

Stockton Lake Management Lands

25-Year Area Management Plan FY 2020-2044



Joel W. Porath

Wildlife Division Chief

7/25/2019

Date

Stockton Lake Management Lands Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

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OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Stockton Lake Management Lands, #7701
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1977
- **Acreage:** Currently 16,572 acres of land lying within the Big Sac and Little Sac arms are managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) under a 25-year license agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which expires Feb. 1, 2021, at which time the license may be renewed.
- **County:** Cedar, Dade, and Polk
- **Region:** Southwest
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statements of Purpose:**
 - A. Strategic Direction**

Manage for wildlife associated with grassland, old field, glade, wetland, woodland, and forest resources with emphasis on upland game, and for compatible recreational opportunities. Manage fisheries resources to maximize recreational sport-fishing opportunities.
 - B. Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition is a diverse mix of restored glades, grasslands, and woodlands interspersed with old field habitats.
 - C. Federal Aid Statement**

N/A

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- I. Special Considerations**
 - A. Priority Areas:** Sac River Stream Reach Conservation Opportunity Area, Little Sac River Fisheries Priority Watershed
 - B. Natural Areas:** None

- II. Important Natural Features and Resources**
 - A. Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are known from this area. Area managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the natural history biologist.
 - B. High Quality Natural Communities:** Yes, records kept with Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) natural history biologist.
 - C. Caves:** Yes, records kept with natural history biologist. Managers should follow the Cave Management policy found in the MDC Resource Policy Manual. All caves on this and other conservation areas are closed or restricted to public access. The fungus

that causes white-nose syndrome in bats has been documented in Missouri, resulting in MDC's *White-nose Syndrome Action Plan* that limits public access to protect bats.

D. Springs: Yes, records kept with MDC natural history biologist.

E. Other: This area is in the Ozark Highlands Section, Springfield Plateau Subsection, and Upper Sac River Oak Savanna/Woodland Low Hills Landtype Association (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002).

III. Existing Infrastructure

- One 20' x 20' building exists on area and is used for storage
- Forty-one parking lots
- One concrete boat ramp (managed by MDC)
- Hulston Mill Trail (14-mile multi-use trail)
- Corry Glade Walking Trail (1.1-mile hiking trail)
- Aldrich Marsh viewing blind

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations: Stockton Lake Management Lands are governed under License number DACW 41-3-96-52 with the USACE. The current license expires in 2021. It is anticipated that the license will be renewed, but if not, this plan would become null and void upon the expiration date. MDC provides the USACE with an Annual Report documenting all income, expenses, and management associated with activities under that license. The Annual Report also includes an Annual Management Plan documenting planned management for the succeeding year. MDC must obtain approval, in writing, from the USACE before any pesticides are applied; and will provide a detailed list of those chemicals used.

B. Federal Interest: Federal funds may be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.

C. Easements: There are multiple easements associated with this property. All real estate documents, including acquisition and easement documents, are archived at the USACE Real Estate Office, located at 601 East 12th, Kansas City, Missouri.

D. Cultural Resources Findings: Yes, records are kept with the USACE, Kansas City District Cultural Resource Manager, and State Historical Preservation Office. Managers should also coordinate with the MDC environmental compliance coordinators. Managers should follow best management practices for cultural resources found in the MDC Resource Policy Manual.

E. Endangered Species: Endangered species are known from this area. Area managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the natural history biologist.

F. Boundary Issues: Establishing accurate and identifiable boundary markers is a priority for this property.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Stockton Lake Management Lands are managed primarily for upland wildlife habitat. Emphasis is placed on early successional habitat manipulation with target species of quail, rabbit, and turkey. Deer and many non-game species also benefit from this type of management. The area can accommodate large numbers of hunters and other users due to the distribution of management lands around the lake and the associated network of access locations.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain and restore healthy grassland habitats.
- 2) Maintain old field habitats.
- 3) Maintain and restore glade and woodland natural communities.
- 4) Control invasive species.
- 5) Manage for doves.

Management Objective 1: Maintain and restore grassland habitats, with a focus on small game species.

Strategy 1: Utilize fire, mechanical methods, and chemical treatments to maintain and restore grassland habitats. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Maintain old field habitats for a wide variety of wildlife species.

Strategy 1: Utilize fire, mechanical methods, and chemical treatments to maintain old field habitats. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Maintain and restore glade, forest, and woodland natural communities for a variety of unique flora and fauna.

Strategy 1: Conduct thinning and/or cedar removal projects to open glades and overstocked woodlands. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Utilize fire on a rotational basis to limit woody encroachment and encourage an herbaceous species response. (Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Retain and protect existing den trees. (Wildlife, Forestry)

Strategy 4: Assist USACE with emergency timber sales and cleanup as needed after storms, tornado damage, and/or wildfire. (Forestry)

Management Objective 4: Reduce nuisance and invasive species on the area to improve wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Annually assess invasive species and control through herbicide application, mechanical removal, cultivation, and other cultural treatments. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Annually assess feral hog numbers and control through reporting systems and the use of trapping, and other approved lethal methods. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 5: Maintain active dove field management program as budgets and staffing allow.

Strategy 1: Continue sunflower and wheat plantings in a manner that encourages high use by doves and quality hunting for area users. (Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Stockton Lake Management lands are in the Sac River Basin in southwest Missouri. Aquatic resources on the area consist of one large reservoir, four permanent streams, ephemeral pools, springs, and man-made ponds. These resources provide habitat for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial species. Fishing opportunities are plentiful with many foot access points and one concrete boat ramp.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Evaluate riparian corridors.
- 2) Implement watershed best management practices.
- 3) Protect Niangua darter population.

