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Fulton State Game Area Master Plan



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE DIVISION

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STRATEGIC PLAN

Fulton State Game Area is comprised of 670 acres purchased in 1943 with the Southern Michigan Land Purchase Funds (State Game Area Funds) for the purpose of providing public lands for hunting and trapping. The Area is located in Wakeshma Township (T4S, R9W) in southwest Kalamazoo County (Figures 1 & 2). Current uses of the Area are primarily hunting of small game, waterfowl, and deer as well as trapping. These uses are the targeted activities for which management will continue.

This plan supports multiple other planning documents, especially the Wildlife Division's Guiding Principles and Strategies (GPS) document and the More Bang for Your Buck initiative. Specifically, this plan supports Goals 2 (Manage habitat for sustainable wildlife populations) and 4 (Increase public participation in hunting and trapping) of the GPS by providing wildlife habitat and allowing access to public lands managed for hunting and trapping. This plan addresses aspects of the waterfowl and small game portions of the More Bang for Your Buck initiative. These goals are priorities for the Division's Southwest Region as indicated by the Southwest Regional Operations Plan.

Currently, the habitat on Fulton State Game Area is dominated by wetlands centered along Bear Creek. These wetlands range from open marshes to flooded timber and provide excellent habitat for a variety of waterfowl species. The upland areas are primarily forests or agricultural fields. Some timber harvest has occurred on the Area in the past 20 years as well as abandonment of some of the agricultural fields.

What follows is the strategic direction for Fulton State Game Area. 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 should come mostly from the featured species and habitat issues relevant for the given SGA, but could also come from recreational infrastructure needs or natural communities. For the purposes of this master plan, the following definitions will be used:

Goal – A desired future condition of the area.

Objective – A management approach or strategy that the best science suggests can be used to move the area toward the goal. An objective is a quantifiable input to be completed within a defined timeframe that contributes towards accomplishing the goal.

Action – An operational means to accomplish an objective. An action is a step needed to complete an objective and is described in sufficient detail to inform implementation in operational and annual work plans. It is expected to take approximately ten years to complete all the objectives.

Goals/Objectives/Actions

Goal I is abundant populations of small game species, especially cottontail rabbits and woodcock. **Rationale:** 1) This area was dedicated to provide hunting recreation for Michigan citizens; 2) each of the species listed above are listed as Featured Species; 3) one of the DNR's priorities is to reverse the trending loss of hunters and trappers, this goal will help ensure convenient hunting opportunities in the Fulton area; 4) one of the objectives in the Wildlife Division's GPS is related to small game hunting opportunity; 5) the Fulton SGA is a small area that already has habitat that can support these species so management for these species will not require extensive habitat alterations; 6) this goal address the following strategies in the GPS: 1.1.5, 1.1.7, 2.1.1-4, 4.3.2).

Assessment: 1) Conversations with hunters, 2) annual review of workplan vs. master plan actions completed on the area.

Objective A: Maintain current 72 acres of agricultural openings

Action 1. annually establish sharecrop agreements with a local farmer.

Action 2. investigate the uses of additional agricultural methods that will benefit small game species (for example, use cover crops on harvested bean fields or change crop rotations to provide improved winter food and cover for small game species).

Objective B: Maintain current 16 acres of grassland openings

Action 1. annually establish sharecrop agreements with a local farmer for existing hay fields.

Action 2. remove invading woody vegetation from non-sharecropped grassland openings by cutting and creating rabbit piles, mowing, or herbicide treatment.

Objective C: Continue rotational cutting of aspen stands to maintain 40 acres of mixed-age aspen habitat

Action 1. evaluate current aspen stands to determine condition

Action 2. if the opportunity exists, arrange a timber sale to renew approximately 10 acres of aspen.

Objective D: Improve cover for cottontail rabbits.

Action 1. partner with local volunteer organizations (Boy Scouts for example) to create 50 rabbit brush piles surrounding cropped and grassland openings.

