

VI. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the planning process it became clear that the stewardship plan would not be fulfilled without some direction for the future, for what happens after the report is published is more important than the document itself. The items listed below are those that the committee identified as the most important to follow the planning process.

A. Management Coordination

Like the Beach Ridges Forum, one of the top recommendations of the stewardship committee is continued coordination of resource management for both aggregate and biological resources. The aggregate and rare species are bound together by proximity and do not follow property boundaries. The intermingled resources require coordinated management by various parties if the species and habitat are to survive and the aggregate resources mined without controversy and legal wrangling. Members of the coordinating committee should include representatives of all landowners and managers including Clay County, DNR, TNC, USFWS, Aggregate Industries, and other study area mine operators.

B. Alternate Aggregate Resources for Clay County

If the county wants to maintain its own source of Class 5 aggregate and not rely on commercial providers then it should begin looking for other suitable properties. Expanding the current footprint north could damage the fens and cause mortality to listed species meaning the county would need a fen management plan and takings permit. To avoid these impacts the county will need to mine below the water table starting in 2002. This will increase expenses and the material will be used for a lower value commodity than its potential use as concrete aggregate. Given the environmental considerations, the county might consider selling land with sensitive biological resources and use those funds to purchase less sensitive land for Class 5 aggregate.

C. Continued Education and Research

The lands covered by the stewardship plan offer many opportunities for continued research and exploration. More data is needed to develop a comprehensive groundwater and hydrology model for the calcareous fens and the impact of gravel mining on them. Based on the limited literature review conducted for this plan, more research is needed on the effects of prescribed burning on butterfly populations. Successful restoration of prairie habitat and mine reclamation could contribute to the general knowledge of these activities. The state scientific and natural areas are already used by local universities and colleges for field study and this use should be encouraged.

D. Passive Recreation

Based on the analysis conducted for land use recommendations, the state and county have a tremendous opportunity to cultivate interest in Felton Prairie for sustainable recreation activities like bird and butterfly watching, photography, and star-gazing. In fact these activities could potentially expand our knowledge of the resources at Felton Prairie. The parking lot and interpretive signs off County Road 108 will serve as an important gateway for these activities but much more could be done to improve appreciation for and interest in the prairie and its resources. Currently the area is difficult to locate and navigate for the casual user. On the other hand, more risky activities like swimming and boating are likely to occur without more active management, especially at the State Trust Fund gravel pit. A comprehensive recreation or public use plan for the area should be developed along with appropriate interpretation and facilities. This use has the possibility of directly generating income for service businesses in the area, and indirectly, benefits for the county.

Conclusion

E. CONCLUSION

Felton Prairie is a complex assortment of habitats, minerals, and interests. Some members of the committee advocated a preservation ethic while others stressed the economic benefits of mining the gravel. For all of the reasons outlined in this report and others, the committee attempted to balance preservation, mining, and restoration in a manner that will best meet current and future needs. The conclusions reached here will require continued coordination of land management strategies such as prescribed burning and haying along with monitoring of biological, mineral, and economic resources. This plan was based on the best current science but as our knowledge grows so will the need to revisit the conclusions of this report.

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