Management Objective 1: Evaluate and, as needed, expand riparian corridors to meet riparian guidelines specified in MDC's *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines (2009)*.

Strategy 1: Enhance riparian corridors by allowing natural regeneration or by planting suitable native woody vegetation in areas with riparian corridors not meeting guidelines by June 2020. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Ensure survival of riparian plantings by controlling competing vegetation within the corridor. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Implement stream management best management practices on all area streams. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Implement appropriate watershed best management practices on all MDC managed areas.

Strategy 1: Complete glade/woodland restoration, and associated management activities on the area according to state forest management guidelines. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Manage roads and trails according to appropriate best management practices to minimize runoff and sedimentation into stream resources. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Protect Niangua darters by conserving their potential habitats in the Little Sac River and its tributaries.

Strategy 1: Implement Niangua darter best management practices in conjunction with projects that cause disturbances in or near the Little Sac River and its tributaries. (Fisheries, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Coordinate with Fisheries Division Staff during planning and implementation of any disturbance or construction that could directly impact the Little Sac River and its tributaries containing permanent pools. (Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide hunting and fishing opportunities.
- 2) Provide hiking and nature viewing opportunities.

Management Objective 1: Provide and regulate public use trails compatible with the resource base.

Strategy 1: Maintain existing multi-use and hiking trails. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Monitor and close unauthorized trails. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Provide opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Strategy 1: Maintain existing waterfowl/shorebird viewing blind located within the Aldrich Waterfowl Refuge. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Enhance and maintain fishing access.

Strategy 1: Explore feasibility to improve Aldrich Access Area with better design, including a double lane boat ramp, additional parking, and more efficient traffic flow (Fisheries, Design and Development).

Management Objective 4: Maintain hunter/non-consumptive use access.

Strategy 1: Maintain 41 parking lots. (Wildlife)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain area infrastructure at current levels.
- 2) Maintain clearly marked area boundary lines.
- 3) Coordinate management activities with USACE.

Management Objective 1: Maintain area infrastructure at current levels.

Strategy 1: Maintain area infrastructure in accordance with MDC guidelines and at currently identified maintenance level. (Wildlife, Design and Development)

Management Objective 2: Maintain clearly demarcated boundary lines.

Strategy 1: Maintain clearly marked boundary lines by repainting/reposting boundary line markers every five years.

Management Objective 3: Promote and continually improve communication with USACE regarding management of the Stockton Lake Management Lands.

Strategy 1: Provide the USACE with a copy of the annual Stockton Lake fisheries management report and the annual Stockton Lake Management Lands report. (Fisheries, Wildlife)

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	Fiscal Year																									
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	
Aquatic Resource Management Considerations																										
<i>Objective 1</i>																										
Strategy 1	X																									
Public Use Considerations																										
<i>Objective 3</i>																										
Strategy 1	X																									
Administrative Considerations																										
<i>Objective 2</i>																										
Strategy 1	X					X					X					X					X					

APPENDICES

Area Background:

In the 18th century, French explorers found the present-day area to be under the control of the Osage Indians. Settlement by American homesteaders prompted other Indian tribes, such as the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw to settle in this area. The presence of these Indian tribes led to the 1825 treaty which expelled the Osage Indians from Missouri.

In 1963, the Amis Construction Company of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma began construction of the Stockton Lake Dam. Originally estimated to cost about \$40 million, the project was completed in 1969, with the total cost around \$73 million. Upon completion, the dam’s purpose was expanded from primarily flood control to include power generation and recreation. Stockton Dam impounds the northward flowing Sac River and its major tributaries, Little Sac River, Big Sac River, Turnback Creek, and Sons Creek. The resulting Stockton Lake Reservoir is located in Cedar, Dade, and Polk counties. The surface area of the lake is 24,900 acres with 300 miles of shoreline. The USACE purchased a wide strip of property around the shoreline to protect the lake and restrict private use, resulting in a large area for wildlife around the lake while preserving its natural beauty and a sense of wilderness surrounding it. Currently 16,572 acres of land lying within the Big Sac and Little Sac arms are managed by MDC under a 25-year license agreement with the USACE, which expires Feb. 1, 2021, at which time the license may be renewed. The USACE manages an additional 15,572 acres, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources manages a 2,176-acre state park on Stockton Lake lands as well.

The conservation area is open to the public from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	% of Area	Miles
Forest/Woodlands/Savanna	11,793	71	
Old Fields	2,652	16	
Open lands	1,042	6	
Established Grassland	977	6	
Wetlands	52	<1	
Glades	41	<1	
Impounded Water	15	<1	
Total	16,572	100	
Stream Frontage			18.9

Public Input Summary:

The draft Stockton Lake Management Lands Management Plan was available for a public comment period Feb. 1–28, 2019. MDC received comments from 13 respondents (Appendix A). The Stockton Lake Management Lands Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

MDC responses to themes and issues identified through the Stockton Lake Management Lands Management Plan public comment period.

Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Would like to see quail habitat restored and glade restoration completed. About 10 years ago two large areas of cedars were cut and left to lie. The glade restoration work was left incomplete.

Stockton Lake Management Lands are managed for quail and other small game habitat. Cedar cuts and follow-up prescribed burns were conducted at several glades across the area. One glade was cut and received two burns. Unfortunately, the two burns were unsuccessful and the cut trees were not fully consumed by the fire. This site doesn't have enough herbaceous fuel to carry fire. No follow-up efforts are planned for that site due to the inability to effectively burn the site.

Aquatic Resource Considerations

Suggests improving water quality at the upper end of Son's Creek. Has observed a lot of algal growth at this location.

