

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-office Communication

Date: 4/19/2024

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Donna Martin-Brown, Director, Department of Transportation

Subject: From the Director, Department of Transportation, and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission providing an Informational Report regarding the Regional Natural Areas Plan Update.

File Type: Informational Report

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**POLICY**

This report documents the update process for the natural areas and critical species habitat protection and management plan for southeastern Wisconsin. This update reflects physical changes in the Region, as well as new findings, which have occurred since the preparation of Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) Planning Report No. 42, A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin in September 1997.

**BACKGROUND**

A regional natural areas and critical species habitat protection and management plan for Southeastern Wisconsin was adopted by SEWRPC as an amendment to the regional park and open space plan in September 1997. The regional natural areas and critical species habitat plan is documented in SEWRPC Planning Report No. 42, A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin, September 1997. The planning effort was undertaken to identify the most significant remaining natural areas—irreplaceable, biodiverse remnants of the pre-European landscape—as well as other areas vital to the maintenance of endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species in the Region.

Promoting biodiversity, the plan represents an important additional element of the evolving comprehensive plan for Southeastern Wisconsin. It also provides an important supplement to the open space preservation recommendations of the regional land use, and park and open space plans. Under the plan, natural areas are defined as tracts of land or water so little modified by human activity, or which have sufficiently recovered from the effects of such activity, that they contain intact native plant and animal communities believed to be representative of the pre-European-settlement landscape. Critical species habitats are defined as additional tracts of land or water which support endangered, threatened, or rare plant or animal species. Last amended in 2010, the plan at that time identified a total of 494 natural areas and 271 critical species habitat sites.

In order to accurately reflect ongoing changes to the landscape and new discoveries, the natural areas plan is presently in the process of being updated and amended under the direction of the SEWRPC Technical Advisory Committee for the Protection and Management of Natural Areas.

The following major focus areas are being addressed by the natural areas plan:

- Updating the site inventory and mapping
- Modernizing data curation
- Creating site profiles to improve communication
- Addressing a wide variety of issues and concerns with the critical species habitat concept
- Revising and deploying an aquatic areas assessment scheme for surface waters

### **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Describe how the item aligns to the strategic plan:

2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.

2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.

3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

This report is for informational purposes only.

### **FISCAL EFFECT**

There is no fiscal impact to approve updates to the Regional Natural Areas Plan Update.

### **VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Jennifer Sarnecki, Deputy Chief Transportation Planner, SEWRPC

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Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation and  
SEWRPC Commissioner [donna.brownmartin@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:donna.brownmartin@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

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**PREPARED BY:**

Jennifer Sarnecki, Deputy Chief Transportation Planner, SEWRPC

**APPROVED BY:**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Donna Brown-Martin", is written over a horizontal line.

Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Powerpoint

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk