

# Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area

## Ten-Year Area Management Plan FY 2017-2026



  
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Wildlife Division Chief

15 FEB 17  
Date

## Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

### PLANNING TEAM

Eric Dennis, Fisheries Management Biologist

Sean Cleary, Wildlife Management Biologist

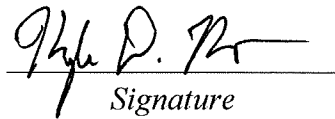
Lonnie Messbarger, Resource Forester

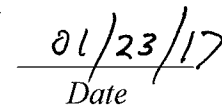
Dave Carlisle, Conservation Agent

Steve Buback, Natural History Biologist

### NORTHWEST REGION

RCT Chair

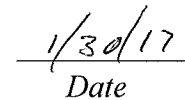
  
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### WILDLIFE DIVISION

Wildlife Management Chief

  
Signature

  
Date

## OVERVIEW

- **Area Name:** Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area, #8925
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1989
- **Acreage:** 405 acres
- **County:** Buchanan
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statements of Purpose:**
  - A. Strategic Direction**

The purpose of Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area (CA) is to provide fishing and hunting opportunities to the public in and around the Buchanan County area.
  - B. Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition of Belcher Branch Lake CA is a soundly managed lake, grasslands, and successional/annual plant habitats that provide public recreational use while protecting the area's natural resources.
  - C. Federal Aid Statement**

N/A

## GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- I. Special Considerations**
  - A. Priority Areas:** None
  - B. Natural Areas:** None
  
- II. Important Natural Features and Resources**
  - A. Species of Conservation Concern:** None observed.
  - B. Caves:** None
  - C. Springs:** None
  
- III. Existing Infrastructure**
  - One concrete boat ramp
  - One privy (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] accessible)
  - Five parking lots (1 ADA accessible parking lot)
  - Belcher Branch Lake (55-acre fishing lake)
  - Fishing pond (1-acre)
  - One ADA accessible floating courtesy dock
  - Two ADA accessible fishing piers

**IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations**

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** None
- 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:** The Missouri Department of Conservation (Department) owns a 15-acre Easement for Flood Rights on the neighboring property (southern half of the northeast quarter of Section 8, Township 55 North, Range 34).
- D. Cultural Resource Findings:** No known cultural resources.
- E. Endangered Species:** None observed.
- F. Boundary Issues:** None

**MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

**V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations**

**Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Manage for upland game and grassland wildlife.
- 2) Manage for deer and turkey populations.
- 3) Provide a diverse mixture of quality native and early successional vegetation.
- 4) Provide healthy and sustainable woodland and forest habitat.

**Management Objective 1:** Manage for quality upland game and grassland wildlife.

**Strategy 1:** Increase and maintain quality nesting, brood rearing, and covey headquarters by converting and managing open lands using tool including but not limited to prescribed fire, herbicides, native plantings, disking, food plots, and the agriculture crop permittee program. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Create and maintain soft edge habitat adjacent to open lands using tools including but not limited to herbicides, mechanical treatments, and prescribed fire. (Wildlife)

**Management Objective 2:** Manage for quality deer and turkey populations.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain diverse habitats that will provide both annual and native food types. Use tools including but not limited to prescribed fire, agricultural crop permittee program, food plots or other techniques to provide optimum deer and turkey habitat. (Wildlife)

**Management Objective 3:** Manage for a diverse mixture of native vegetation and annual food sources.

**Strategy 1:** Implement annual disturbances to establish and maintain native vegetation. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Implement management practices for disturbance and quality forage including but not limited to agriculture, prescribed fire, and herbicide treatment. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 3:** Annually treat invasive and noxious vegetation using tools including but not limited to herbicides, mechanical treatments, and prescribed fire. (Wildlife)

**Management Objective 4:** Manage for healthy and sustainable woodland and forest habitat to benefit the Belcher Branch Lake watershed.