This is most likely a result of nutrient input from upstream sources. Local conditions (such as major floods, droughts, etc.) can also intensify these problems.

Would like to know what the plans are for stocking walleye at this area.

When available, we stock 300,000 fingerling walleye annually. We plan on maintaining this stocking regime.

Suggests dredging or removing sediment from creeks that feed into Stockton Lake. The creeks are becoming shallower and less navigable because of gravel, sand, and silt deposits.

We do not have the authority to dredge streams coming into Stockton Lake. When a river is impounded, its energy decreases due to the lower gradient that impounded water creates. Upstream tributary channels widen where they meet this lower gradient. This results in an increase in sediment deposition within these areas. Poor land use practices and lack of sufficient riparian corridor width upstream of the reservoir have likely added to the gravel deposition and

bank erosion issues in those areas. We will continue to work with upstream landowners on conservation-friendly land-use practices, especially riparian corridor restoration efforts. Additionally, we will continue to monitor riparian conditions on tributaries within Stockton Lake Management Lands and work toward maintaining adequate riparian corridors.

Public Use Resource Considerations

Hunting

Suggests removing the antlerless deer restriction. Believes that the doe population is strong enough to warrant the change. Would like to know why doe shooting is prohibited.

Our spotlight surveys suggest that the Big Sac Arm/Greaser Creek deer population has increased significantly since the antlerless regulation change was implemented in 2005. However, our surveys also show that after a period of growth, the current population of 35 deer per square mile has held steady the last few years. Because the deer population is steady, we intend to maintain the regulation into the foreseeable future.

The shooting of antlerless deer is not prohibited on the south end of the Big Sac Arm. Rather, no antlerless permits are allowed. Hunters can shoot an antlerless deer, but must tag it with an Any Deer Permit.

Suggests increasing the areas where waterfowl hunting is permitted (e.g., hunting from the shore) to reduce difficulties of competing for draw locations.

There is one waterfowl refuge on Stockton Lake, which includes less than 700 acres. Stockton Lake includes more than 16,000 acres. Almost all of the remaining acreage is open for waterfowl hunting, at least by boat. Some U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Missouri State Park shoreline is not open for waterfowl hunting, but the water is open.

Suggests restricting the number of hunters permitted on dove fields to 20 on opening day. Overcrowding in the dove fields results in unsafe conditions.

Although opening day is quite crowded, the area has maintained a good safety record. We typically host 150 hunters opening morning, who may kill 1,000 to 1,500 doves. Therefore, if we were to restrict the number of hunters to 20, we would turn away 130 hunters. By severely restricting the number of hunters, we would severely reduce the overall dove harvest. We have considered this option in the past and have elected to accommodate as many hunters as safely possible, and thus allow the maximum harvest possible.

Trails

Appreciates the horse-riding trails at Stockton Lake Management Lands. Suggests expanding horse-riding trails on this area and keeping all multi-use trails open. Nearby horse-riding trails are limited. The Backcountry Horsemen of Missouri continually maintain and cleanup the multi-use trails on the area and work to educate others about keeping the trails clean.

There currently are no plans to close or expand trails at this area. We plan to keep the existing 14-mile trail open for horse-riding.

Boat Ramp

Suggests repairing the boat launch under Taylor Bridge.

There is an area under Taylor Bridge where folks have unloaded boats for years, but it is not a maintained boat launch area. Erosion has compromised this location, due in part from years of continued boats launching from this location, which has channeled waterflow down the tracks and eroded the riverbank. The lower portion of this “boat launch” is a gravel bar. Gravel bars naturally shift during highwater events. This has never been maintained as a boat launch by MDC, as sites like this change every time the water rises. Maintaining such a site would require heavy equipment use after significant rain events, and the repairs are lost upon the next river rise, due to the natural shifting nature of river gravel bars. MDC does not consider this a wise use of resources.

General Comments

This plan is too general and therefore useless. Suggests including information about the management of individual fish and wildlife species in the area management plans (e.g., shortening the length limit of spotted bass to 12 inches).

Area plans are written to address broad, long-range guidance. Detailed approaches to how the management is conducted is decided on an annual basis due to changing conditions or responses to prior activities. Annual plans are developed to allow flexibility and more targeted efforts as resources of funding, labor, and equipment allow. The length of spotted bass was shortened to 12 inches in March 2019.

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Nigh, T. A., & Schroeder, W. A. (2002). *Atlas of Missouri ecoregions*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map – Big Sac Arm

Figure 2: Area Map – Little Sac Arm

Figure 3: Aerial Map – Big Sac Arm

Figure 4: Aerial Map – Little Sac Arm

Figure 5: Land Cover Map – Big Sac Arm

Figure 6: Land Cover Map – Little Sac Arm

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A: Stockton Lake Management Lands Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map – Big Sac Arm

