile and ATV plans, campgrounds, parks and boat landings, recreational maintenance and development plans and other recreation surveys and reports.

The Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan, Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), public input, and other local or regional planning documents will be used as resources in recreational planning and development efforts. The responsibility for recreational planning, development and maintenance on the Vernon County Forest will rest with the Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee.

AUTHORITY

The Vernon County Code of Ordinances and s.28.11 Wis. Stats, authorize the Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee to provide recreational opportunities for the public. This authority is further recognized in the mission statement for the Vernon County Forest Plan (Chapter 100), which specifically identifies outdoor recreational opportunities. This mission statement also charges the Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee to conduct activities in a manner that prevents or minimizes environmental damage.

Maps of the recreational facilities managed through the Vernon County Forest program are appended or referenced in Chapter 1000.

ENTRANCE AND USER FEES

The Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee is empowered and shall have responsibility for establishing entrance, camping and other user fees on recreational facilities
maintained by the Vernon County Forest. Camping, entrance or other fees shall be comparable to fees charged by similar private facilities and are subject to periodic change by the Committee. Fees, where appropriate, will be utilized to assist in the maintenance of recreational facilities.

920 RECREATIONAL SERVICE AGREEMENTS
It is permissible for the Land and water Conservation Committee to contract with clubs or individuals to provide for recreational maintenance or services to the public. As part of the Plan, Vernon County contracts for the following services
1. Snowmobile trail grooming and maintenance
2. Trail grading and maintenance
3. Mowing campgrounds and parking areas
4. Cleaning of facilities in recreational areas

925 RECREATIONAL USE PERMITS FOR ORGANZIED EVENTS
Any event on the Vernon County Forest which is advertised to the public, for which a fee is charged, or is otherwise organized as an event, requires a permit or authorization by the Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee. Permits may be issued by the Committee provided the use is consistent with management activities and will not cause resource damage. Appropriate levels of event liability insurance is required.

930 UNDESIGNATED RECREATIONAL USE OF THE FOREST
Undesignated recreation includes those informal activities for which Vernon County generally does not provide a facility or service. These uses include activities such as hunting, fishing, biking, hiking and others. These uses do not require a permit but must be conducted in compliance with ordinance. The Vernon County Forest Administrator and the Land and Water Conservation Committee shall periodically review such uses and enact ordinances as necessary to protect from resource damage.

930.1 HUNTING
The entire Vernon County Forest is open for regulated hunting, with the exception of areas developed for high public use.
The Vernon County Code of Ordinances regulates activities relating to hunting. Refer to Chapter 1000 for a full text of the Ordinance. In general the following activities are regulated:
1.) Elevated platform regulations
2.) Regulations based on time of year near special use areas

930.2 FISHING
All lakes and streams within the forest are available for fishing unless otherwise listed in state regulations. The Vernon County Forest also provides for non-motorized lakes providing a unique opportunity for recreation.

930.3 PICNICKING / DAY USE
Picnicking and other day uses, outside of established facilities are allowed. The Vernon County Code of Ordinances also regulates day use. In general, the following activities are regulated:
1. All litter, trash or rubbish must be removed
2. Cutting or harvesting vegetation is not permitted
3. Fires may not be left unattended unless the ground is 100% snow covered
4. Soil disturbance is prohibited including types of foraging
5. Trail development must go through proper channels prior to establishment Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee approval etc.

930.4 CAMPING
A permit is required to camp outside of developed campgrounds on the Vernon County Forest. Permits are available from the Vernon County land and Water Office Described regulations/process for dispersed camping. In general, the following activities are regulated:
1.) permits must be obtained prior to camping in any areas not previously designated for this use.

930.5 MOTORIZED TRAVEL
The Vernon County Code of Ordinances (and road and access plan if applicable) regulates motorized uses on the Vernon County Forest. The full text of these regulations is included in Chapter 700. In general, the following regulations apply to motorized travel outside of a developed recreational trail system.
1. It is illegal to operate a motor vehicle on a trail designated closed with a gate, earthen berm, sign, or other closure
2. Two-wheeled motorized travel (motorcycles, mini bikes, dirt bikes) is not permitted
3. All recreational trails are closed to all motorized vehicles with the exception of snowmobiles when trails are open to public use.
930.6 OTHER USES
Other uses of the Vernon County Forest are permitted provided they are not specifically addressed with the Vernon County Code of Ordinances. Mountain Biking, Horseback riding, and other non-motorized uses are currently regulated on a compartment basis. The Vernon County Board may, at any time, enact ordinances to protect the forest should damage begin to occur.