**Strategy 1:** Monitor and treat any invasive and noxious vegetation using tools including but not limited to herbicides, mechanical treatments, and/or prescribed fire. (Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Manage the area to benefit woodland and forest communities. Management actions include, but are not limited to, conducting forest stand improvement, prescribed burns, snag retention and a multi-layered canopy with small gaps. Conduct management actions in accordance with the forest management plan developed based on the forest inventory. (Forestry)

**Strategy 3:** Utilize best management practices during management as described in the Department's manuals: *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests: 2014 Management Guidelines for Maintaining Forested Watersheds to Protect Streams* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014) and the *Missouri Forest Management Guidelines: Voluntary Recommendations for Well-Managed Forests* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014). (Forestry)

## VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Manage for quality sport fish populations.
- 2) Manage for native aquatic vegetation on area lake and pond.
- 3) Provide aquatic habitat to enhance sport fishery.
- 4) Manage riparian corridors.

**Management Objective 1:** Manage for quality angling opportunities on area pond and 55-acre lake.

**Strategy 1:** Conduct fish population surveys to monitor for quality sport fish populations (e.g., largemouth bass and bluegill). Aim for proportional stock densities of largemouth bass of 40-70 and bluegill 20-40. (Fisheries)

**Strategy 2:** Supplemental stock fish (e.g., channel catfish) when necessary to maintain quality angling opportunities. (Fisheries)

**Management Objective 2:** Manage for native aquatic vegetation on area fisheries.

**Strategy 1:** Plant native aquatic vegetation in pond and 55-acre lake. (Fisheries)

**Strategy 2:** Treat aquatic nuisance species using tools including but not limited to herbicide. (Fisheries)

**Management Objective 3:** Enhance sport fish habitat in Belcher Branch Lake and area pond.

**Strategy 1:** Install brush piles to enhance sport fish recruitment. (Fisheries)

**Strategy 2:** Add fish holding structures in strategic locations in 55-acre lake and pond as natural fish habitat deteriorates. (Fisheries)

**Management Objective 4:** Manage riparian corridors within the Belcher Branch Lake watershed to reduce potential soil erosion and deposition in the lake.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain existing native corridor vegetation and monitor for invasive plant species. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Plant native trees and vegetation, as needed, to maintain adequate riparian corridors within the watershed of Belcher Branch Lake watershed. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 3:** All management activities will follow the *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines for Lands and Waters Managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2009). (Wildlife)

## **VII. Public Use Management Considerations**

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Keep area regulations up-to-date.
- 2) Maintain quality infrastructure to access area resources.

**Management Objective 1:** Keep area regulations up-to-date.

**Strategy 1:** Regularly patrol and enforce the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*, with emphasis on vandalism, littering, and response to public complaints. (Protection, Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Annually evaluate regulations and update, as needed. (Wildlife)

**Management Objective 2:** Maintain infrastructure to provide public access to area resources.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain a diversity of accesses to provide angling opportunities. (Wildlife, Fisheries)

**Strategy 2:** Maintain area accesses for multiple user groups through signage and special use permits. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 3:** Mow/maintain the grassy areas around parking lots (areas designated for primitive camping). Mow to a shorter height than what is required for parking areas not used for camping. (Wildlife)

**Management Objective 3:** Inform public about area regulations.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain signs according to Department policy. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Maintain accurate and timely information on the Department's Atlas Database. Review information annually. (Wildlife)

## VIII. Administrative Considerations

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Provide defined area boundaries through Missouri Department of Conservation signage.

**Management Objective 1:** Maintain area boundaries.

**Strategy 1:** Annually inspect area boundaries and restore boundary markers as needed. (Wildlife)

**Strategy 2:** Resolve boundary issues with adjoining landowners as they arise. (Wildlife)

### **Lands Proposed for Acquisition:**

When available, adjacent land may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities, as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities, may be considered.

## **MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE**

All strategies for this management plan are considered ongoing.

## APPENDICES

### Area Background:

The Missouri Department of Conservation purchased this area in 1989 and completed construction of Belcher Branch Lake in June 1992.

In addition to the 55-acre Belcher Branch Lake, the area contains open land, grasslands, and timber. The area surrounding the lake features modestly sloping terrain with well-drained soils, including a thick layer of loess on the upland portions.

The Missouri Department of Conservation manages the forest, fish, and wildlife resources of this area to provide for public recreation and to protect soil and water quality. Farming, mowing, disking, prescribed burning, and other techniques are used to improve wildlife habitat.

### Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	% of Area
Grassland (non-prairie)	104	26
Forest and Woodland	100	25
Old Field	82	21
Lakes/Ponds	59	15
Open Land	55	13
Other	5	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>100</b>

### Public Input Summary:

The draft Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period August 1–31, 2016. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from four respondents (Appendix A). The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area 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.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through the Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Management Plan public comment period.

### **Supports removing non-native species from conservation areas. Suggests washing mowing and farming equipment before moving to other areas.**

The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Planning Team agrees with the active management of removing non-native species from conservation areas. The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation



Area Resource Team annually treats non-native vegetation through chemical and mechanical means and sweeps off equipment prior to moving to another conservation area.

**Supports upland game habitat management. Wonders if focus is on quail, pheasants, or both.**

The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Planning and Resource Team supports and currently manages the area for upland game habitat. Belcher Branch Lake CA is currently managed for quail and other native grassland bird species. These management activities include reducing cool-season grass densities, promoting warm-season grass and native shrub establishment.

**Suggests adding campsites to Belcher Branch Lake CA.**

The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Planning Team does not support adding camping sites to the area at this time. There are primitive camping opportunities adjacent to the parking lots that are utilized throughout the year.

**Suggests adding paddle boats for rental/use at Belcher Branch Lake CA.**

The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Planning Team does not support providing paddle boats for rental at Belcher Branch Lake. Currently the use of paddle or non-motor boats is an accepted public use on the lake. Due to the fact that Belcher Branch Lake CA is an unstaffed area, providing and overseeing the rental and maintenance of Department-owned boats would not be compatible with the staffing requirements of a daily rental program.

**Suggests planning for maintenance of current fishing docks. Suggests expanding fishing docks to avoid overcrowding.**

The current fishing docks and infrastructure are inspected annually for safety and maintained accordingly. The Belcher Branch Lake CA has three fishing docks and over 100 feet of usable shoreline adjacent to or near the parking lot. The planning team is aware that the facilities often get moderate use, but has never received complaints of overcrowding. The planning team does not support adding or expanding the current fishing docks at this time.

**Suggests adding a trail from the parking lot to the north end of the Belcher Branch Lake.**

The Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Planning Team does not support adding a trail from the parking lot to the north end of the area. There are currently mowed access trails on the area that are maintained during the growing season. From the lake parking lot going to the north end of the area would require traversing some steep and difficult terrain to build and maintain a trail.

**Suggests adding more trash cans and covering them.**

There is currently one trash can on the parking lot of Belcher Branch Lake CA. In recent years there were three trash cans, but they were getting filled with household trash on a regular basis; we reduced trash cans to one to eliminate this.

**Concerned about pest management in area privies.**

The privies on Belcher Branch Lake CA are checked at least on a bi-monthly basis and are maintained according to their needs. Pests are removed when present and are actively discouraged.

**References:**

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

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri forest management guidelines: voluntary recommendations for well-managed forests*. Jefferson City, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri watershed protection practices recommended for Missouri forests: 2014 management guidelines for maintaining forested watersheds to protect streams*. Jefferson City, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

**Figures:**

Figure 1: Belcher Branch Lake CA Map

Figure 2: Land Cover Types Map

Figure 3: Topographic Map

Figure 4: Belcher Branch Lake Contour Map

Figure 5: Forest Resources Map

**Additional Appendices:**

Appendix A. Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Belcher Branch Lake CA Map