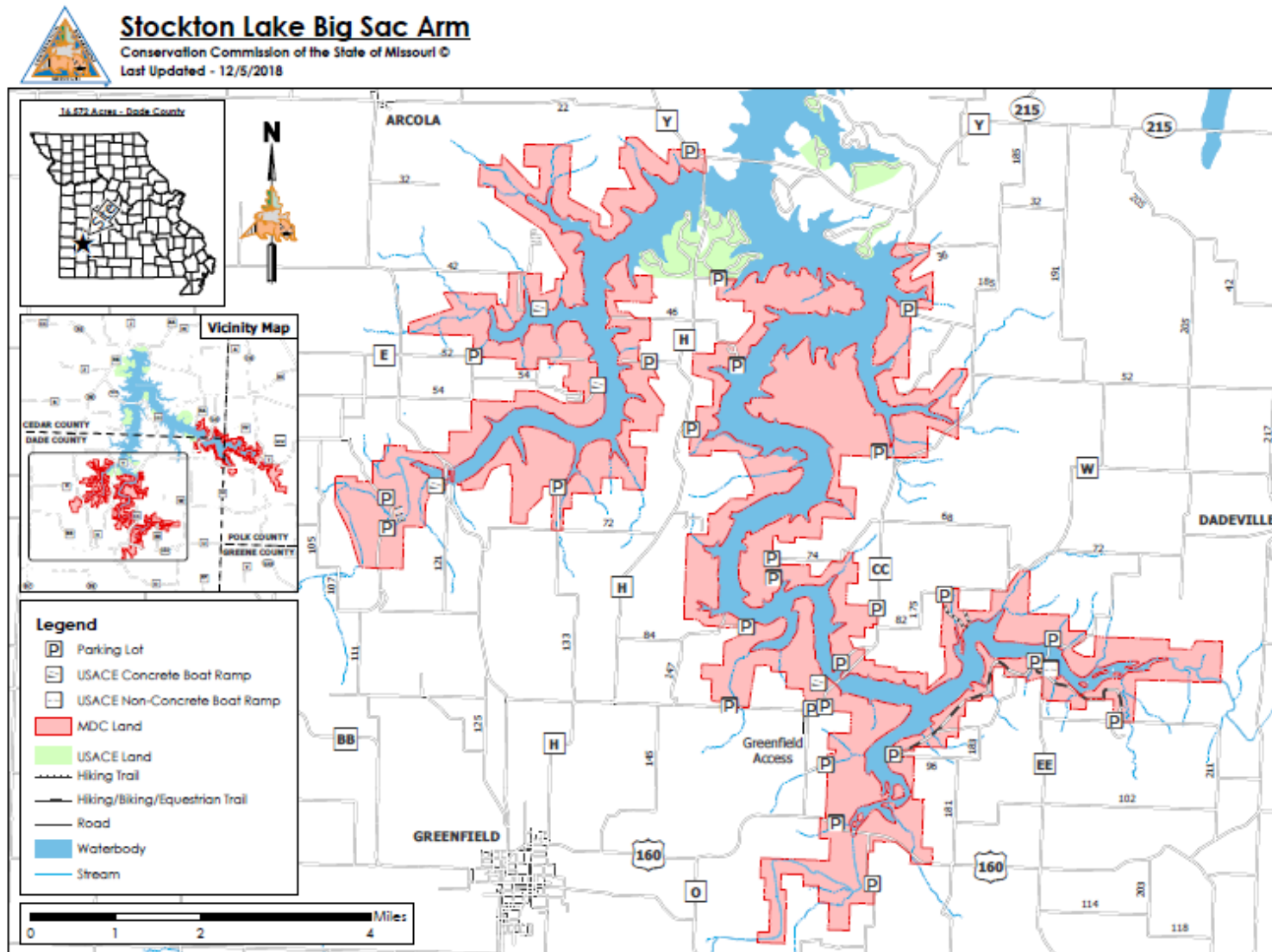


Figure 2: Area Map – Little Sac Arm

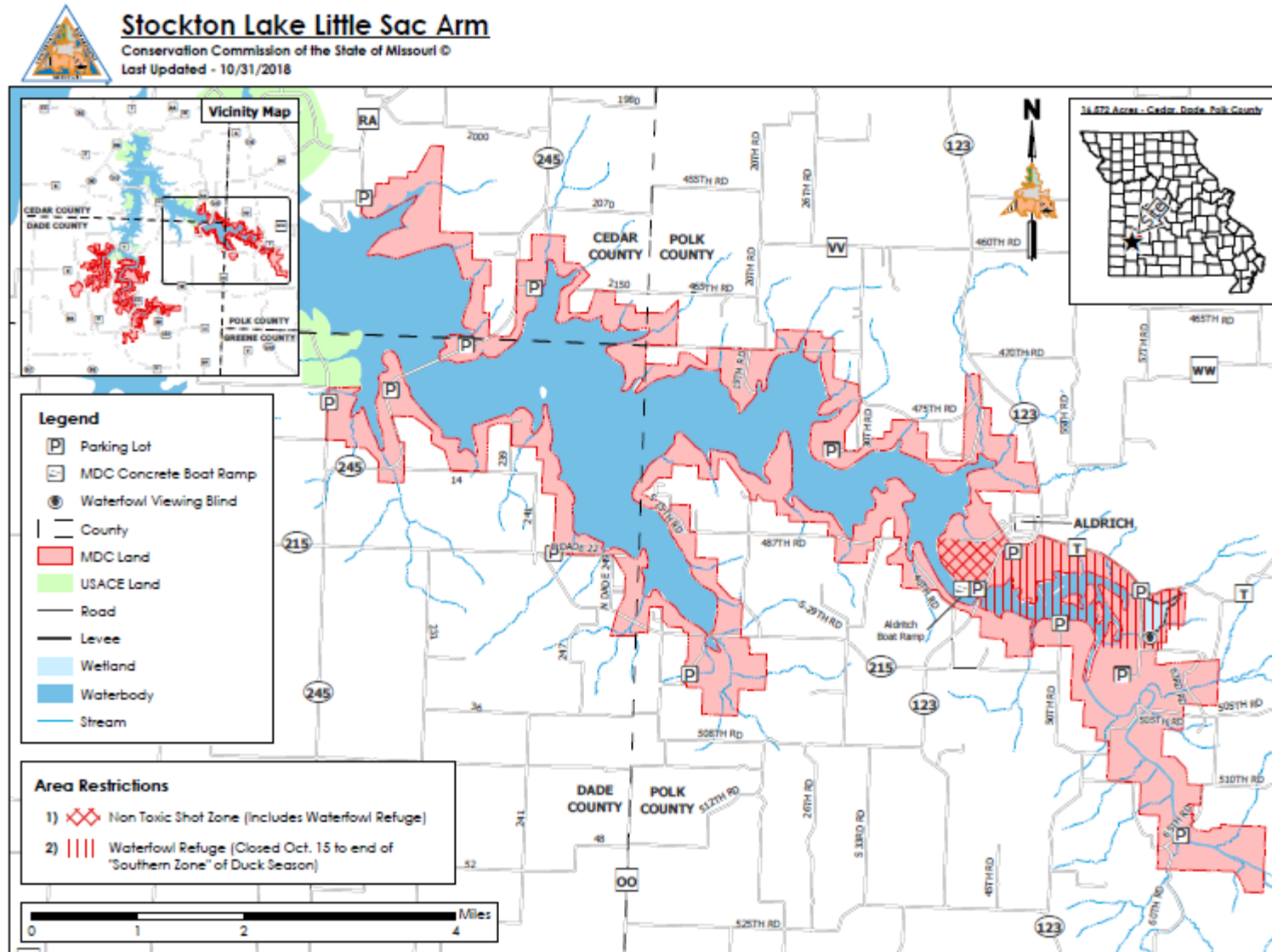


