

# Forest Lodge Historic District Master Site and Management Plan

## Executive Summary and Conclusions

### Executive Summary

#### Historical overview

Forest Lodge, on the shore of Lake Namakagon in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, is built on land that once held a spectacular first-growth forest. The property was the site of a logging camp that housed lumberjacks who clear-cut the towering timber in the late 1890s and then moved on. In 1902 Crawford Livingston, a wealthy Saint Paul businessman, purchased an initial 100 acres to serve as a country retreat for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.

This Northwoods wonderland became the summer home and life-long source of inspiration for Mr. Livingston's granddaughter, Mary Griggs Burke. In 1943 Mrs. Burke inherited Forest Lodge from her mother. She continued to use and enjoy the property throughout her adult life and in 1999 generously donated it as a life estate to the American People under the stewardship of the US Forest Service with the assistance of the Trust for Public Land.

While most vintage Northwoods lake country properties have given way to resorts and condos or have been subdivided and rebuilt as modern lake homes, Forest Lodge stands proud and tall like a first-growth tree the lumberjacks missed, a spectacular and extraordinary living link to our heritage and another era.

It was Mrs. Burke's intent to pass on this treasure to protect the legacy of Forest Lodge. It is her wish that the property transition into an environmental education center for use by generations to come.

#### Methodology

The primary purpose of the Master Site & Management Plan is to develop informed recommendations for a new compatible contemporary use for Forest Lodge. The study area for this plan is the Forest Lodge Historic District, a 50.1 acre parcel with 15 historic structures. To develop the plan, an interdisciplinary team of professionals with expertise in similar adaptive reuse and historic preservation projects was retained by the US Forest Service. Building upon previously completed studies, the team worked collaboratively with the US Forest Service and a

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wide range of stakeholders to analyze comparable properties, evaluate existing conditions, explore compatible options for new use and define a management strategy. Over a period of nine months the group evolved a consensus based plan for Forest Lodge.

The plan provides guidelines for the property's overall character, new use, management and project implementation. Information and documentation related to the history, existing conditions and significance of resources are also provided. This knowledge base serves as the foundation for the recommendations which seek to achieve a balance between contemporary use and maintaining historic and architectural integrity.

### **Existing conditions**

Forest Lodge is a large family retreat resting on the south shore of Lake Namakagon in Bayfield County. The property is about 8 miles east from the community of Cable. The complex's Rustic style buildings are largely constructed of log and reflect a strong relationship with their North Woods' surroundings.

The complex largely dates to the early twentieth century, with a majority of buildings constructed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The grounds remain largely natural, with mature wooded areas and open space surrounding the buildings. The 15 primary buildings and structures are constructed of natural materials – fieldstone and log – reflecting the Rustic style of architecture and the buildings marriage to their North Woods' environment.

Primary domestic buildings for the family and support staff include the Main Lodge, Guest House, Gatehouse/Caretaker's House and Maid's Cabin. These are located in a circular arrangement on a hill above the shoreline. Stairs from the main lodge lead to the shore and the two-story Boathouse. Recreational buildings and sites include the Boathouse, Bowling Green, Tennis House and Playhouse. Complete with vegetable and flower gardens, Cow Palace (or barn) and pasture, Forest Lodge was somewhat self-sustaining, providing much of its own produce and dairy products.

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The grounds have a dirt road system with a main road and a service road providing access to the buildings. The grounds also have an elaborate footpath system connecting the buildings and providing paths to picnic grounds and view sheds along the shoreline.

*Paraphrased from the National Register Nomination, June 2000*

In general the building and landscape are in good condition. Several structures have immediate needs related to substantial stabilization and repairs. These include the Boat House, the Lake Water Pumphouse and the Steamer Fire Engine Shed. Several buildings, including the Maid's Cabin and the Cow Palace, are in need of new roofs.