935 DESIGNATED RECREATION AREAS/USES
Designated recreation includes those uses for which Vernon County provides a trail or facility. The Vernon County Forest has developed sites and areas to accommodate a fairly high degree of public use. The Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee may prohibit other recreation activities that are not compatible with the intent of the developed facilities.

The Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Committee and Forestry Department has noted a marked increase in demand for recreation facilities. Vernon County Land and Water Department may attempt to develop additional facilities and will maintain its currently developed facilities.

935.1 CAMPGROUNDS
935.1.1 Esofea Park
Esofea Park is located 8 miles north west of Viroqua. The park facilities include 27 campsites, electricity, shower house, 2 flush toilets, fishing pond, dump station, firewood sales, and 4 miles of nature trail. The facility is fee based for camping and day use.
935.1.2 Sidie Hollow Park
Sidie Hollow Park is located 5 miles west of Viroqua. The park facilities include 73 campsites, electricity, WIFI, shower houses, flush toilets and pit toilets, fishing piers, dump station, firewood sales, and 10 miles of nature trail. The facility is fee based for camping and day use.

935.2 PICNIC / DAY USE AREAS
1.) Duck Egg County Forest contains areas for campfires, public parking and picnic tables placed in locations throughout. A Scenic overlook and 12 miles of recreational trail are available for day use.
2.) Kooyumjian Lost Creek contains areas for picnics and 3 miles of hiking trails.
3.) Jersey Valley contains public parking at two locations a playground facility, a beach (see 935.4) and 10 miles of hiking trail.
935.3 SWIMMING AREAS / BEACHES

Jersey Valley contains a public beach and swimming area. However, in 2018 a storm event caused Vernon county’s impoundment to become breached rendering this area unusable to the public. Decisions will be made to reopen this facility based on recommendations from engineers and watershed studies conducted.

935.4 BOAT LANDINGS

As a result of the wide distribution of lakes, streams, rivers, and other surface waters on the Vernon County Forest, water access may be planned, developed, or restricted as a component of the overall Forest access management plan. Several boat landings, canoe landings, and adjacent roads currently provide water access on the Forest primarily for recreational activities. In addition, these water access points also provide water supply points for fire apparatus working to suppress forest fires or nearby structural fires.

The existing water access points will be maintained to provide a place to launch a small fishing boat or canoe. Not all watercraft will be able to use these access points. These landings are built for public use and not for private boat mooring sites. Mooring or storing boats for longer than 24 hours is prohibited.

The following public boat access sites have been developed on the Vernon County Forest and are open to public use: List as appropriate for your county.

935.4.1 Public Boat Access Sites Maintained by Vernon County Forest
1. SIDIE HOLLOW LAKE
2. JERSEY VALLEY LAKE

935.4.2 Undeveloped Water Access Points

Other undeveloped water access points for canoes and boats currently exist on the Vernon County 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 Land and Water Conservation Committee.

940 DESIGNATED RECREATION TRAILS

Designated recreation trails are those for which Vernon County provides a designated trail and/or facility. Vernon County currently provides trail systems that accommodate a fairly high degree of public use. The Land and Water Conservation Committee may prohibit other activities on these trails that are not compatible with the intent of the development.

Whenever possible, multiple uses of various trail systems are encouraged and are subject to policy review of the Land and Water Conservation Committee. Wherever possible, attempts will be made to avoid user conflicts. Recreational users, however, will frequently encounter forest management activities instrumental to the existence and future of the Vernon County Forest. Trail systems are identified in Chapter 1000, please reference table of contents.

940.1 NON-MOTORIZED RECREATION TRAILS

The Vernon County Forest is a multiple use forest. Non-motorized recreation trails are a legitimate use of the Vernon County forest. Design and maintenance of these trails may highlight natural features present on the Forest, should minimize damage, and reduce user conflict. Trail use and development must be compatible and sustainable with the characteristics of the landscape. It is the policy of the Land and Water Conservation Committee to manage non-motorized recreation trails on the Vernon County Forest.

940.1.1 Hiking Trails

All developed trails are open to hikers on all Vernon County Forest compartments.