Figure 3: Aerial Map – Big Sac Arm

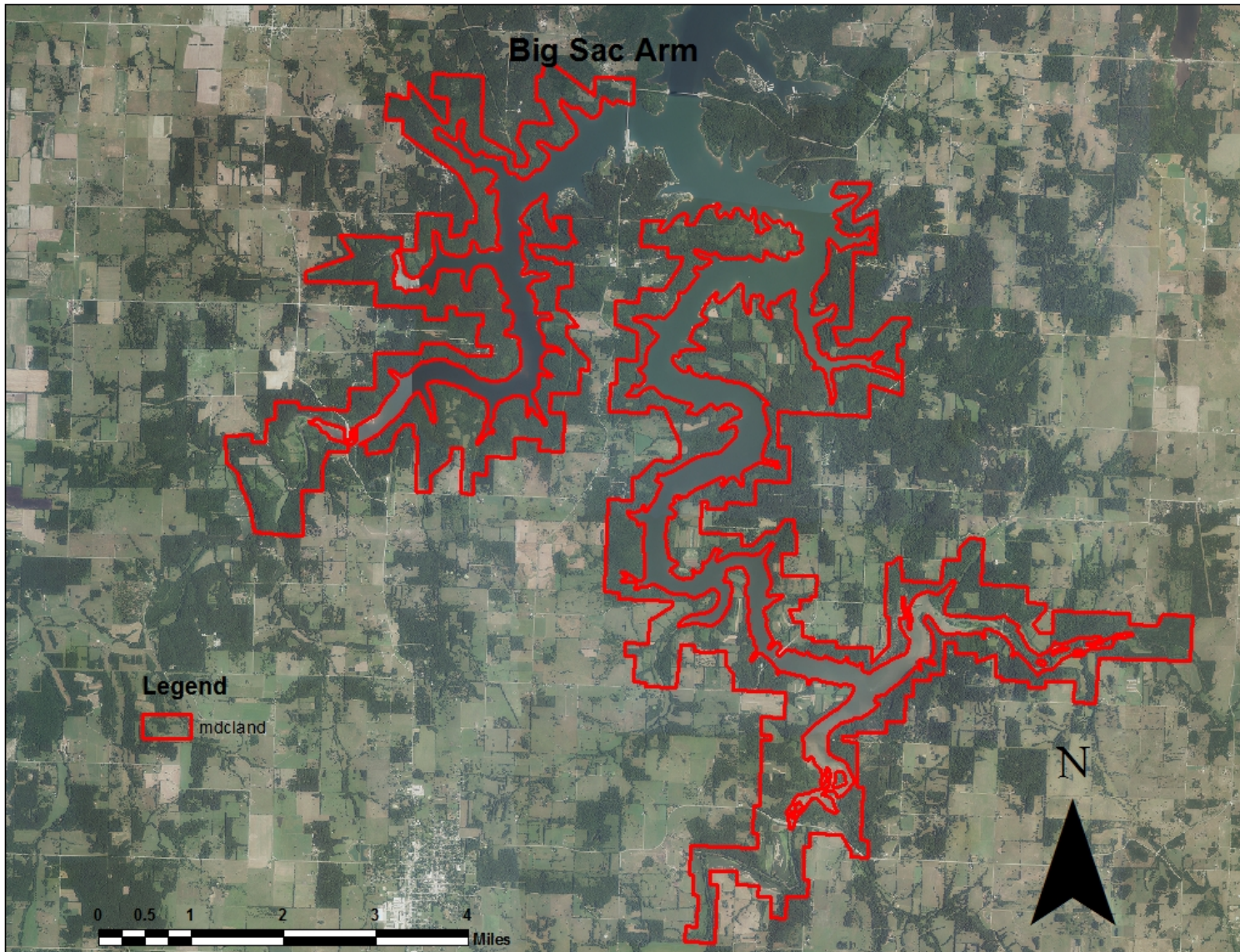


