

## The History of Fish Lake

Fish Lake is part of the Northwest Wisconsin Pine Barrens. The “Barrens” extends from northern Polk County to southern Bayfield County and covers 1,500 square miles. This large sand plain is a result of a large glacial lake (Glacial Lake Grantsburg) that covered the area after the retreat of the last glacier 12,000 years ago. The southern portion of the “barrens”, where Fish Lake is located, contains huge sedge marshes. These vast marshes are remnants of the glacial lake.

The sandy uplands of the wildlife area were historically covered by a jack pine savannah or brush prairie. The vegetation consisted of large jack and red pine widely scattered throughout an open expanse of prairie grasses and wildflowers and a variety of woody vegetation including sweet fern, hazel, willow, blueberry, and oak brush. The plant community was maintained by naturally occurring wildfires that frequently swept through the area.

European settlement, beginning in the mid 1800’s, caused many changes to the area. Settlers began farming the sandy uplands which were easy to clear but produced poor crops. In the late 1800’s they began draining the sedge marshes for framing and commercial cranberry production. These efforts were commercially unsuccessful but upset the ecological balance of the area.

Fire control efforts began in the early 1900’s and the number and extent of wildfires gradually declined. In the absence of fire, most of the once common brush prairie grew into oak-jack pine forest. Many of the native wildlife populations declined or completely disappeared as their habitat was lost. In 1912, several thousand acres of sedge marsh were purchased by the Crex Carpet



Company. For the next twenty years this company harvested “wiregrass” (actually a sedge) from the marshes. The sedges were shipped by rail to the factory in St. Paul where they were used to manufacture “grass rugs” and furniture. The company went bankrupt in 1933 and all their land holdings went to the ownership of Burnett County. The foundations of a large camp (Camp 5) are still evident in the center of the property.

During the depression and drought years of the 1930’s, further wetland drainage and agricultural attempts failed. By 1940, two-thirds of the land in this area was tax delinquent. The Fish Lake Wildlife Area began in 1946 when the State Conservation Department (now the Department of Natural Resources) began buying these tax delinquent lands for a public hunting ground.

### Management: restoring the natives

Management focuses on restoring the native wetland and brush prairie habitats that existed here prior to settlement. Management began in the early 1950’s when the first dikes were constructed to re-flood the drained marshes. Timber sales and prescribed burning are used to restore

the brush prairie habitat.

The wildlife area currently contains ten flowages that flood three thousand acres. Numerous potholes, several small run-off ponds, and a water transfer ditch have also been constructed. Wetland management includes periodic drawdowns of the flowages.

More than three thousand acres of brush prairie have been restored and are maintained with prescribed burning.

There are 14,124 acres within the boundaries of the wildlife area. More than 13,000 of those acres are in state ownership. There is one natural lake (Fish Lake) located in the northwest corner of the property.

Management plans include additional brush prairie and wetland restoration and acquiring the remaining private lands within the boundaries. Fifteen hundred acres of forest will be retained and managed for forest wildlife habitat and timber production.



## Wildlife Recreational Opportunities

The restoration efforts at Fish Lake have resulted in an abundance of prairie and wetland plants and wildlife. Wildlife observation is probably the most common use of the property. Fall is especially popular when thousands of sandhill cranes roost in the marshes and the Grettum refuge is teeming with ducks, geese, swans, coots, and many other water birds. The wildflower display along Stolte Road, especially of the Wild Lupine, can be spectacular.

Many people take advantage of the excellent hunting and trapping opportunities available at Fish Lake. Except for a 1,200 acre refuge (Grettum Refuge), the entire wildlife area is open to these activities. Deer hunting is allowed in the refuge during the gun deer season. Dueholm Flowage and Fish Lake are the most popular duck and goose hunting areas.

