

§1805. Designation of ecological reserve

The director may designate ecological reserves on parcels of land under the jurisdiction of the bureau. The director may designate ecological reserves or remove the designation of a parcel of land as an ecological reserve only in conjunction with the adoption of a management plan for a particular parcel of land, and the process for adoption of that management plan must provide for public review and comment on the plan. When a proposed management plan includes designation of an ecological reserve, the director shall notify the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over public lands matters of the proposal. When a proposed management plan includes the removal of a parcel of land of 10 acres or more as an ecological reserve, the director shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over public lands matters prior to the bureau's updating the accompanying management plan for the parcel of land. The report must include a description of the parcel of land, the reasons for the removal of the designation as an ecological reserve, the intended uses of the parcel of land and the benefits to the public as a result of the removal of the designation as an ecological reserve. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over public lands matters may report out a bill relating to the subject matter of the report. [PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

1. Allowed uses. The director may within an ecological reserve allow uses that are compatible with the purpose of the ecological reserve and do not cause significant impact on natural community composition or ecosystem processes. Uses that the director may allow include nonmanipulative scientific research, public education and nonmotorized recreation activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, primitive camping, gathering of materials for cultural and traditional use by a member of a federally recognized Wabanaki Indian nation, tribe or band in this State, hunting, fishing and trapping. For the purposes of this subsection, "primitive camping" means camping in a location without facilities or where facilities are limited to a privy, fire ring, tent pad, 3-sided shelter and picnic table. The removal of trees and construction of facilities associated with these allowed uses are allowed. The director may allow other uses when their impact remains low and does not compromise the purpose of the ecological reserve. Recreational use of surface waters is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. [PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

2. Trails and roads for motorized vehicle use. The director shall allow the continuing use of an existing snowmobile trail, an all-terrain vehicle trail or a road if the director determines the trail or road is well designed and built and situated in a safe location and its use has minimal adverse impact on the ecological value of an ecological reserve and it cannot be reasonably relocated outside the ecological reserve.

A new snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle trail or a new road is allowed only if the director determines all of the following criteria are met:

- A. No safe, cost-effective alternative exists; [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]
- B. The impact on protected natural resource values is minimal; and [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]
- C. The trail or road will provide a crucial link in a significant trail or road system. [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

3. Incompatible uses. Uses that are incompatible with the purpose of an ecological reserve are not allowed. Incompatible uses include timber harvesting, salvage harvesting, commercial mining and commercial sand and gravel excavation. For the purposes of this subsection, "salvage harvesting" means the removal of dead or damaged trees to recover economic value that would otherwise be lost. [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]

4. Resource protection measures. The director shall take action to control a wildfire occurring on an ecological reserve or spreading to bureau lands. The director may authorize a prescribed burn in an ecological reserve if necessary to replicate natural processes that maintain specific natural communities or rare species populations. The director may implement predetermined wildfire tactics to protect the integrity of the landscape and shall use minimal impact suppression tactics to the extent possible.

The director may use pesticides, including herbicides, and sanitation harvests to control insect and disease outbreaks only in response to:

- A. A specific threat to the functioning of a native ecosystem or managed wildlife habitat; [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]
- B. A specific threat to human health or safety; or [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]
- C. A condition that is likely to result in significant damage to adjacent lands if control is not exercised. [PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW).]

For the purposes of this subsection, "sanitation harvest" means the removal of trees that have been attacked or are in imminent danger of attack by insects or disease in order to prevent these insects or diseases from spreading to other trees.

[PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

5. Limits on acreage designated as ecological reserves. The total land acreage designated as ecological reserves may not exceed 115,000 acres. No more than 8% of the operable timberland acres on public reserved lands and nonreserved public lands may be designated as ecological reserves. For the purposes of this subsection, "operable timberland" means land the bureau considers viable for commercial timber harvest operations and does not include inoperable lands, which are lands not suitable for timber production due to topography or hydrologic setting. Inoperable lands include ledges, steep slopes, nonforested barrens, mountaintops, nonforested wetlands and other nonproductive sites. Lands donated or acquired after the effective date of this section with the condition that the donated or acquired land be designated an ecological reserve are not included when calculating acreage limits under this subsection.

The designation of land as an ecological reserve may not result in a decline in the sustainable harvest level on land under the jurisdiction of the bureau to less than the average annual harvest for the preceding 10 years. For purposes of this subsection, "sustainable harvest level" means the amount of forest products that can be harvested over time without reducing timber inventory and is determined by the operable timberland acres of land and the forest growth rate.

[PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

6. Reporting requirements. The bureau shall report the status of ecological reserves under the reporting requirements of subchapters 3 and 4.

[PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1999, c. 592, §3 (NEW). PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. W, §7 (REV). PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §24 (REV). PL 2021, c. 516, §1 (AMD).

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