Figure 4: Aerial Map – Little Sac Arm

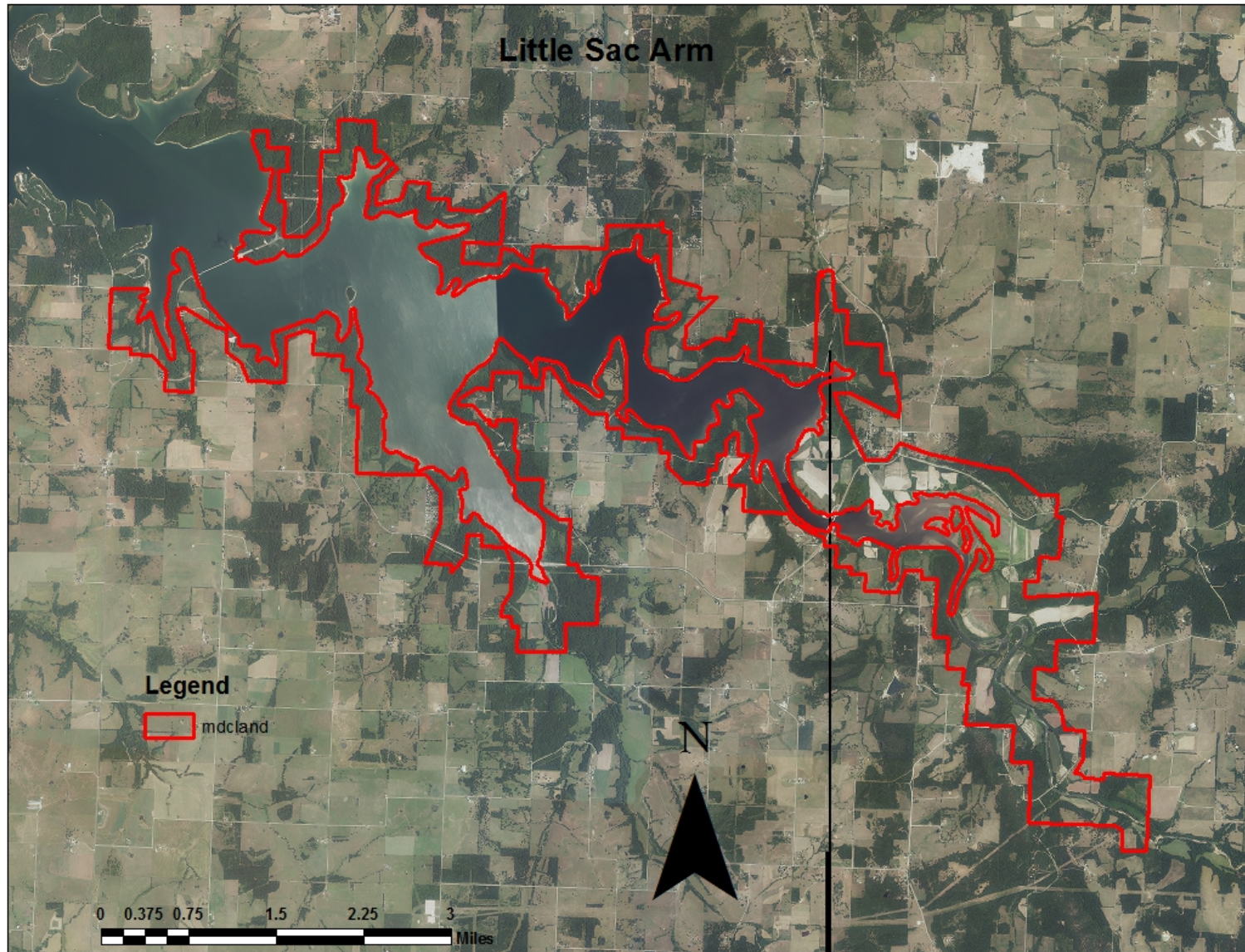


Figure 5: Land Cover