

DNR Initial Development Plan (IDP) Coordinator discussion

What is an IDP?

It is a DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife (FAW) Directive (070605) that all parcels becoming a WMA (Wildlife Management Area) or an AMA (Aquatic Management Area) meet minimum development standards when acquired. These minimum standards meet user expectations of that property, including boundary identification, access and habitat development.

To meet this Directive, all new parcels must have an Initial Development Plan (IDP). This is a form where the Area staff note what needs are present at the parcel to meet the minimum standards set forth in the Directive. This form is completed by DNR staff for DNR led acquisitions and with conservation partner input and approval on partner led acquisitions. This form also serves as the restoration and management plan, as required by Minnesota Statute 97A.056, subd 13 (c) and (d) for all lands restored or acquired using Outdoor Heritage Funds.

Need for IDP, OHF Appropriations

With the increase in new parcels becoming WMAs and AMAs, the DNR has seen a significant increase in the costs associated with bringing these new parcels up to minimum standards. When the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment was passed in 2008, the enormous boost to the acres of public hunting land in MN came with increased financial burden of meeting public land expectations (parking lots, boundary postings, removal of structures, fences along private land, etc.). Before 2015, IDP work for WMA/AMA parcels was the responsibility of the partner acquiring the land. Many parcels were being transferred to DNR without meeting the minimum development standards, resulting in DNR needing to fund this important work with traditional funding sources like Game and Fish. Communication about these IDP needs was often held at the Area level, without a central point of contact within DNR (acquisition or area staff), or coordination among partners and the LSOHC.

2015-2017: Changes to IDP Process

In 2015, then Acting Deputy Director for the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Pat Rivers, communicated by memo with partner organizations on the need to improve on completing the IDP work and meeting minimum standards on every acquisition before it is conveyed to the DNR. In 2017, the DNR Wildlife Section Manager communicated with Wildlife staff clarifying an IDP was required for all land acquisitions, regardless of whether they were being acquired by DNR or one of our partners. A similar memo from the Fish & Wildlife Acquisition Unit went out to all partner organizations.

IDP forms were now required to be completed, signed by both DNR and partners, before a parcel could be conveyed to the DNR. This process change ensured that the completion of these important activities would

become the priority of both partners and DNR staff. This eased the financial strain of funding IDP work on OHF-funded acquisitions, with non-OHF dollars for all future appropriations.

With this new process in place, it became clear that not all partner organizations would be able to develop the parcels to meet the minimum standards. Therefore, partners could transfer funds from their appropriation to DNR to complete some or all of that IDP work. This is through submitting a “Use of Funds” letter where the exact amount is identified by the partner. This allows DNR staff, who are well suited to this work, to order the supplies and complete the projects.

2018: IDP Coordinator Needed

While this new process ensures the parcels meet the minimum standards, it became apparent that a central point of contact was needed to track all of the parcels, IDP forms, appropriations and work progress. In 2018, DNR submitted a proposal to create an IDP Coordinator position as part of the ML2019/FY2020 DNR WMA & SNA Acquisition, Phase XI grant. This position would serve to be the one point of contact between area staff, acquisition staff, partners, LSOHC staff and members, and OHF grant staff. The coordinator would work with DNR and partner staff to develop the IDP, gaining necessary approvals and ensuring costs are estimated correctly. They would also work with the partners to obtain the “Use of Funds” letter and begin tracking budgets, expenses, work being completed, to report back to the partner on regular status updates and the final funding spent/ project completion. Finally, this position would ensure that the proper funds were being spent on the correct projects and coded correctly, making corrections when needed.

Current Status

In October of 2019, the IDP Coordinator position was filled and has since been working to pull all IDP needs into a central point. Jennifer Olson has created reports down to the parcel level, for all open appropriations requiring status updates, and provided those reports to all partners. She has been effective at communicating deadlines, closing appropriations as soon as possible, and working directly with Area staff to complete IDP work. This position is fulfilling its original intention of being a single point of contact. Communication on all IDP topics comes from the Coordinator, which means the messaging is consistent for all partners and staff. With the number of parcels and appropriations, the IDP Coordinator has improved IDP tracking and reporting across the State.

Table 1. Number of OHF Appropriations, Parcels, DNR Work Areas and Partner Organizations with IDP projects as of September 29, 2021.

OHF Appropriations	Number Of Parcels	DNR Work Areas	Partner Organizations
46	120	23	7