The designation of Forest Lodge to the National Register of Historic Places (2002) recognizes this noteworthy and Northwoods inspired complex as important to the community and State. The designation commemorates the distinctive architecture that harmonizes with the natural landscape. Within the Historic District, the buildings, landscape features, view corridors, circulation paths, topography, vegetation and spatial organization possesses a high level of intact original fabric. Much of what was originally planned was implemented and has been retained to the present day.

## Conclusions

Forest Lodge is an extraordinary Northwoods treasure, lovingly nursed and tended for more than a century by the Crawford Livingston family. Thanks to Mary Griggs Burke's vision and generosity, Forest Lodge has been given to the American People to preserve and enjoy for generations to come.

The focus of this planning effort for Forest Lodge has been to balance the needs of the historic resource with those of compatible contemporary uses. Through this blending of historic preservation efforts and low intervention adaptive contemporary reuse, the legacy of the past may be maintained for future generations.

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Sensitive adaptive reuse of Forest Lodge for an environmental education center is feasible and the anticipated impacts upon historic structures and landscape should be very minimal and in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Through a blending of historic preservation efforts and compatible contemporary use, the legacy of the past may be maintained for future generations. The retention, rehabilitation, preservation and expansion are highly appropriate in respect to sustainable goals and good preservation practice as well as for providing a functional contemporary educational facility for the foreseeable future. The priority of adaptive reuse and site development should be oriented towards maintaining the fabric and character of the property to the greatest extent possible. A "least intervention possible" philosophy must be applied to all rehabilitation and adaptive use efforts.

Relative to the operation of Forest Lodge primarily as an educational center, the base assumption is that the facility is essentially a host, providing facilities, support and services but not necessarily providing instructors for all classes, seminars, conferences and special events. It is envisioned that initially operations should be seasonal, perhaps May through October. Use would likely be heaviest on weekends but weekday use is envisioned as significant. Eventually the use should be year around as improvements are made to buildings and site infrastructure providing for additional and more varied program opportunities.

Adaptive Reuse of Forest Lodge should allow the buildings and site to fulfill the vision of an environmental education center. The proposed reuse will require a substantial investment of capital, resources and time on the part of US Forest Service, supporters and stakeholders. The gradual transition from a family retreat to an ecology and environmental education center is anticipated to require careful planning, phased implementation and take a minimum of five years. Additional time, perhaps several years, may be required from the ending of the life estate to the actual management of the property by the US Forest service.

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A transition period beginning with the ending of the life estate will pave the way for gradual implementation of proposed programming and contemporary uses at Forest Lodge. With diligent planning the operational structure and business model should be successful as long term funding, partnerships and alliances are established. A multi-phased comprehensive rehabilitation and adaptive reuse project will provide for the long-term flexible contemporary use of the property.

To be successful Forest Lodge must have a specifically designed management and operational structure. Review of a wide range of other comparable properties indicates that one of the best ways for this property to marshal support, build awareness of its potential and bring various management skills into its operation, is through the work of a “friends group”. An operational and management agreement should provide for daily operations entrusted to a “friends group” with the US Forest service providing overall oversight, stewardship and technical support.

Significant cash inflows are necessary for viability. These are anticipated from funding or services provided by the US Forest Service, the St. Paul Foundation endowment and gifts/grants from a “friends group”. As the educational programming matures, perhaps within five to seven years, positive cash flow from classes, programs and special events is expected.

The strong resources and technical assistance of US Forest Service in combination with an organized and enthusiastic “friends group” and well-orchestrated funding continuity will be critical to long-term success. With this joint venture between a “friends group” and the US Forest Service, Forest Lodge should become a premier center for environmental leadership, sustainability and conservation education. Forest Lodge should significantly contribute to public knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural, cultural and historic resources of Wisconsin.

The consensus aspirations, vision and recommendations presented herein by the working committee and the consultant team represents a realistic stewardship model and sustainable approach to repurposing Forest Lodge. We trust this Master Site & Management Plan provides the future caretakers with a flexible *road map* for the future.