Map – Big Sac Arm

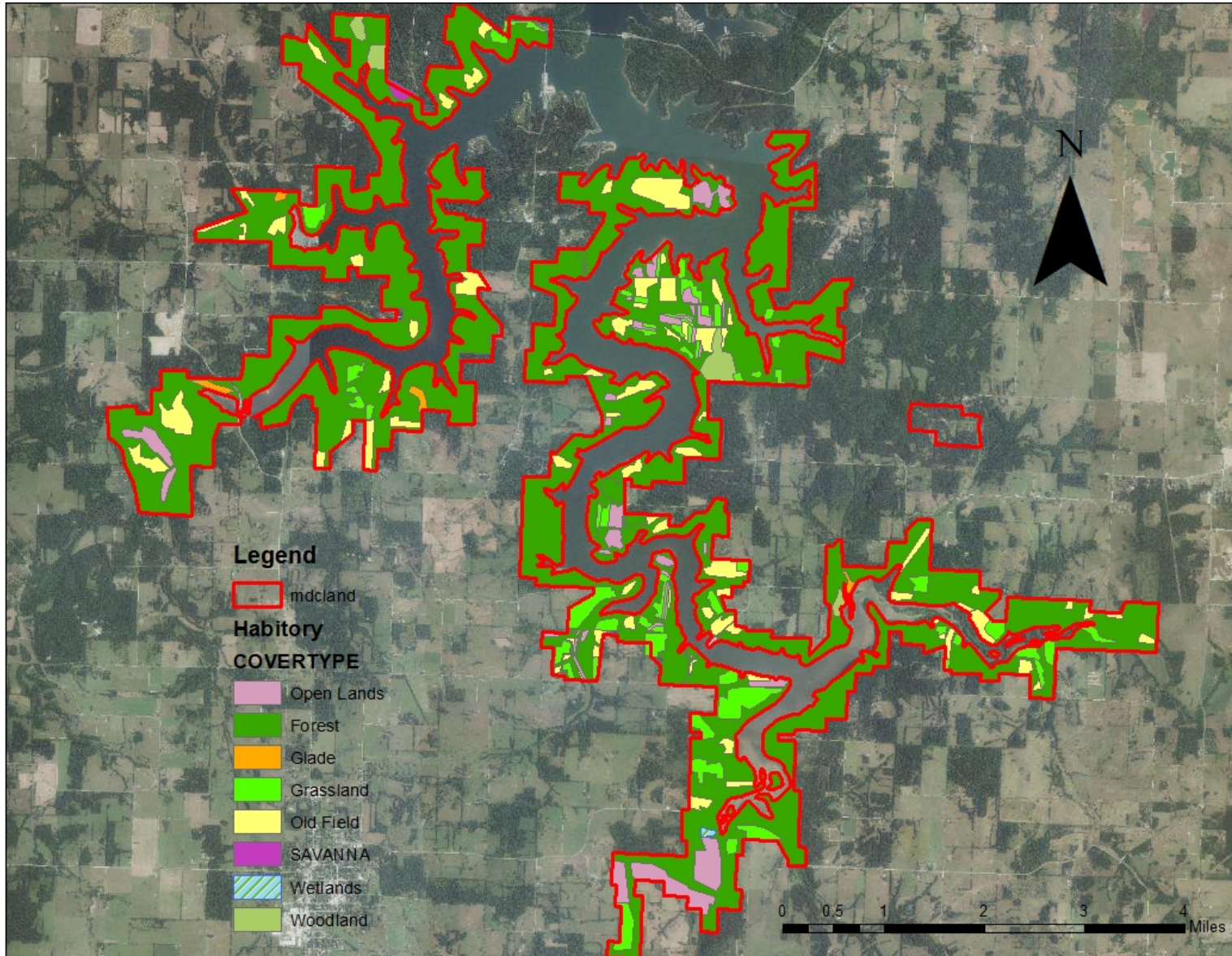
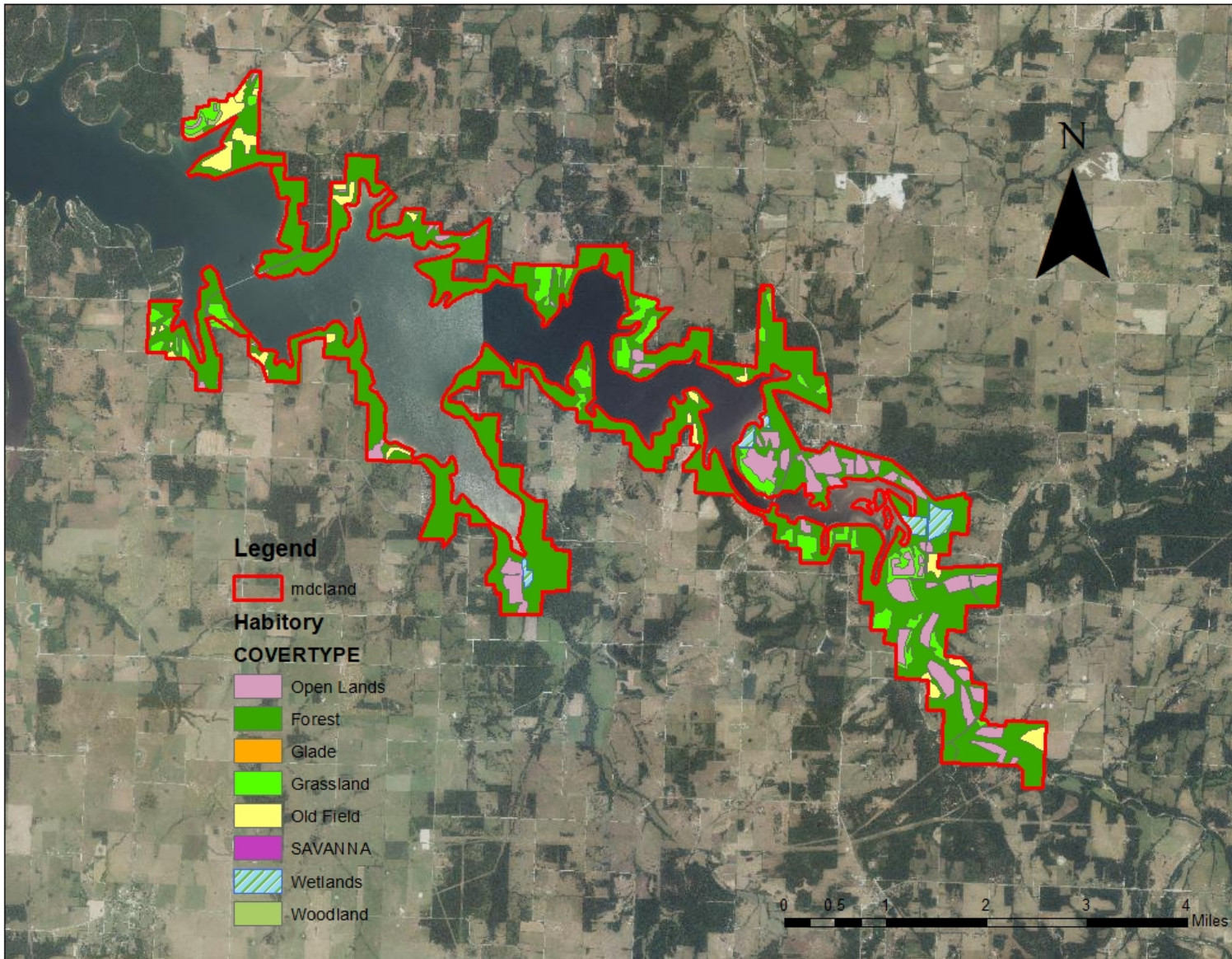


