

Potawatomi State Park

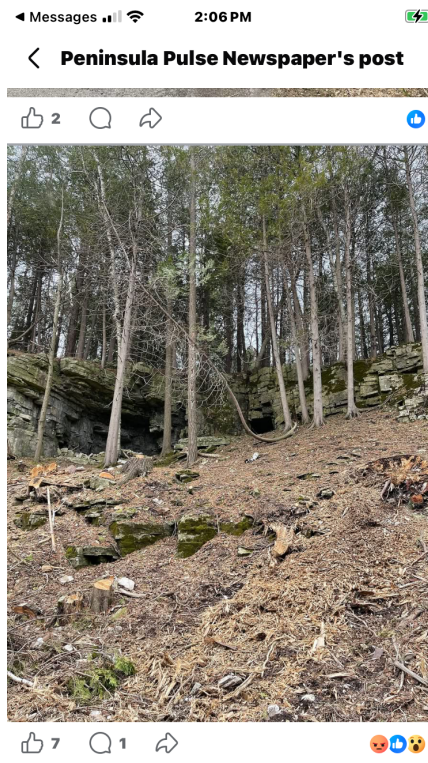
Tree Clearing & Master Plan Compliance Report

Prepared May 2026 | Source: 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan (WDNR)

Background

In spring 2026, significant tree clearing occurred along road corridors at Potawatomi State Park in Door County, Wisconsin. The Wisconsin DNR describes the work as a road-widening and infrastructure modernization project. A citizen group, Potawatomi Advocates for Trails, Conservation and Heritage (PATCH), has raised concerns that the clearing violates the governing 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan — particularly near the Niagara Escarpment, which is designated as a Native Community Management Area with a mandatory 200-foot buffer zone. The following photos were taken at the site and posted by Peninsula Pulse Newspaper. This report documents tree species observed and their status under the master plan.

Photo 1: Niagara Escarpment Bluff — Limestone Cliff Face



Potawatomi State Park bluff face showing limestone cliff and cedar trees. Source: Peninsula Pulse Newspaper / Facebook.

Tree Species Observed:

Eastern Red Cedar / Northern White Cedar — The tall, columnar trees growing directly from the limestone face. These are the most critically protected species under the master plan. The plan notes

that cedar trees on the Niagara Escarpment grow at only one inch every 15 years; a single northern white cedar in Peninsula State Park was aged at over 500 years old.

Mixed understory conifers — Likely white cedar and balsam fir in the talus slope areas below the cliff face. The plan identifies these as part of the Northern Wet-mesic Forest community requiring passive management and no disturbance.

Substrate: Niagaran dolomite limestone — the bedrock of the escarpment, listed as globally significant habitat in the master plan.

Master Plan Relevance:

This location falls within or immediately adjacent to the Niagara Escarpment Native Community Management Area. The master plan is explicit:

"Within a 200-foot buffer zone of the escarpment face, do not conduct management or development (e.g., timber harvesting, new parking lot or building construction), or allow uses that would disturb soil and forest canopy cover and negatively impact the core habitat area of the Niagara Escarpment."

■ PATCH contends that tree cutting shown here violates this 200-foot buffer zone requirement.

Photo 2: Road Corridors — South Norway Road / Shoreline Road

[◀ Peninsula Pulse Newspaper's post](#)

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Two views of cleared road corridors at Potawatomi State Park showing removal of roadside trees and understory.

Source: Peninsula Pulse Newspaper / Facebook.

Tree Species Observed:

Trembling Aspen / Bigtooth Aspen — Pale-barked trees visible on the cleared margins. Common in disturbed areas of the park's upland forest.

White Birch — Smooth, lighter-barked stems visible at the forest edge. Listed by the DNR as one of the dominant species covering Potawatomi's 1,200 acres.

White Pine / Mixed Conifers — Visible in the remaining tree line background, including what appears to be white pine and balsam fir.

Stumps and slash piles visible in foreground indicate recent clearing of trees that previously formed a canopy over the road corridor — described by park users as a "magical canopy" and important woodpecker habitat.

Master Plan Relevance:

The DNR's own nature page describes Potawatomi's forests as composed of sugar maple, basswood, white pine, red pine, and white birch — the very trees cleared here. The master plan's Recreation Management Area prescriptions state:

"In forested locations maintain a healthy tree canopy. Where feasible, promote the growth and retention of larger trees."

The plan's short-term prescription for roads was to maintain existing facilities "at current development levels." The road-widening project — which the DNR listed only as "Road Resurfacing" in its 2025-26 Annual Property Implementation Plan — was not clearly authorized by any master plan language for tree removal at this scale.

Summary: Protected Trees vs. Observed Clearing

Tree Species	Master Plan Protection	Observed Location
Northern White Cedar	Native Community Mgmt Area / 200-ft buffer	Photo 1 — cliff face cedars
American Beech	Rare in WI; found only near Lake Michigan at Potawatomi	Not directly visible; present in park
Sugar Maple	Dominant canopy species — maintain healthy canopy	Photo 2 — roadside clearing
White Birch	Listed dominant species — retain larger trees	Photo 2 — roadside clearing
White Pine	Listed dominant species — retain larger trees	Photo 2 — background tree line
Mixed Conifers (talus)	Northern Wet-mesic Forest — passive management	Photo 1 — below cliff face

Key Findings

1. The 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan designates the Niagara Escarpment as a Native Community Management Area with a strict 200-foot no-disturbance buffer zone. Tree cutting visible in Photo 1 appears to violate this buffer.
2. The plan's short-term road prescription was to maintain roads at current development levels — not to widen them. No clear master plan authorization for large-scale tree removal along road corridors has been identified.
3. The DNR's own Annual Property Implementation Plan described this project only as "Road Resurfacing," which PATCH argues did not adequately disclose the scope of tree clearing to the public.
4. Several species present — including ancient northern white cedar, American beech, sugar maple, white birch, and white pine — are specifically identified in the master plan as trees to be protected, retained, and managed for old-growth characteristics.

Sources: 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Regional Master Plan (WDNR); Potawatomi State Park Nature Page (dnr.wisconsin.gov); Peninsula Pulse / Door County Pulse news coverage, May 2026.