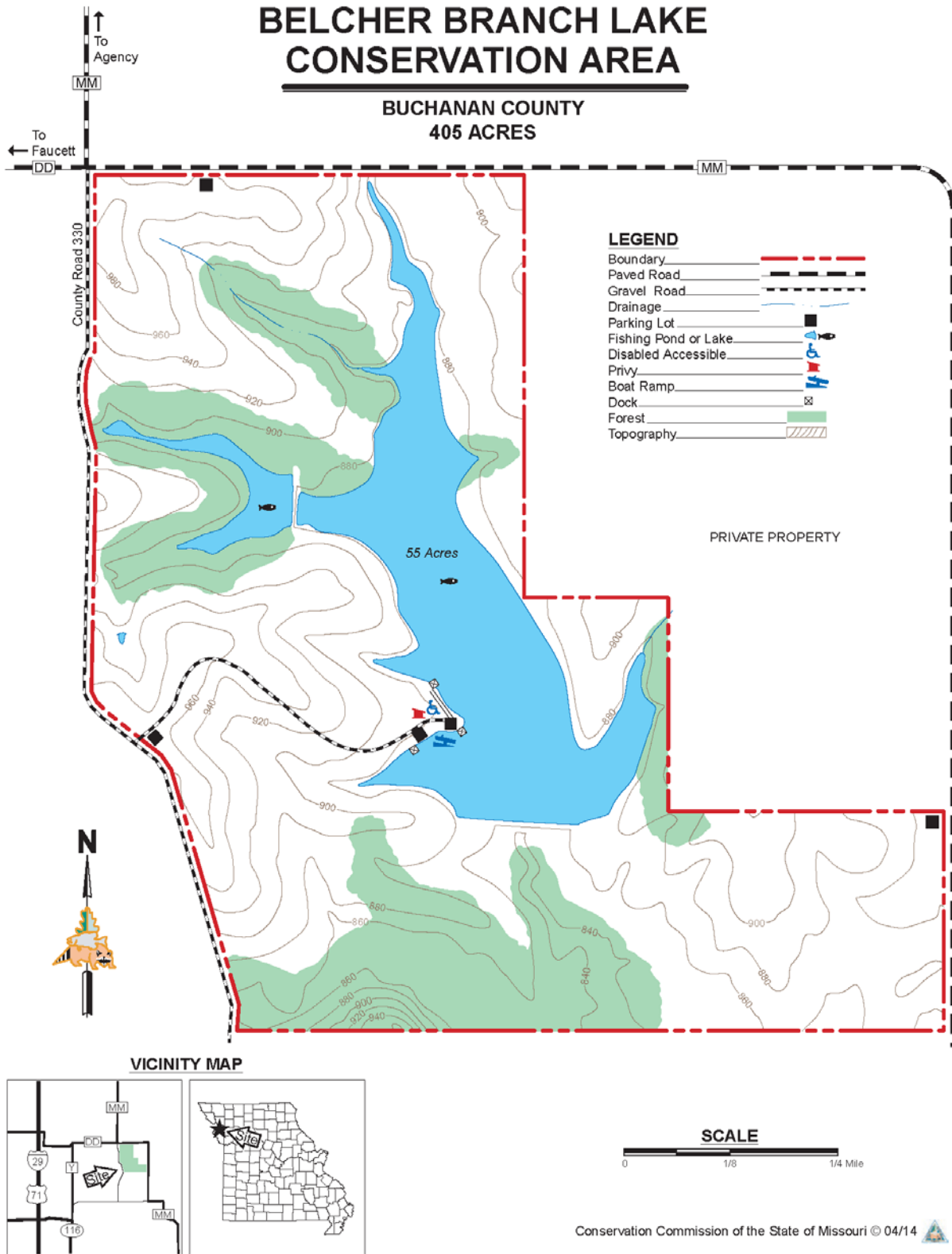


Figure 2: Land Cover Types Map

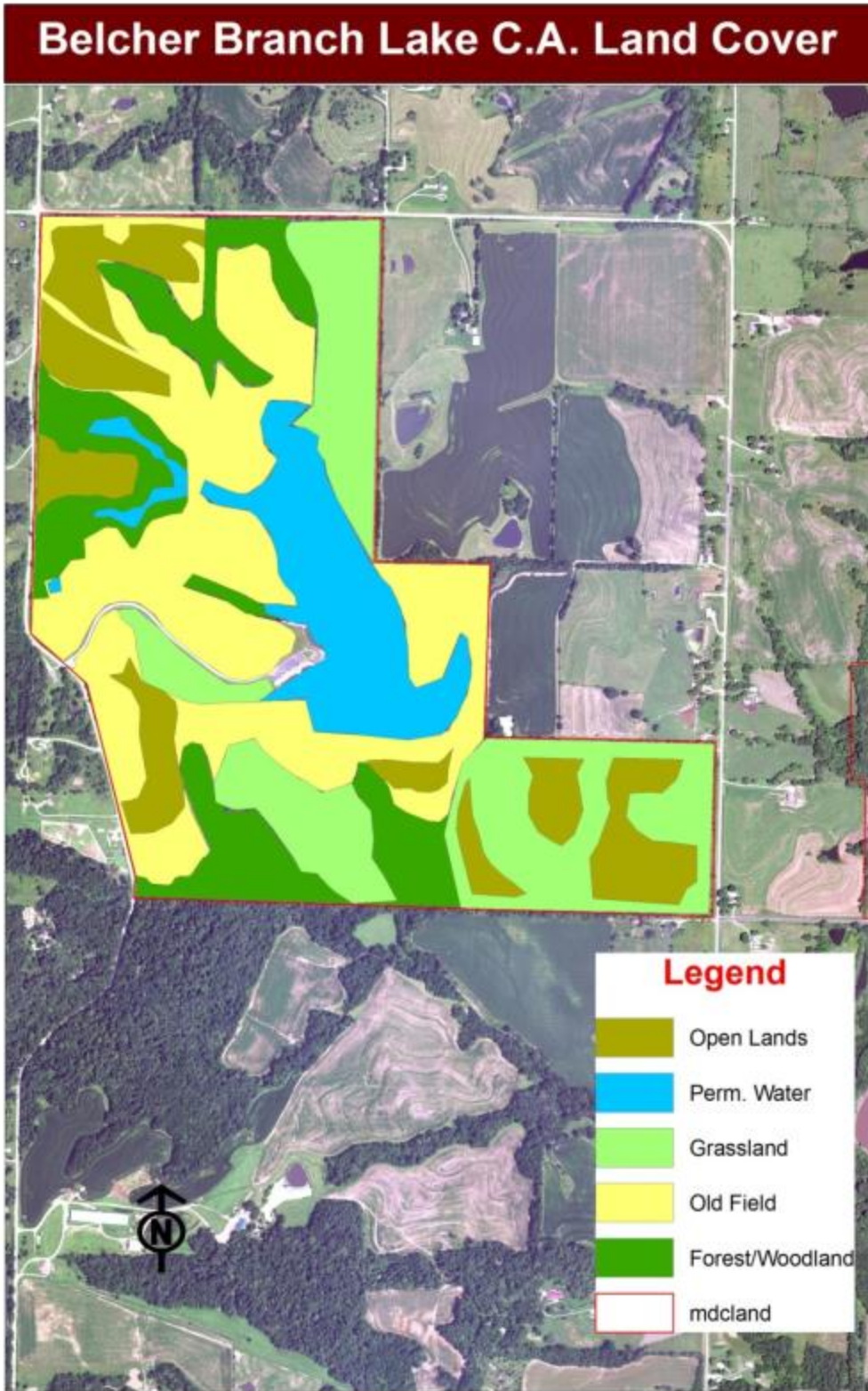


Figure 3: Topographic Map



Figure 4: Belcher Branch Lake Contour Map

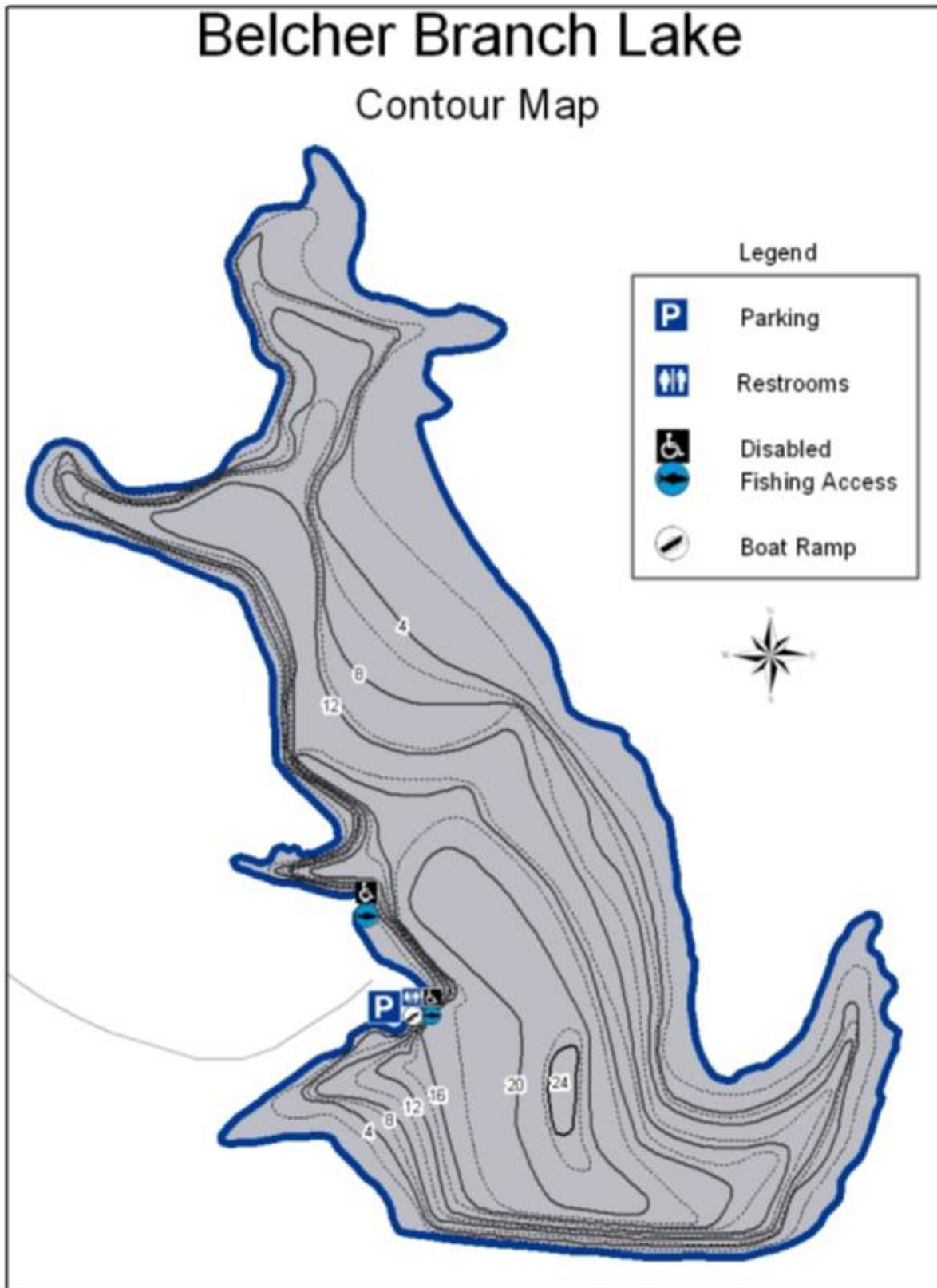


Figure 5: Forest Resources Map



## Appendix A. Belcher Branch Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (August 1-31, 2016):

Some of the MDC lands are incredible with native species diversity while others are dominated by non-native species. The number one Management need is the control or reduction of non-native species. It is imperative that mowers and farmers wash their equipment before moving into a new area. There must be an active role in the control of exotic species. If there is not more of an active role then the remaining pristine sites will subcumb to exotic species and degrade ecological integrity.

Respectfully,