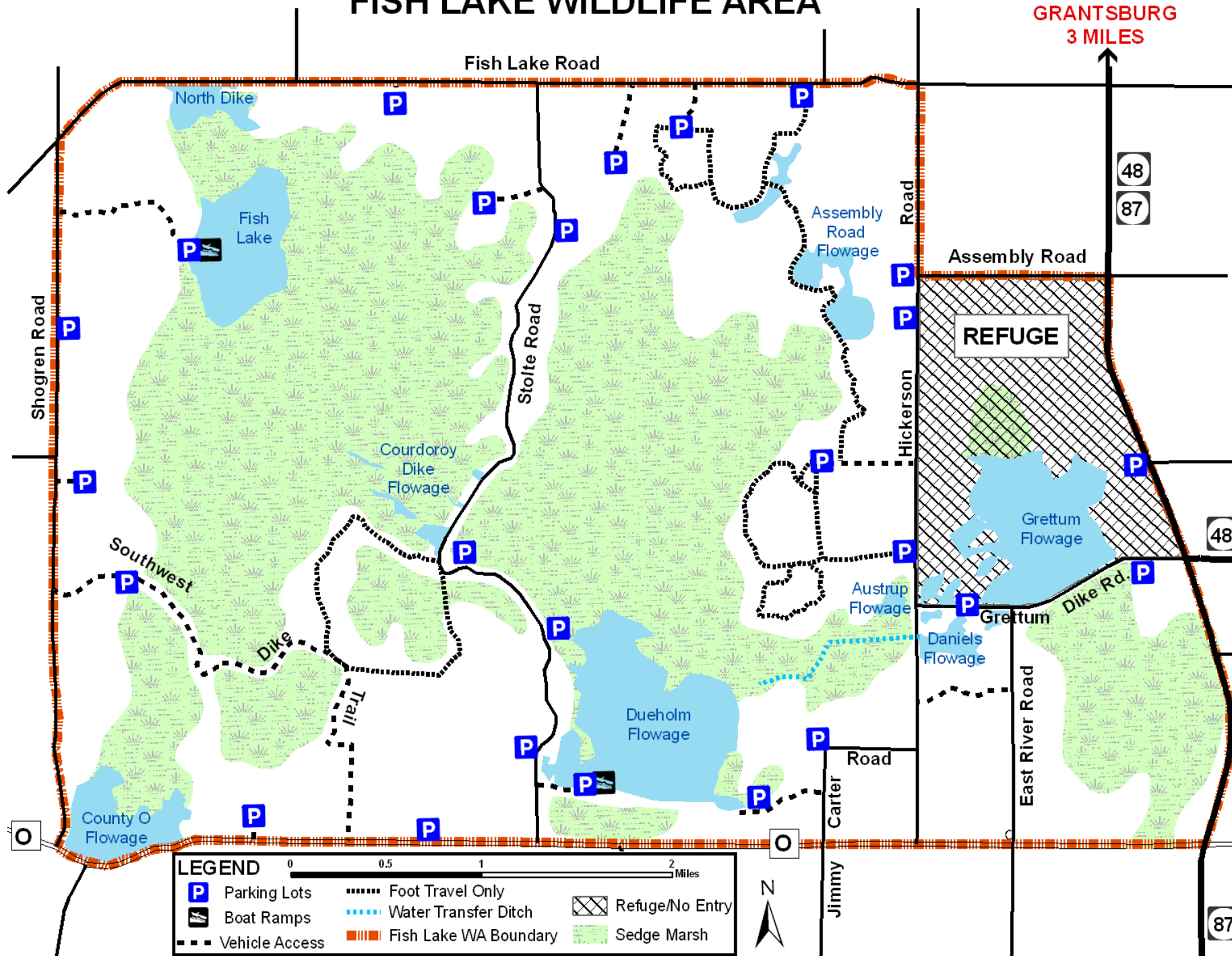
### Funding: hunters and trappers foot the bill

Tax dollars provide very little support for this property. Nearly all the funding for Fish Lake is provided by hunters and trappers through their purchase of licenses and payment of a federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition.

### How can you help?

You can help by joining the Friends of Crex, a support group for Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, and the other properties that comprise the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Wildlife Management Complex. Your support will help insure that Fish Lake is adequately managed and maintained.

# FISH LAKE WILDLIFE AREA



Welcome to

# Fish Lake

## Wildlife Area

Glacial Lake Grantsburg  
Wildlife Management Complex



Wisconsin Department  
of Natural Resources

**Information:**  
Crex Meadows Wildlife Education  
and Visitor Center  
102 East Crex Avenue  
Grantsburg WI 54840  
715-463-2739  
[www.crexmeadows.org](http://www.crexmeadows.org)