Goal II is to improve wetland habitats for use by mallards, wood ducks, and Canada geese. **Rationale:** 1) This area was dedicated to provide hunting recreation for Michigan citizens; 2) each of the species listed above are listed as Featured Species; 3) one of the DNR's priorities is to reverse the trending loss of hunters and trappers, this goal will help ensure convenient hunting opportunities in the Fulton area; 4) the Fulton SGA is a small area that already has habitat that can support these species so management for these species will not require extensive habitat alterations; 5) the wetland resources on the game area provide for trapping opportunities as well as waterfowl hunting, 6) this goal address the following strategies in the GPS: 1.1.5, 1.1.7, 2.1.1-4, 4.3.2).

Assessment: 1) Conversations with hunters and trappers, 2) annual inspection of the wetland habitats.

Objective A: Identify and remove invasive species of vegetation

Action 1. annually inspect the existing wetlands during summer

Action 2. control invasive vegetation in an appropriate manner using mechanical and chemical removal methods

Objective B: Encourage wood duck nesting on the area

Action 1. preserve riparian timber where wood duck nesting cavities are likely to remain intact

Objective C: Allow beaver activity to create opportunities for increased flooding

Objective D: Investigate the possibility of creating a ~300 acre managed wetland on the north side of "Y" Avenue

Action 1. discuss the project with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission, Michigan DNR Fisheries Division, and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Action 2. secure funding from interal or external sources.

Action 3. execute the project (engineering, permitting, bidding, construction).

Recreational and Commercial Uses

Recreational and commercial uses on the area that are not incidental to our management for the purposes described above are generally not allowed. These uses can be allowed, however, under the following circumstances:

1. The uses must not interfere or conflict with the wildlife conservation purposes of the area described above.
2. The DNR 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 DNR 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 DNR always reserves the ability to disallow activities previously allowed as wildlife conservation needs dictate.

Additionally, the DNR will continue to monitor any existing commercial and recreational uses for interference with the intended purposes of the area as described in this plan.

Acquisition and Disposal of Land

Fulton State Game Area should be expanded, when possible, within the project boundary to provide more public hunting and trapping opportunities in the Fulton area (Figure 3).