I think there should be camping sites but what I would love to see is paddle boats like at Pony Express we go there and use those 3-4 a week when they are available we'd love to be able to paddle around it

I think an upland bird area at Belcher is a GREAT idea. I believe the area is already setup well for an upland bird area. There are other conservation areas within a short distance that have good deer hunting on them. I am curious though if the thought is for quail or pheasant? I like both.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the plan. I use the lake often to fish. I'm glad to see the plans to manage the fish population. The lake is nice and gets a lot of use, from what I can tell.

A couple of suggestions:

- I think it would be nice to plan for upkeep of the current fishing docks, and also consider expanding the fishing docks. They are popular and often crowded. I did not see the upkeep or repairs mentioned in the draft plan?

- The plan does not mention trails. There seems to be some mowing around parts of the lake, but it would be nice if there were trails from the parking lot towards the north, past the first fishing dock, towards those coves in the north end. It's very hard to walk back in that area, and hard to walk to the fishing pond.

- The trash cans at the parking lot are always overflowing, and then the trash blows across the area. Please consider adding more trash cans, and having them covered so the wind does not spread the trash. Also please consider trash cans in more places, like maybe adding one at the west end of the parking lot and one by the north fishing dock.

- There needs to be some plan for management of pests in the restroom. I think the concrete privy is good, but there are often dead mice inside. Rustic is fine, but the dead mice are a bit too much.

Thanks again.