940.1.2 Mountain Bike/Fat Tire/Bicycle Trails

Biking is only allowed in Vernon County Forest’s Sidie Hollow compartment. All other Vernon County Forestry properties restrict access to bikers.

940.1.3 Equestrian Trails

Duck Egg Compartment of the Vernon County Forest allows equestrian use on all developed trails maintained for this type of use. All other forestry compartments restrict access to recreationalists utilizing horses.
940.1.4 Ski Trails
All developed recreational trails on the Vernon County Forest are open to cross country skiing.
Trails are not maintained for this use, this provides for a natural recreational activity on our properties.

940.1.5 Future non-motorized trail systems
The development of additional non-motorized trail systems will include careful consideration of public demand, analysis of user conflicts and potential damage to the natural resource. Trail system development should comply with the Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan goals and be referenced in SCORP or other regional planning documents.

Non-motorized trail systems generally are not supported by statewide grant programs. Vernon County may require proof of an organized club, or user group, with the ability to assist with maintenance and support of the trail and associated facilities. Appropriate trail passes, or other user fees, may be implemented as indicated in Section 905.

940.2 RECREATION TRAIL PERMITS

940.2.1 Storm Water Discharge
In general, any trail construction or rehabilitation activities that disturb one acre or more of land will require a Storm Water Discharge Permit. There have been instances of inconsistent application of permit requirements statewide. In order to further define Vernon County’s understanding and implementation of permit requirements, the following current acceptable process will be used for determining when a permit is needed.

- The 1 acre threshold will be determined by measuring/estimated new disturbance or disturbance of previously grassed surfaces.
- Periodic grading of impervious or non-grassed trail surfaces is not considered disturbance.
- Restoration of water filtration/diversion devices, such as sediment traps or catch basins is considered maintenance and not disturbance
- Reconstruction of previously grassed ditch lines as part of trail rehabilitation is considered disturbance.
940.2.2 Chapter 30
Permits are required for bridges or culvert crossings of navigable waterways. These permits will either be classified as general or individual depending on specific site conditions. These permits are not required for culvert or bridge crossings of non-navigable or intermittent streams, nor are they required to install a clear span bridge over wetlands.

940.2.3 Wetland Fill
Permits are required at any time that fill is placed in a wetland. Permits are available to fill small wetlands for recreation trail purposes. Wetland fill must be less than 10,000 square feet and the permit does not require wetland mitigation. Clear span bridge and boardwalks placed on pilings generally do not require a wetland fill permit. Puncheon style bridges do require a permit.

945 RECREATION PROGRAM FUNDING AND GRANTS
945.1 RECREATION AREA FUNDING
Funding for recreation areas is generally donation based or grant based. Aid for Development of Local Parks (ADLP) funding is available for facility development or enhancement but there is normally a very high level of completion for these funds.

945.2 RECREATION TRAIL FUNDING

945.2.1 Non-motorized trail systems
At this time, there is very limited access to any grant funds that will assist with non-motorized recreational trail maintenance. Vernon County timber revenue, RTP (Recreational Trail Program), donations and other grant funding.

945.2.2 Motorized trail systems
There are numerous grant programs available to offset motorized trail system costs. Vernon County Parks utilizes the following funding sources:
1. Snowmobile Maintenance - $300/mile Administered within the Vernon County Parks Department.

950 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RECREATION PROGRAM
The following are recommended changes that the Vernon County Comprehensive Land Use Plan recognizes as improvements or enhancements to the recreation program.
950.1 ENFORCEMENT NEEDS – CAMERAS OR EXTRA SUMMER HELP TO HELP ENFORCE FEES, VANDILIZATION, OR OTHERWISE
950.2 STAFF NEEDS- SEASONAL OR FULLTIME STAFF FOR MAINTINACNE OF CAMPGROUNDS, TRAILS SYSTEMS, OR AMENIDIES.
950.3 CAMPGROUNDS-DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FULL HOOKUP SITES AS WELL AS NEW FACILITIES TO ACCOUNT FOR INCREASED USE
950.4 PARKS- NEW RECREATIONAL USE AREAS FOR ALL RECREATIONALISTS, ACQUISITIONS, CAMPGROUNDS, AND OTHERWISE
950.5 TRAILS-NEW TRAILS DESIGNATED FOR BOTH RECREATIONAL USE AND A MORE UTILITARIAN USE SUCH AS ACCESS OR LOGGING MAY BE NEEDED.