Figure 1: Location of Fulton State Game Area within state

Regional View of Fulton State Game Area

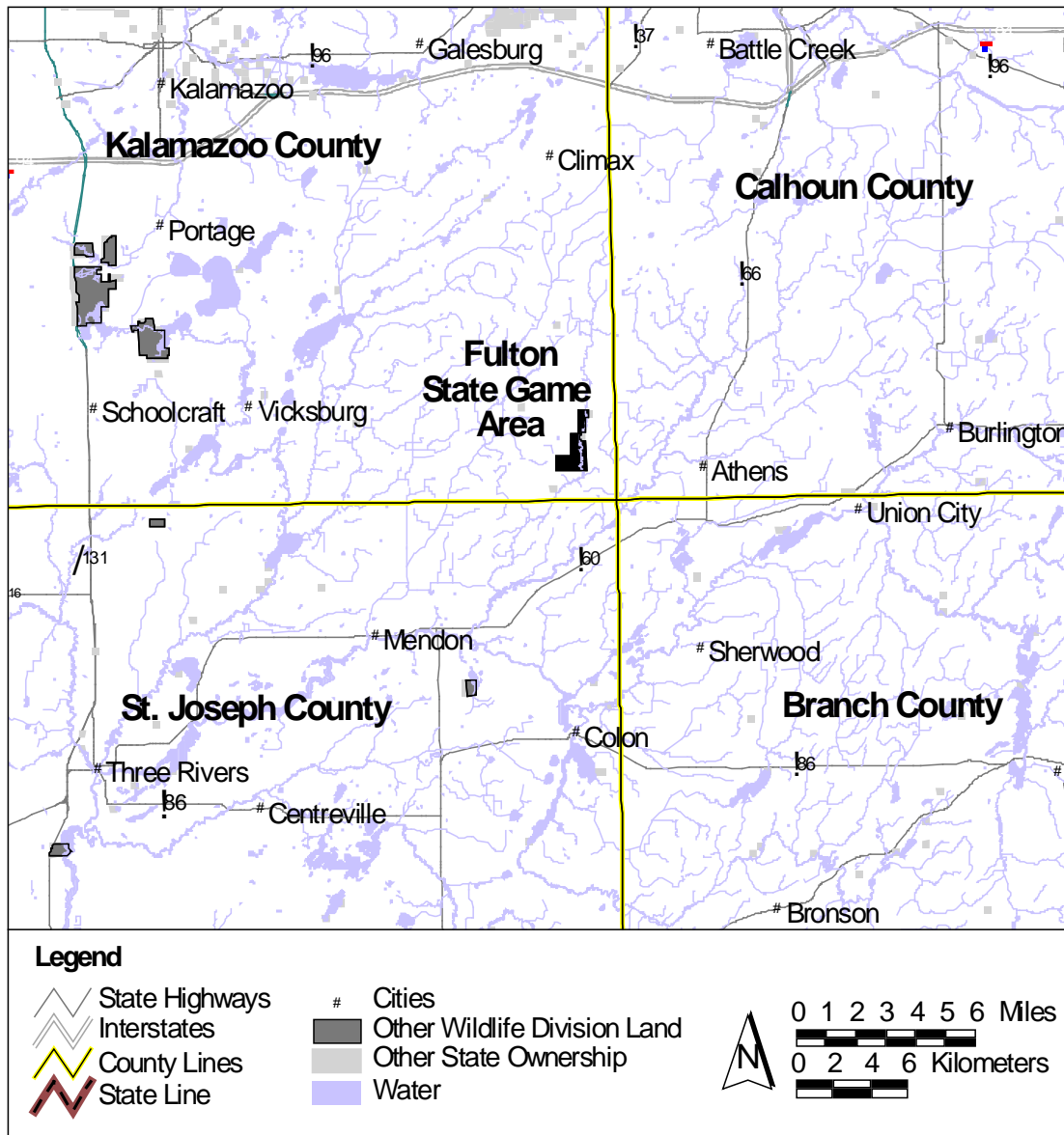


Figure 2: Regional location of Fulton State Game Area.