Figure 6: Land Cover Map – Little Sac Arm



Appendix A: Stockton Lake Management Lands Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (Feb. 1–28, 2019):

Have not read the entire plan but hope you allow as much use as possible for waterfowl hunting including the opportunity to hunt from the shore even in areas where used in the summer. I think you should think maximum use instead of minimum public use. The public waterfowl areas have benefited the younger hunters and changed the historical flight patterns of waterfowl. Waterfowl still use to some extent the lakes increasing the opportunity for hunting in areas where you do not have to compete in the draw line or get up at 3 A M to hope you get a chance to hunt or if successful wide a mile to find a spot to hunt.

The only thing that I think should be changed on this area is that there should be a limited number of hunters (10-20) allowed to hunt the dove fields on opening day at one time. Allowing more hunters can create unsafe conditions as many shoot at the low birds without checking if there are people behind the bird. Allowing less hunters would allow the hunters to spread out more and help to eliminate this issue. I would not be opposed to a non toxic shot rule for dove hunting everywhere on stockton not just in the current non toxic shot zone.

Please assure that trails for horseback riding or multiple use trails permitting horseback riding are included in the plan.

1. The plan mentions glade restoration and cedar tree removal. I'd like to see completion of the cedar tree removal project that was started about 9 or 10 years ago between Greaser Creek and the fire road that runs west from Duncan cemetery. At that time residents of Lowes Addition (the residential area just south of Duncan cemetery) were told that the cedars were going to be removed for glade restoration and quail habitat. Two large areas of cedars were cut and have been left lying there ever since then. Not only was the quail habitat not restored as promised, but it significantly altered the deer patterns in the area.

2. I would also like to see the deer management of the area around Greaser Creek changed to remove the antlerless restriction that has been in place for many years. I believe, having hunted the area for 30 years, that the doe population is strong enough to warrant the change. I also believe that a point restriction on bucks would help encourage a better class of bucks harvested in the area.

Please maintain and consider expansion of horseback riding trails. Thank you.

1. Sure would appreciate some repairs to the “boat launch” under Taylor bridge on the Little Sac.
2. Over the last few years the water quality at the upper end of Son’s creek has gotten nasty - a lot of algae growth as a result.

This plan is so general that it is totally useless. There is nothing here to even comment on. How about sharing with the public plans on the management of individual wildlife and fish species. Like shortening the length limit of spotted bass to 12 inches to control their numbers. Also, why is the shooting of does on the south end of the lake prohibited? What are the plans for the stocking of walleye? MDC does a great job on Stockton Lake but it would be nice to know what you are working on for individual species.

We would appreciate very much if you would keep all multi-use trails open. As a member of the Backcountry Horsemen of Missouri, we have worked to keep the trails open and have worked to keep trash picked up. We have limited areas to ride and county roads are unsafe to ride. We try to educate other users to respect the trails and keep them clean.

Sincerely, *****

My wife & I go to Hulston Mill 4 times a year & take grandchildren at least twice. We are in the Tri-Lakes Chapter of BCHMO, we go to clean & clip the trails at least twice a year, even when we go just to ride we always carry hand clippers. When we have scheduled work days I take a chain saw to cut downed trees off the trails. We pick up trash & debris. We enjoy the trails & so does our grandchildren, we plan on continuing helping with the maintenance of the trails.

I am an equestrian and am requesting the multi-use trails remain for our continued enjoyment. I am also a member of the Tri Lakes Back country organization which helps to maintain Berry Bend, Busiek, Hulston Mill, and Bolivar landing. Our group also rides Compton Hollow and Pleasant Hope and will schedule work days if needed all done by letting the land manager know first and approval obtained. The multi use trails allow individuals no matter their ability and capability to enjoy the outdoors.

Thank you

As a horseback rider and member of Back Country Horsemen of Missouri (BCHMO)- Tri-Lakes Chapter, the multiuse trail system is of great importance to me. The purpose of BCHMO is to be service to land managers in the maintenance, health, and access to multiuse trails. Several times a year the Tri-Lakes Chapter plans a volunteer work event where the trails are cleared of downfall, clipped back, and trash picked up and disposed of. In Section VII - Strategy I, it is mentioned the maintenance of multiuse and hiking trails. This is an area where BCHMO excels and will continue to contribute to proper maintenance. Strategy 2 refers to unauthorized trails. BCHMO supports designated trails and discourages the creation of "social trails."

Keeping access to trails is our main objective by being a positive influence in trail maintenance and would like to offer other trail skills if needed. BCHMO is trained in trail repair, new trail layout, etc.

We are adamant about keeping access for equestrian trail users.

One negative effect I've noticed in the branches of Stockton Lake is that the creeks are filling in with gravel, sand, and silt creating a system of shallow, less navigable, unappealing waterways. Dredging and gravel removal might improve the quality and appeal of the nearby MDC land. Perhaps that could be included along with revetment plans.

Please keep the trails around the Stockton Lake open to horseback riders. Our family enjoys going to Hulston Mill at least 4 times a year and spending 2 to 3 days each trip riding the trails. We make every effort to hit the upper trail and the lower trail and all cross-over trails in an effort to keep them maintained and the litter picked up. We are members of BCHMO and we strive to maintain equestrian trails. Every time we ride the Stockton Lake area we spend 16+ hrs clipping and clearing the trails of brush and debris as well as picking up several onion sacks of trash.

Thank you for your consideration.