Fulton State Game Area Planning Boundary

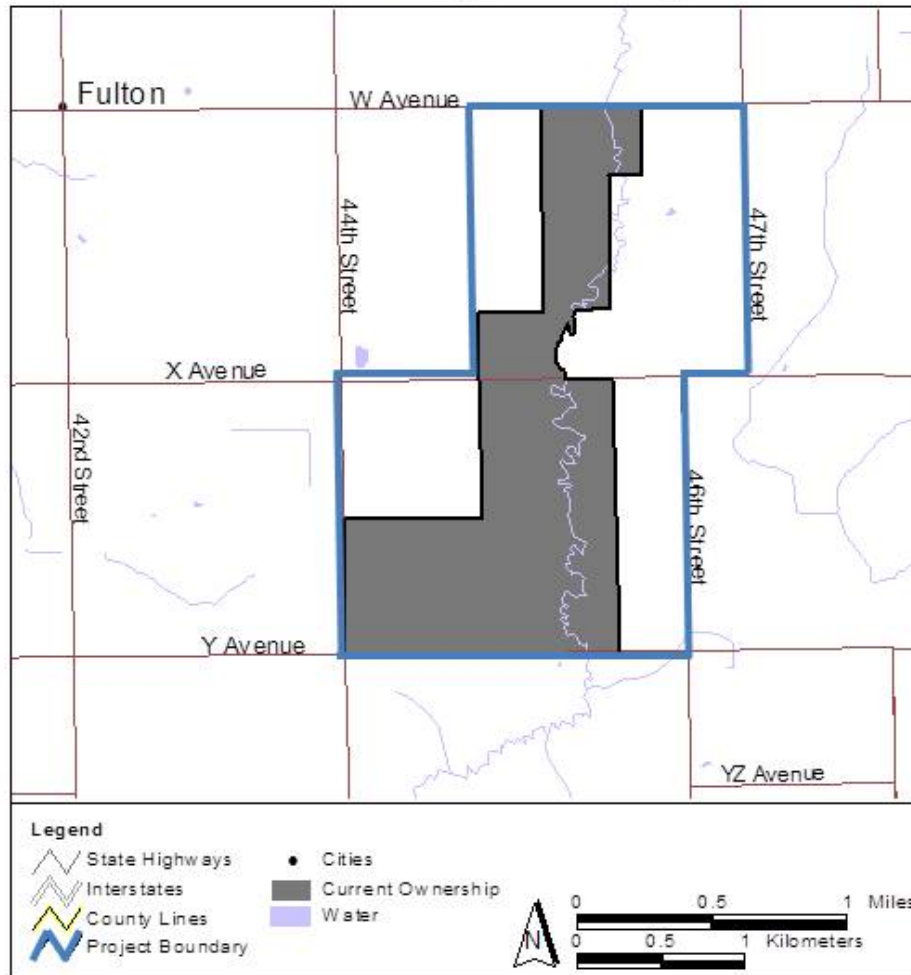


Figure 3: Project Boundary around Fulton State Game Area (blue line). Properties within this boundary will be considered for purchase as they become available.

Current Landcover at Fulton State Game Area

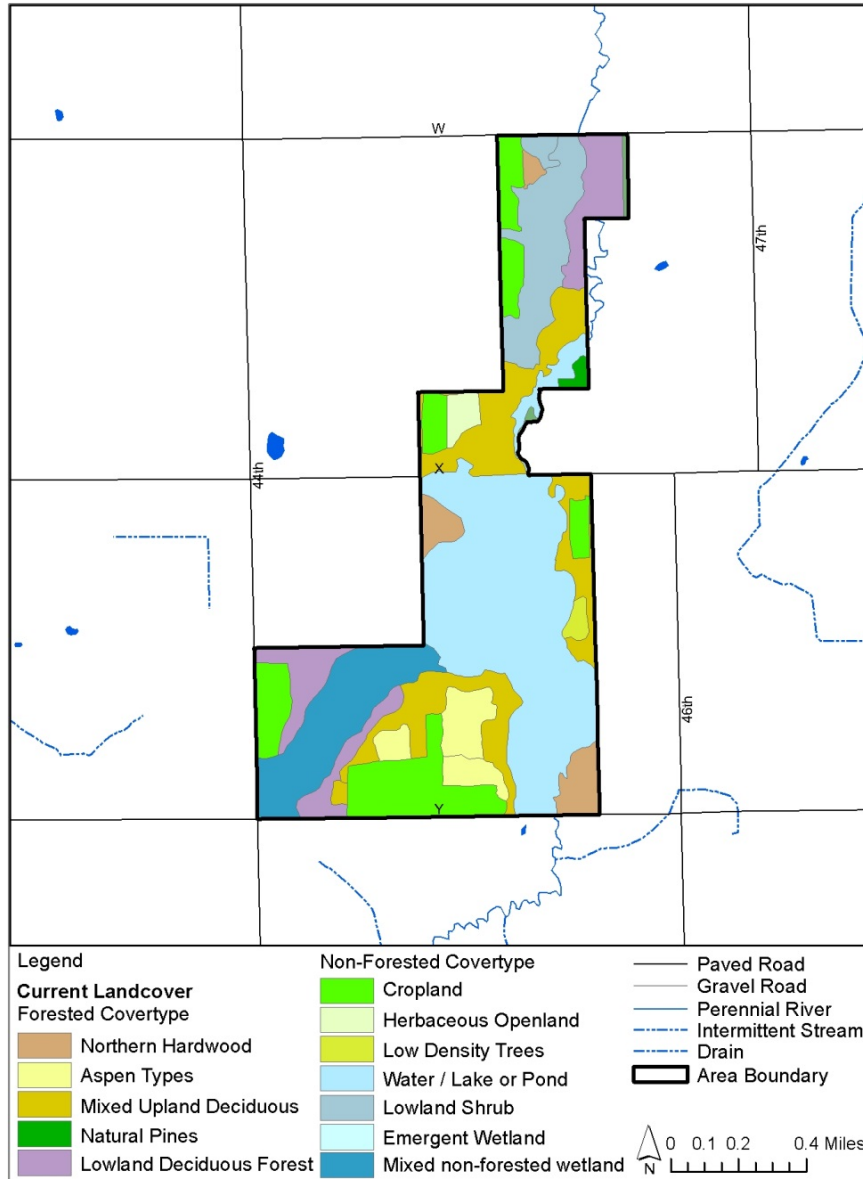


Figure 4: Current landcover around Fulton State Game Area based on IFMAP (forest inventory) data.